



# **‘New Regionalism’ as the New Local Development Paradigm?: Cautionary Evidence from some Recent Research in Canada**

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# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**



## **Agenda**

- The Issue – ‘New Regionalism’s’ promise for Local Development?
- ‘New Regionalism’ – Selected Roots
- ‘New Regionalism’ – Summary of Some Key Perspectives
- The Research Project – Objectives and Methodology
- Selected General Findings – First Impressions
- Potential Implications for Local Development Policy and Practice

# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**



## **The Issue – ‘New Regionalism’s’ promise for Local Development**

- ‘New Regionalism’ is an admixture of theories and concepts that purport to explain the post-Fordist evolution of a faltering regional development regime.
- From this, the emergent theorizing proffers a normative or prescriptive body of principles to inform a reconstituted development policy and practice.

# 'New Regionalism' and Local Development



## The Issue – 'New Regionalism's' promise for Local Development

- Might this 'New Regionalism' have productive application for local development?
- Before answering this - we have to determine whether there is actual evidence of an emergent 'New Regionalism' in today's regional development policy and practice. **Is it happening?**

# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**



## **‘New Regionalism’ – Selected Roots**

- The mixed record of post-War regional and area development policies and programmes, and the persistence of interregional disparities and under-development.
- Globalization, neo-liberalism, NPM and the managerial turn, retreat of the State, borderless capital, multi-scalar macroeconomic governance arrangements (e.g. EU, NAFTA) with the associated geo-political restructuring.

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## **‘New Regionalism’ – Selected Roots**

- Observed spatial patterns and processes of development including clustering, industrial districts, innovative milieux, knowledge-based concentrations of creativity, and the centrality of networks.
- A growing, if uneven awareness that context matters and may be a definitive factor in a community's/area's development potentials, and the locus of policy design as well as asset-based strategic practice.

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## **‘New Regionalism’ – Summary of Some Key Perspectives**

- An historico-empirical claim that the ‘region’ has (re)emerged as the most appropriate and efficacious frame for area development policy and practice.
- Effective development requires a holistic approach, integrating environment and economy, and availing of new forms of contextually responsive governance.

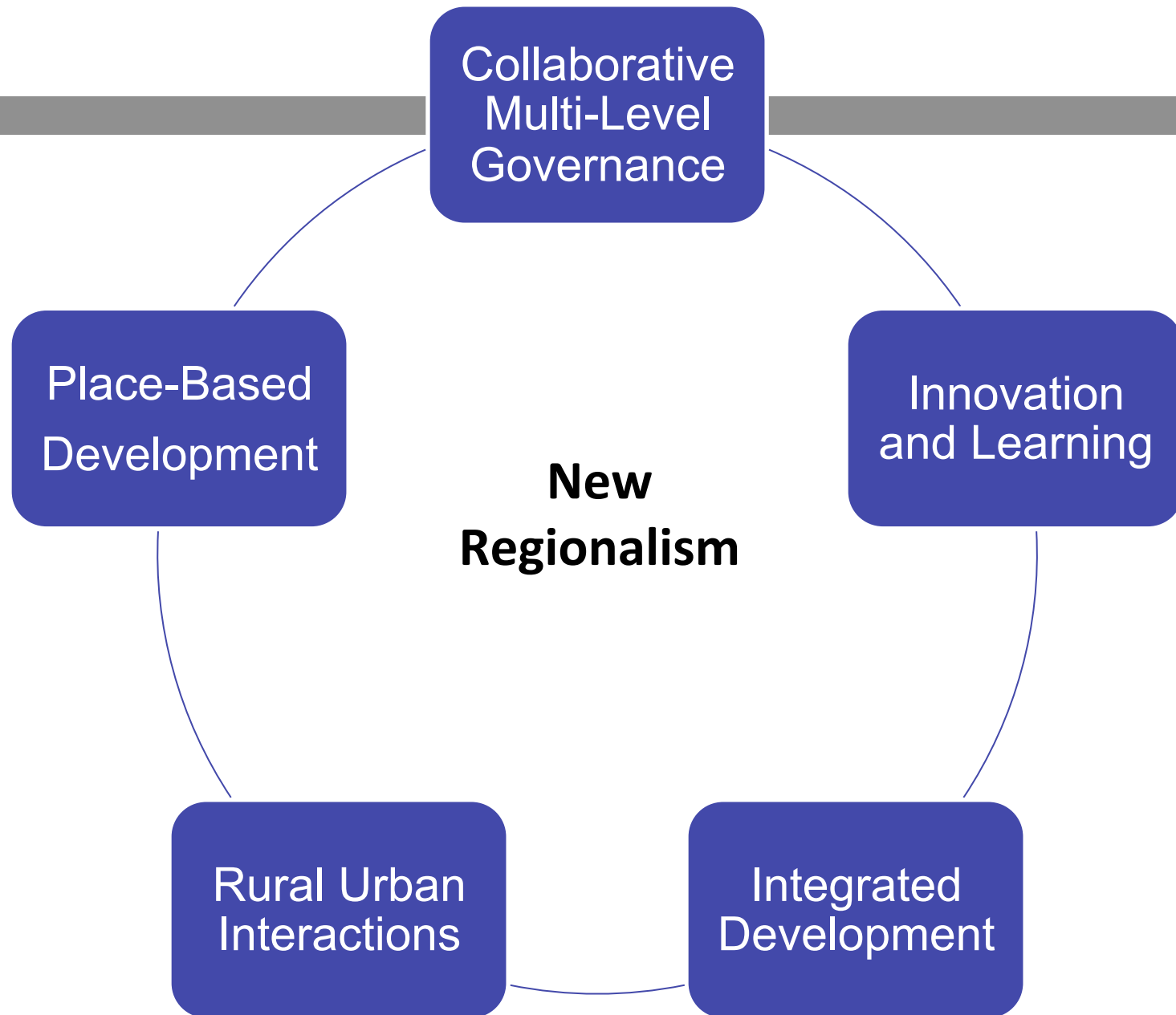
# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**



