

Building Vibrant Rural Futures
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Regional policy in Québec

with a special stress on MRC of Rimouski-Neigette

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The regional dimension in Québec

- Regions are part of the Québec history for a long time and well-known by everybody able to put Gaspésie or Saguenay region at the right place on a map
- We have a full set of regions: central, intermediate and remote (peripheral)
- Mostly based on cultural-historical regions, in 1966 Québec create 10 administrative regions (now 17)
- BAEQ: an important regional planning experience in sixties that lead to the CRD (Conseil régional de développement) with representatives of civil society.
- In 2003, CRD became CRÉ (Conseil regional des élus)
- In 1979: Quebec government put in place the MRC (Municipalité régionale de comté) MRC have a mandate of planning and rural development

Projet findings resonate with your experiences in your province

- The five key themes of New Regionalism: i) collaborative, **multi-level governance**; ii) **integrated** versus sectoral and single objective approaches; iii) fostering knowledge flow, learning and **innovation**; iv) **place-based development**; and v) **rural-urban interaction** and interdependence.
- Those themes are largely relevant for Quebec case and the specific MRC Rimouski-Neigette case study even if local issues may be different.
- ***There is a significant gap between policy and practice and the theory and rhetoric*** of new regionalism is also true for Québec case as every political party are more talking about the regions of Québec, of development regional than taking action with public policies.
- This is possibly connect with the growing gap between the metropolitan development of Montreal region (near half of population and half of GNP) and the rest of Québec.

Rural-urban interdependance

- At what level: national, regional, MRC level, local
- Very important but not well understood by urban population
- In Quebec the discourse of politicians change over the time: from dependence to interdependence to rural-urban complementary

The governance of rural-urban relationship at MRC level: a blind date

- This MRC have a large city (Rimouski) and an eight small communities. On the MRC Board, the mayor of Rimouski have seven vote... so he can influence the decision at election time for a new « Préfet » of that MRC.
- In the beginning, the Mayor was very cool saying that Rimouski must help the development of those small rural community. But today, the discourse have change and he say: *Rimouski contribute for 85% of the budget of the MRC, we want more power.*
- So rural agent of development are now part of a local development organisation based in Rimouski serving rural community quite far away
- Rimouski provide jobs for people living in those communities and Rimouski charge extra fee for citizens of those communities using cultural, recreational and sportive facilities based in the city.

Significant new regional development policy trends

- Quebec government use to have a municipal affairs, regions and land occupancy department but they drop “region” in the label and “occupation du territoire” is a nice rhetoric but no public money
- The dismantling of regional institutions. The Couillard liberal government turn down the CRÉ (Conseil regional des élus) acting at large administrative regions.
- This government give the mandate of regional development to the MRC with a reduced budget
- DEC-Quebec (federal regional development agency) still spend public money but mostly for classical industrial plans

Best practices

- The *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement* de chaque MRC where population have a real power in the drawing of that plan
- Watershed management agency where various partners and political constituency sit a same table in order to protect a specific river watershed
- The consulting process around the windfarm parks (Multi-level governance)
- Community college research body devote to innovation linking with surrounding community (Centres collégiaux de transfert de technologie)
- A new emerging body replacing CRÉ: Forum ou Table de concertation régionale

Future directions of regional development

- A new regionalism is arising based on a bottom-up perspective
- In Quebec, rural development, at government level, was always connected to « municipal affairs » and not agriculture department
- The successful *Quebec national rural policy* have been transferred, with half of the original budget, to those MRC
- The 8 MRC in Lower St.Lawrence region recently put in place the CRD (for Collectif regional de développement), they put money to make this body efficient to deal with collective problems the “region” is facing.
- This evolution is interesting as a new multi-level governance is growing up from the bottom

THANK YOU