WHEN I was growing up I didn't realize how varied a country the UK is. At school we learned as much about London boroughs as Cullercoats, and children's TV showed the whole country, with Supergran and the Machine Gunners even being set in my own village.

As I child, I knew about London and I assumed Londoners knew about Newcastle. I was shocked at university to discover how far the North East was invisible to south easterners. In my college digs in the south I had a beautiful aerial photo of a Tynemouth Priory against a brilliantly azure North Sea. A fellow student saw it and asked admiringly where it was from.

When told, he couldn't believe his ears. "I thought it was all coal mines in your part of the world" he said, in 1995, long after the Tories' vindictive pit closures.

Those differences followed in my professional life as a researcher. 15 years ago I was studying renewable energy's economic potential for the North East. With our strong innovative marine engineering tradition, with the right policy support the region could definitely become a hotspot for energy technologies.

I had to work with London-based economic consultants whose view of renewables differed as much from mine as Dan's view of Tynemouth had differed from reality. They saw manufacturing as a dying industry and the north east as a dying region: London's innovative services were the future!

The UK was creating a trading system to encourage renewable generation. The Consultant believed it was that knowledge about trading system that offered economic benefits, creating work for British consultants in globally deregulated energy markets.

By being the first country to privatize their utilities, our consultancy firms would become world-leaders in creating markets for privatized services. That global export business would further strengthen the City of London's preeminent market position. This strategy had worked - up to a point - because privatization brought short-run benefits. But it reduced company incentives to invest, certainly at the scale of something like the Kielder Reservoir, and so ultimately UK-based customers suffered shortages and price rises. We all know the chaos of rail privatisation - but it was hoped the wasted billions on fragmenting track, rolling stock and services would be compensated by tax income from exporting Rail Privatization consultancy firms. But other countries weren't as starry-eyed as the UK.

Even in the 1990s Netherlands, where ultra-liberals were trying to privatise the railways, internal documents revealed they were determined at all costs to avoid the disaster engulfing the British railways.

Other countries naturally had no interest in our consultancies' expertise in this madness. They privatised a few rail services but learned cheaply from our expensive mistakes.

If you travel by trains in Merseyside, East Anglia or Scotland, then you may well be paying a massive premium for the pleasure to these Dutch nationalised railway services. And we all remember the disaster of Deutsche Bahn running the Metro.

Every informed commentator warned of the dangers of privatisation and against its so-called benefits. By pressing on this vanity project trashed British industries, massively disadvantaging north eastern consumers, without even creating competitive benefits for the City of London.

The only ones to benefit from this sorry tale were a few consultants who stuffed their pockets with public cash. So beware of smooth Southern charmers persuading us destroying our farming, fishing, and manufacturing are a price worth paying for Britain's (read London's) valiant future!