## **‘New Regionalism’ – Summary of Some Key Perspectives**

- Place making, with its emphasis on assets, endogenous development, social capitals and ‘non tradable interdependencies’ is central to this new approach to development, in contrast to the traditional dominance of sectoral perspectives and a-contextual policy making.





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## **The Research Project – Scale and Core Questions**

**Scale** - intra-national regions.

### **Core Questions**

- Have Canadian development policies and practices adopted the characteristics of this “New Regionalism”?
- If so, which characteristics predominate, and which are less evident?
- What are the theoretical, policy, practice and other implications?

# 'New Regionalism' - Central Sub-Concepts



**Governance**



**Integration**



**Placed-  
Based**



**Innovation  
and  
Knowledge  
Flows**

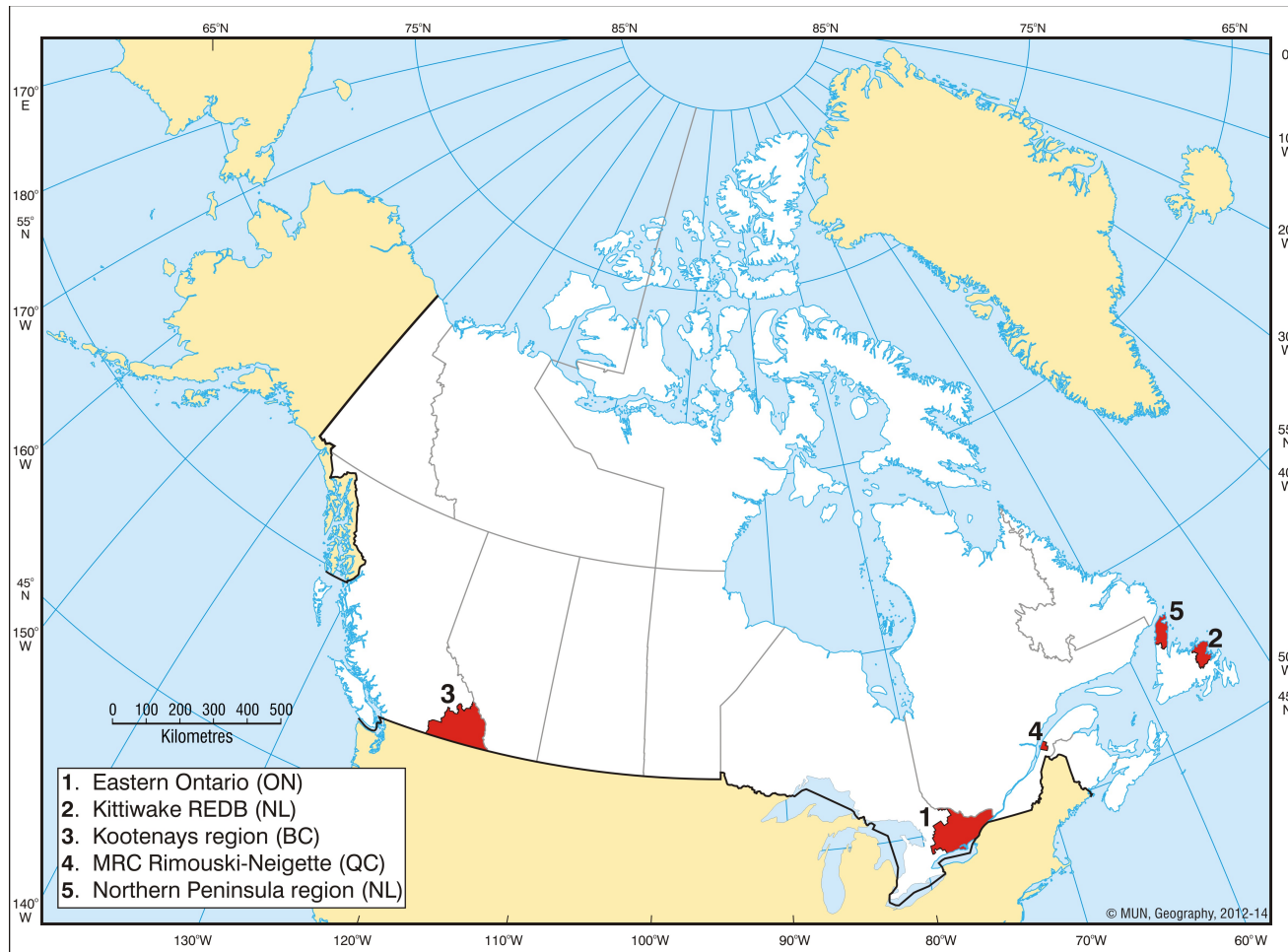


**Rural-Urban  
Relationships**



# Research Methodology

- **Multi-level (nested) case study approach**



# Research Methodology

- **Mixed methods, interdisciplinary**
  - Document/literature review
  - Semi-structured in-person interviews
  - (Participant) observation
  - Pattern searching and theme indicators
  - Multiple analytical “passes” with team dialogue and theme vs. case study region team cross-checking

# Sub-Concepts and Development Arenas

Arenas of Regional Development	Economic Development	Recreation	Water (watershed) management
<b><i>Sub-Concepts in New Regionalism</i></b>			
1. Governance			
2. Rural-Urban			
3. Place-based			
4. Integration			
5. Learning, knowledge flows and Innovation			

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## **Findings – First Impressions - General**

- While there are variations across Canadian regions, sometimes within regions, and across the five sub-concepts of ‘New Regionalism’, in general, there is a significant gap between policy and practice and theory and rhetoric.

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## **Findings – First Impressions – The Region**

