

# **New Regionalism: A Critical Reflection on its Role and Relevance in Planning Today**

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- Agenda
  
- ‘New Regionalism’ – A Brief Overview of Selected Theoretical Perspectives
- A Sampling from the Recent Record
- Suggested Criteria for Assessing ‘New Regionalism’s’ Role and Relevance in Planning
- ‘New Regionalism’ in Planning - A Critical Reflection
- Discussion



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- Theoretical Perspectives - General
  
- Considerable confusion, some skepticism, uncertain direction
- Two overlapping themes – NR as the evolution of an historico-empirical process, NR as a normative prescription
- American focus on metropolitan dynamics
- European focus on diverse regional and rural contexts
- Canadian uneven foci



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- Theoretical Perspectives – The Engine?
- Post-Fordist transition, withdrawal of the State, globalization, neo-Liberal agenda and play-out of advanced market capitalism, revelation of systemic economic disparities, realization of ineffectiveness of previous sectoral, top-down public policies, emergence of flexible specialization and production, .... .... ....



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- Theoretical Perspectives – The Response
  
- With upward/downward devolution of State power and functions region as (residual?) rational spatial frame, rediscovery of socially embedded nature of development, interpersonal relationships (via business, community, organizations) a central development factor, endogenous (economic) development process feasible and practical, ...  
... ..



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- Theoretical Perspectives – Response
- Governance, replacement of hierarchic with heterarchic self-organization, nascent form of bottom-up regulation and coordination, experimentation with institutional arrangements, economies of scale, clustering (e.g. extra-local, inter-business), ... ..



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- Theoretical Perspectives – The Response
  
- Realization of centrality of institutional factor (the “institutional turn”), articulation of social capitals, highlighting of “untraded interdependencies”, place-based assets to the fore, connecting of these with innovation and competitiveness, generative power of “institutional thickness”, networks, information exchange, relationships, shared collective knowledge and the learning region, .... ....  
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- Theoretical Perspectives – Response
- Much of this theorizing converges on the interrelated concepts of place-based *capacities* and *multi-level governance* as a new and potentially more effective mode of regional (economic) development, away from the unproductive dichotomies of the top-down/bottom-up feud, and a pragmatic response to the differentiated, place-particular footprint of globalization.





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- Theoretical Perspectives – Response
- In sum - The region is validated as *the* basis for economic and social life (e.g. Lovering, 1999, Douglas, 1999)
- “ ... .... The region has central theoretical status in the process of capitalist development.” (Storper, 1995).



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- A Sampling from the Recent Record
  
- Canada
  - Northern British Columbia – endogenous, counter-core, region-wide mobilization, some institutional infrastructure
  - Community Futures Corporations in Ontario – multi-regional consortia for functional “fit”
  - Ontario “Places to Grow” Policy – the metro region growth management agenda



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- A Sampling from the Recent Record
  
- Canada
  - Quebec – Provincially supported devolution and regional autonomy, strong rural presence, OECD recognized progressive practice, increasingly integrated practice.
  - Newfoundland & Labrador – regional economic development design (REDBs, 1996), with 20 Zones, now overlain with 9 Rural Secretariat Regions, for general development policy.



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- A Sampling from the Recent Record
  
- America
  - Some evidence of integrated regional development (e.g. devolution, governance, environment/economy) in Portland, Oregon, New England.
  - Metro growth management agenda dominates (e.g. Wheeler, 2002)
  - High hopes to rectify past planning and development errors (e.g. urban sprawl, placelessness, pollution).



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- A Sampling from the Recent Record
  
- Europe
  - LEADER (1991) as proto-type for New Regionalism? - multi-perspective development, devolution, governance, appropriate spatial scale (?), learning evident, institutional development.
  - Regional Authorities in Republic of Ireland – defunct!
  - Strong culture of regionalism and regional identity in place, and in use (e.g. Keating & Loughlin, 1997, Douglas, 2006).



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- New Regionalism in Planning – Criteria
- Policy Role and Relevance
- Practice Role and Relevance



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- New Regionalism in Planning – Criteria
  
- Policy
  - Credibility and Explanatory Power
  - Predictive Capacity
  - Guidance Capacity
  - Values, Ethics and Normative Dimensions



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- New Regionalism in Planning – Criteria
  
- Practice
  - As in Policy
  - Concrete Applications: Lessons
  - Concrete Applications: Outputs and Outcomes





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- New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection
  
- Policy
  - Theory in formative, emergent stage with as yet modest explanatory and predictive capacity.
  - Causal propositions are few and many are tentative.
  - Undeveloped in terms of critical interrogation of power, entrenched privilege, institutional inertia, and other dimensions of hegemonic regional relations.



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- New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection
  
- Policy
  - Strong documented empirical base, rich conceptual integration, and interdisciplinary potentials (e.g. institutional Economics, cognitive Psychology) bode well for its relevance and application.
  - Addresses the core and a greater breadth of issues of development, providing an opportunity for more efficacious policy design and implementation.



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- **New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection**
  
- **Policy**
  - Political feasibility with possibilities for acceptable degrees of devolution and fiscal implementation.
  - Opens possibilities for agglomeration economies and synergies in policy implementation (e.g. integrating social with economic policy).
  - Catches up with contemporary Social Science in seeing the regional economy as a socially/institutionally constructed entity.



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- New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection
  
- Policy
  - Provides an articulated normative framework for policy design and implementation through advocacy planning, participatory process, and responsive governance alternatives.
  - Challenges the false dichotomies of zero-sum urban-rural dynamics.



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### □ New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection

#### □ Practice

- Concrete application of “fuzzy concepts” (Markusen, 1999) and evaluation of practice outputs and outcomes remains to be seen.
- Most planning institutional structures are rigidly hierarchical, posing significant barriers to application.
- New Regionalism is not currently part of the core curriculum for professional planners.



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## □ New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection

### □ Practice

- Remaining skepticism (“old wine in new bottles” syndrome) among practitioners, and others.
- Prescriptive, at time oppositional dimension, challenges remnants of practice’s inherited sense of objectivity and rational scientism.



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- New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection
  
- Practice
  - Another opportunity to get our regional planning right?
  - Release from the bounds of localism and local authority insularity?
  - Makes the case for multi-community cooperation and collaboration, in line with orthodoxy of partnerships and area-based development planning.



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- New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection
  
- Practice
  - Maybe the best opportunity for holistic, integrated approaches to practice that we will ever have, notably for physical planning.
  - Matches the functional reality of economic, social and political-administrative systems - a “fit”.
  - Opportunity to positively harness the nascent re-emergence of regionalism itself, as a potent and sustainable societal resource.





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- New Regionalism in Planning – Critical Reflection
  
- Practice
  - Accords with much of received theory and practice in Community Economic Development (CED), endogenous development, Community Development (CD), participatory-based development, self-reliance, insurgency planning, Alternative Economics, and other aspects of local democratic praxis.



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## **□ Summary**

- ‘New Regionalism’ is convincingly grounded.
- It has an impressive and growing body of theory and conceptualization fueling the project.
- It suffers the clutter and inexactitude of many emergent propositions in our eclectic field.
- The normative emphasis does not have to be polemical.
- It is imperative that NR be refined from intensive feedback from policy and practice.



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*Thank you.*

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