

Devolution vs. aggregation

In our conversations today, we focus so much on devolution and not in what is in a way the obvious, visible, tangible counterpart that is an equally profound force in the world today and that is aggregation. We're thinking short term above the devolution, not long enough term about the aggregation. So I want to talk you through how this is playing out because indeed, it is undeniably the case that devolution is the most powerful, political force in any, in any period of history that we have experienced and can remember. But at the same time, what we see throughout history and particularly in the late 20th century and into the 21st century, is that regions are also coming together. And if you remember the Scottish Referendum or even the Independence movement of Catalan and other geographies, they're not just saying that they want to split off from their sort of home state if you will, they would also immediately want to join the European Union. And the countries want to join the Eurozone; even the European Union itself is expanding so there is this aggregation effect. 30, 40 years ago if we'd said let's talk about regional institutions, we would talk about the European Union. Today however, there are movements around the world to bring down those arbitrary postcolonial boundaries and to fuse regions together through infrastructure so I want to show you some of those. One of the most, one of the ones you would least think of today when you look at American political discourse is North America. And yet, despite all the talk about putting up walls and-and bringing the jobs back and so forth, if you look at what's happening on the ground, you see it more across border interaction between the United States and Mexico and Canada than before. You now have electricity grids that span the Canadian US Border. You already have a very dense freight rail network, energy, pipelines and so forth, and with Mexico you have a growing amount of American foreign investment in Mexico into its energy sector, into its manufacturing. So in fact, one wall, even its physical appearance, if such a thing were to be constructed, which its obviously not but if it were, would not in any way be truly representative of what's actually happening between these three countries. In fact if you focus on looking at the infrastructural connections between these countries, you get an entirely different picture of where the relationship is going. And that's why for me, mapping infrastructure tells us a lot more about the realities of the world today, even the realities of the political world, than political talk in and of itself.