- The multiplicity and complexity of overlapping public policy and organizational regions detract from a unitary sense of region, and identity with that region.
- In place of regional identity and all of its potentials are (a) sub-regions, groupings of neighbouring communities and immediate surrounding areas, and (b) opportunistic mobilizations on a larger regional basis in opposition to particular externally generated issues.



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## Findings – First Impressions – The Region

- The *Municipalite régionale de comtés de Rimouski* is a significant exception here. A product of 20 years of Quebec public policy, the Region functions as a regional government, with a full complement of social, economic, environmental and other services, and a high level of local identity and autonomy.

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## Findings – First Impressions – The Region

- Eastern Ontario is somewhat less of an exception. Here the Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus functions as the *de facto* regional political body, acting on behalf of the extensive region on selected development priorities.
- In lieu of regional identity communities identify themselves as “rural” and small town communities.

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## Findings – First Impressions – **Multi-Level Governance**

- Governance structures and processes are evident throughout all study regions among a great variety of community organizations, interest groups, and others, occasionally involving local governments and Provincially mandated organizations (e.g. Conservation Authorities, Trusts).

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## Findings – First Impressions - **Multi-Level Governance**

- This great diversity of, usually small organizations are often fragile, sometimes ephemeral, single purpose and lacking significant capacity.
- Most of these governance arrangements function on a community, and sometimes on a multi-community or sub-regional level, with few having any region-wide presence.

