



Rhetoric versus Reality: Examining New Regionalism in Rural Canada

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New Regionalism in Rural Canada



The question: New Regionalism's presence and promise for Canadian rural regions?

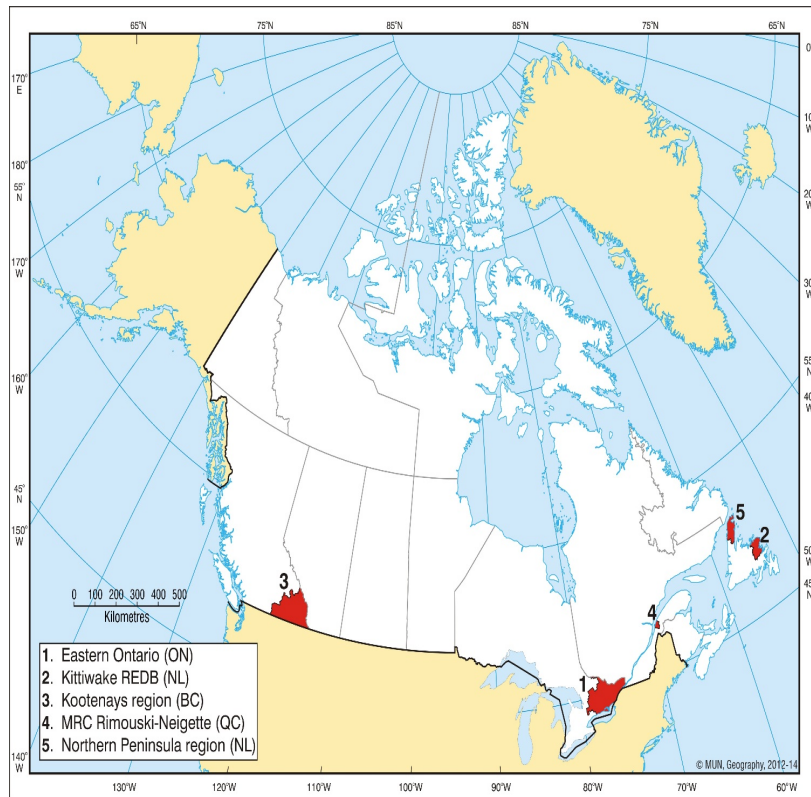
- 'New Regionalism' as a mixture of theories and concepts that has purported to explain the post-Fordist evolution of a faltering regional development regime
- Emergent theorizing offers a normative or prescriptive body of principles to inform a reconstituted development policy and practice

Old vs. New Regionalism

OLD REGIONALISM	NEW REGIONALISM
Hierarchy-based system	Network-based system
Government	Governance
Structure	Process
Closed	Open
Coordination	Collaboration
Accountability	Trust
Power	Empowerment

