Understanding Regionalism and Regional Development in Canada: Highlights from a National Research Initiative

Dr. Kelly Vodden and Research Team
Environmental Policy Institute and Department of Geography
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Outline

• Project goals and methods
• Emerging (early) findings from four provinces
• Implications for rural development policy and practice
• Your experiences?
Project Goals

• Undertake a critical assessment of the application and relevance of new regionalism in the Canadian context;

• Seek Canadian innovations in regional development; and

• Understand how these are evolving and if and how they are being shared across space in networks of regional development policy and practice.
Methodology

- Multi-level (nested) case study approach
Case Study Selection

• Provincially recognized regions as entry point
• Mix of characteristics and levels of “capacity”
• Feasibility
  – Student/researcher interests and relationships, financial and logistical considerations
Asset/Capacity Amoebas

Kootenays

Rimouski-Neigette

Eastern Ontario

Northern Peninsula

Gander EZ
Methods cont’d

• Mixed methods, interdisciplinary
  – Document/literature review
  – Semi-structured interviews
  – (Participant) observation
  – Pattern searching and theme indicators
  – Multiple analytical “passes” with team dialogue and cross-checking
  – Social network analysis
# Themes and Development Arenas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arenas of Regional Development</th>
<th>Economic Development</th>
<th>Recreation</th>
<th>Water (watershed) management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Themes of New Regionalism**

1. Governance
2. Rural-Urban
3. Place-based
4. Integration
5. Learning and Innovation
## Place-based Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic/Indicator</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>ON</th>
<th>NL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social                   | Strong association: Identity, social infrastructure, participation  
   **Scale: sub-region** | Association: med. overall  
   Scale: community | Strong: Identity  
   Med. overall  
   **Scale: community** |
| Economic                 | Low/med association overall  
   **Scale: mixed** | Strong: economic Infrastructure  
   Med. overall  
   **Scale: mixed** | Med. overall  
   **Scale: mixed** |
| Environmental            | Strong: sustainability initiatives  
   **Scale: sub-regl** | Med. overall  
   **Scale: mixed** | Strong: amenities  
   Scale: community and sub-regional |

*Association with place-based characteristics – mixed and medium overall*
Geography

Infrastructure

Distance
Transportation

Identity

Quality of Life

Amenities

Economic Development

Branding

Transience

Second Home
Bedroom Community

Demographics

Working Away

Quality of Life

Place-based Development
Place-based Development - Social

Identity
• BC: (Sub-regional) identity, physical geography key
• NL: Prominent topic, more community oriented but shifting, varied/"fuzzy"
• ON: Less prominent, large scale region, community/township, more language/heritage oriented, also waterways

Transience
• Three versions: seasonal, commuting – ST, LT
• Indicative of reduced commitment to place?
• Implications for development
Place-based Development - Economic

**Branding**
- Strong link with place-based amenities
- ON - more sector focused; BC – closely linked with identity; NL - various scales, less regional

**Infrastructure**
- Mix of quality, initiatives, jurisdictions, capacity, priorities
- Shapes functional regions
Place-based Development - Environmental

- More emphasis in planning within BC, community and regional district level, energy and climate change
  - government, industry, NGO, CBT

- Energy initiatives focus in Ont.
  - Provincial and post-secondary lead

- Less focus in NL

- Overall least present, requires further investigation
Integrated Development

- Strongest association with: collaboration and cooperation, multidisciplinary – environmental

- NL – efficiency and effectiveness - goals and objectives, politico-territorial perspective - dominant problems
- BC - politico-territorial perspective – rationale for region
- ON and BC - alternative economic perspectives - environmental benefits
- NL and ON – comprehensive studies, and analysis (ON)

- *Overall limited association with most characteristics of systems thinking or integrated approach*
Innovation

• Examples in each region BUT ...

• *Barriers to innovation* often cited:
  
  – knowledge infrastructure
  – resistance to change
  – access to capital
  – HR
  – getting “the right players” together at the table – do-ers + facilitators
Knowledge and knowledge flows

• Reliance on personal and informal NL vs. formal speak BC (less support for claims)

• Reflection: internal, few formal mechanisms

• Some sharing lessons, looking outside for ideas but also secrecy and over-reliance on internal networks
Governance

• Multiple governance initiatives in each region
• Greater provincial than federal involvement
• Closer to consultation (and downloading)
  – Local actors engaged, increased responsibilities but power remains external in most instances
• Local human and financial resources constraints
• Lack of coherent governance strategy
  – Mostly reactive or project focused
Rural-Urban Interdependencies:
Canadian Balance of Trade 2006-1011
Rural - Urban Interdependencies

Trade and exchange

Environment

Footprint of the GTA 2015

Footprint of the GTA 1996

Institutions

Identity
4 Normative Systems

**Market-based:**
Contractual, short-term, supply and demand
E.g. commerce, labour, housing, trade

**Bureaucratic-based:**
Rationalized roles, principles
E.g. government, law, corporations

**Associative-based:**
Shared interests
E.g. recreation, charity, religious groups

**Communal-based:**
Generalized reciprocity, identity, low choice
E.g. families, cultural groups, gangs
Rural-Urban Relationships

• Interdependence vs. core-periphery?

• BC:
  – More formal, bureaucratic and market-based relationships

• NL:
  – More informal, associative relationships overall, but extensive market and bureaucratic-based rural-urban relationships
Next Steps

• Dominant topics within each theme
• Data gaps, inconsistencies, cross-checking
• Results by development arena
• Trends/timelines
• Similarities and differences across regions - connection to regional and policy contexts
• Revisiting characteristics/indicators
• Linkages across themes
• Overall findings – and continued sharing, dialogue
So what does it all mean?

• Place matters and, increasingly, so do regions
• BUT - rhetoric vs. reality of new regionalism
  – Not relevant in Canadian context?
  – Distinct brand(s) of Canadian new regionalism?
  – Lessons we have not yet fully taken advantage of?
  – Need to adapt for rural and Canadian regions?
So what does it all mean?

• Lots of work to do!

• Areas of opportunity:
  • Attention to place-based assets and opportunities
  • “Network weaving” for innovation
  • Deliberate approaches to (investment in) scanning, learning and support for these activities
  • Starting with horizontal collaboration in governance and creating more integrated forms of development
  • Focus on rural-urban interdependencies vs. competition
New regionalism in your area?

Collaborative Multi-Level Governance

Place-Based Development

Innovation and Learning

Rural Urban Interactions

Integrated Development
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 of new regionalism 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.wordpress.com