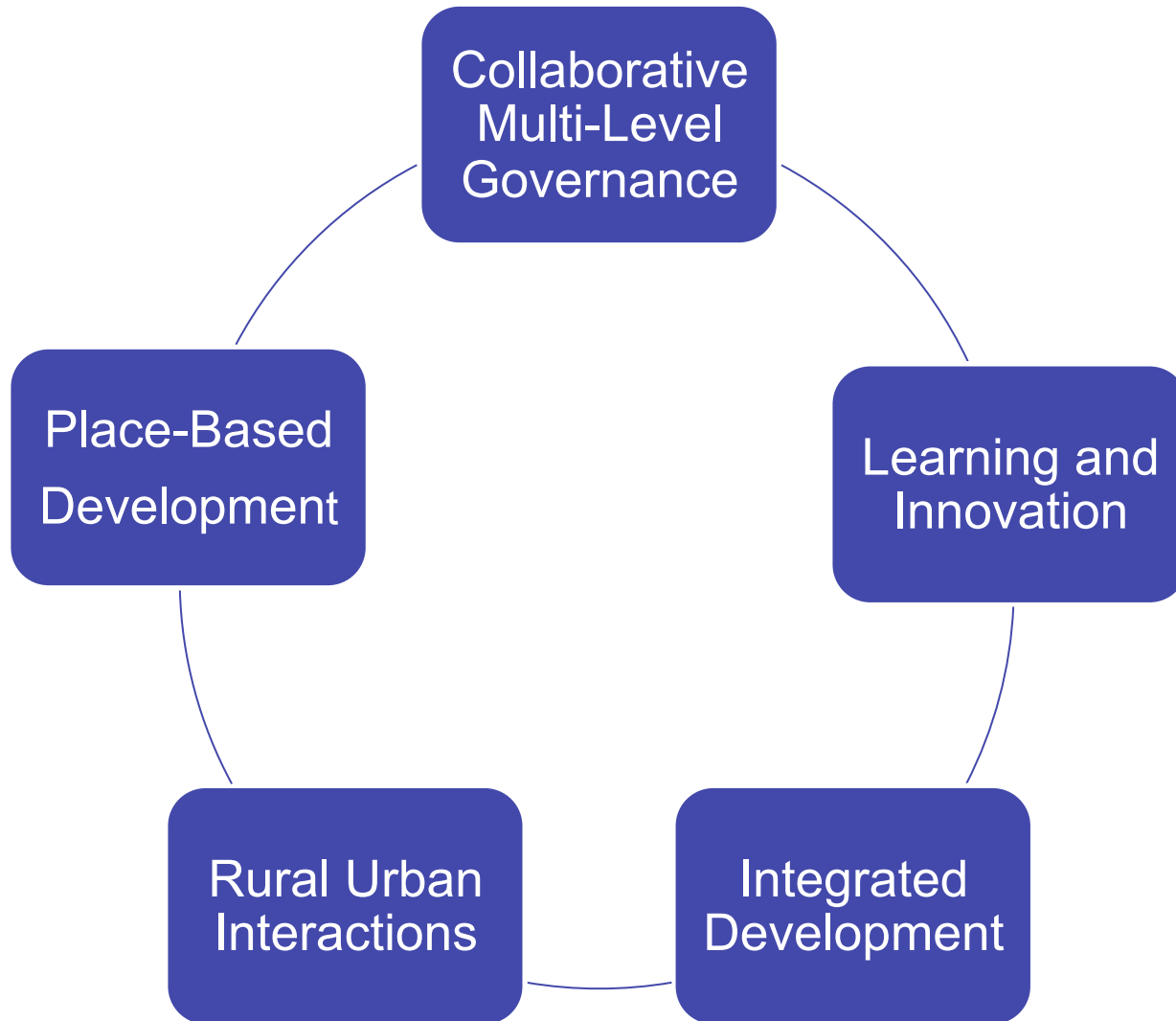
Source: Wallis, Allan. 2002. "The New Regionalism: Inventing Governance Structures for the Early Twenty-First Century." www.miregions.org (August 23, 2011).

Canadian Context



- Distance and density
- Staples dependency
- Weak theorization and poor track record of regional development
- Decades of change post mid-1980s
- Little cross-provincial analysis

Key Elements of New Regionalism



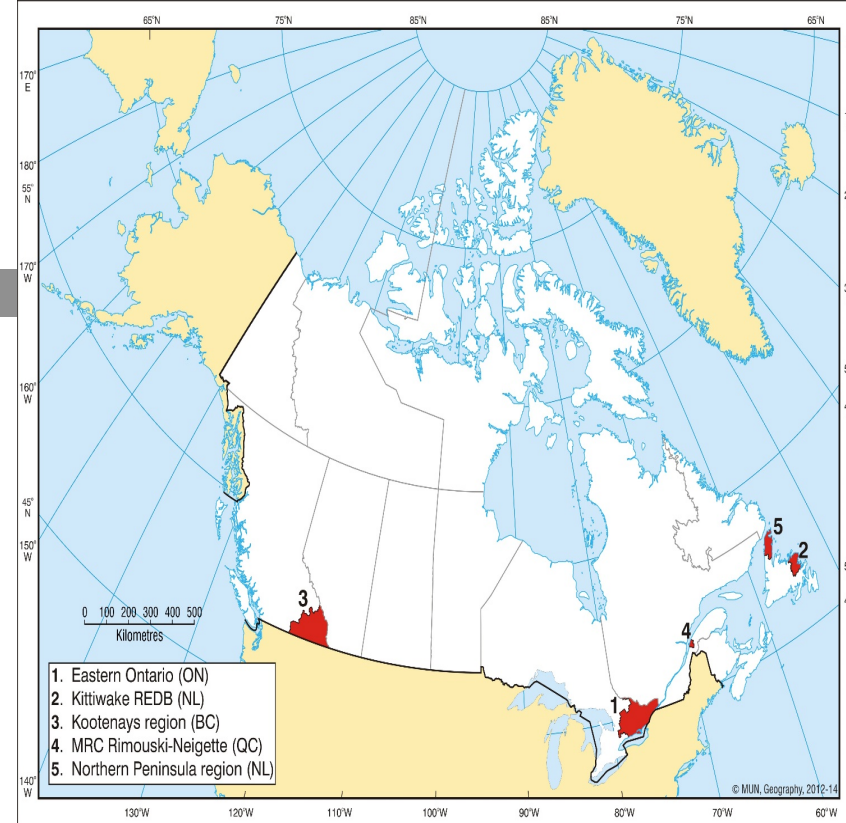
Sample Indicators

Place-based	Learning & Innovation	Governance	Integration	Rural-urban links
Place branding	R&D financing	Stakeholder engagement	Participatory process	Flows of goods
Buy local	Knowledge infrastructure	Multi-sector collaboration	Complexity acknowledged	Institutional links
Community-based resource management	Knowledge sharing partnerships	Multiple levels of government involved	Multi-disciplinary perspective	Environmental services
Community associations	Learning and reflection processes	Local level power	Holistic approach	Movements of people

Research Methodology

Mixed methods, interdisciplinary, case study-based

- 4 + 1 case study regions
- Core themes and indicators
- Document/literature review; 189 semi-structured interviews; (participant) observation
- Coding and pattern searching
- Multiple analytical “passes” with team dialogue and theme vs. case study region team cross-checking



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Findings – **General**

- With some variations across Canadian regions, sometimes within regions, and across the five identified key themes, **in general, there is a significant gap between policy and practice and the theory and rhetoric** of new regionalism and new regionalist ideas.
- Points to challenges in policy and practice but also with new regionalism

'New Regionalism' in Rural Canada

Findings – Multi-Level Governance

- Regional organizations have promoted a variety of multi-sector governance arrangements (often senior government-facilitated)
- Only occasionally involves policy or program co-construction
- Often reliant on sometimes single purpose, fragile organizations that lack significant capacity
- In some regions considerable inter-local government collaboration – a foundation for regional governance?

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Findings – **Learning & Innovation**

- Informal knowledge flows through diverse personal and other networks, ‘quiet’ and pragmatic innovation in rural communities, households, enterprises and organizations
- More formal networks transfer knowledge and skills across professional interest groups (e.g. EDOs)
- BUT processes of, and organizations associated with innovation concentrated in major urban settings
- Minimum interregional or inter-provincial transfer of knowledge or deliberate learning and reflection

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Findings – Rural-Urban Relationships

- Continued urban-rural conflict and competition despite changing residential mix, rural economies, overlapping interests, extending commuter travel patterns etc.
- Limited attention to most types of interdependencies
- Evidence to support critiques of urban-centric new regionalism (increasingly so - city regionalism?)



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Findings – **Place-Based Development**

- Evidence of a strong local sense of place and identity(ies) but generally not associated with official regions
- Some place-based identities extend to groups of communities, recognized landscapes, cultures, histories
- Most identify array of assets that afford development opportunities (including identity) but strategic application is limited
- Issues of compatibility with old and new regionalist ideas of place and place-based development
- Role for regional development organizations

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Findings – **Integrated Development**

- Development policies and practices that might be regarded as highly integrated are rare
- Dissonance between professional and other practitioner appreciation of complexity and interconnected nature of development issues and policies and practices
- Little response in development practice to balancing questions of economic growth and social equity; attempts to take a holistic perspective in development design and implementation remain uncommon

Conclusions

- Recognition that regions and regional development matter
- New regionalist practice emergent at best in small town and rural Canada
- Significant barriers to new approaches
- Time and legacies as key factors
- Need for increased attention to rural and rural-urban dynamics and a more holistic view of development

Implications for Policy and Practice



- Recognize entanglements and potentials of old and new regionalisms and regional identities
- Nurture and support local capacity and connectedness
- Demonstrate and build from successes
- Continue to explore and advance approaches for rural and rural-urban regionalism – learning, adaptive approach



This multi-year research initiative is investigating how Canadian regional development has evolved in recent decades and the degree to which New Regionalism has been incorporated into policy and practice. Five key themes are examined: (i) place-based development, (ii) governance, (iii) knowledge and innovation, (iv) rural-urban relationships, and (v) integrated development. The project is funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development.

Website: <http://cdnregdev.ruralresilience.ca/>

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