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## Findings – First Impressions - **Multi-Level Governance**

- Most public sector organizations pursue inter-governmental collaboration based on statutory and related requirements (e.g. Township with County).
- In some regions there is considerable inter-local government collaboration on infrastructure, sectoral economic development (e.g. tourism), and other issues.

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## Findings – First Impressions - **Multi-Level Governance**

- Where senior governments have facilitated regional development organizations (e.g. Trusts, CFDCs, REDBs, MRCs), a considerable variety of governance arrangements between communities, NGOs, municipalities, the private sector and seniors governments is evident.

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## Findings – First Impressions – **Place-Based Development**

- In all regions there is evidence of a strong local sense of place and identity.
- Place-based development is rarely evident on a multi-community, sub-regional basis.
- However, in some regions it is less localized and extends to groups of communities, recognized landscapes, cultural regimes, common histories, and sub-regions.

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## **Findings – First Impressions – Place-Based Development**

- In most instances rural communities are able to identify an array of assets (e.g. physical, cultural) that afford development opportunities.
- The strategic application of community assets is generally confined to sector specific initiatives (e.g. tourism).



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## Findings – First Impressions – **Place-Based Development**

- Exceptions to this confined practice are found in contexts where (a) there is a major urban centre, university, technological innovation, and related collaborations, and (b) there is a regional development organization in place (e.g. River Basin Trust).

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## Findings – First Impressions – **Place-Based Development**

- Notwithstanding the rhetoric of upper-levels of government, there is very little evidence of the 'co-construction' of a contextualized development agenda.
- But where there is some evidence of this, it is generally single-sector based and sub-regional in extent (e.g. Regional Tourism Organizations, Ontario).

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## Findings – First Impressions – **Integrated Development**

- Development policies and practices that might be regarded as highly integrated are very rare in the five Canadian research regions.
- There is something of a dissonance between the professional and other practitioner appreciation of the complexity and interconnected nature of development issues (e.g. water systems, labour markets), and the actual policies and practices addressing development.

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## Findings – First Impressions – **Integrated Development**

- There are significant differences across all regions in the profile of development practice as it relates to various dimensions of an 'integrated' approach to development.
- There is little response in development practice to balancing the questions of economic growth and social equity.

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## Findings – First Impressions – **Integrated Development**

- Attempts to take a holistic perspective in development design and implementation are rare.
- Practices which address the challenges of 'silos' are rare.
- Rational comprehensive approaches to development planning are quite common.

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## Findings – First Impressions – **Integrated Development**

- A participatory approach to development planning and management is a minority practice.
- A community development perspective is adopted by about 40% of practitioners.
- An 'Alternative Economics' perspective is a common approach to development.

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- Findings – First Impressions – **Integrated Development**
- Multidisciplinary approaches to development planning and management are common, i.e. 55-75%.
- Practices which explicitly address the spatial dimensions of development are common, but are largely confined to statutory dimensions of territorial planning and management (e.g. municipal boundaries).

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## **Findings – First Impressions – Learning & Innovation**

- Informal knowledge flows through diverse personal and other networks to underpin an autonomous, ‘quiet’ and pragmatic innovation in rural communities, households, enterprises and organizations.
- More formal networks characterize the transfer of knowledge and skill sets across professional interest groups (e.g. EDOs, conservation officials).



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## Findings – First Impressions – **Learning & Innovation**

- Processes of, and organizations associated with innovation are dominantly concentrated in major urban settings with universities, colleges, businesses, and government agencies.
- There is a minimum of interregional or inter-provincial transfer of knowledge and processes relating to regional development, beyond the networks of professional practitioners.

# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**



## **Findings – First Impressions – Learning & Innovation**

- Beyond specific foci in rural areas (e.g. neutraceuticals, source water) the location of most public policy supports for inventions, experimentation, testing and product development are in major urban centres.
- There is uneven and emergent evidence of the facilitating role of broadband infrastructure in supporting a more diverse and active climate of innovation and knowledge transfer in the regions.

# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**



## **Findings – First Impressions – Learning & Innovation**

- Besides the disparate processes of ‘quiet’ invention and application in rural society, there are many examples of local innovation in process and organization, many relating to local tourism, heritage, food systems and other matters.
- A small number of high profile organizational and development process innovations are evident at the regional level (e.g. the EOWC in Eastern Ontario).

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## **Findings – First Impressions – Rural & Urban Relationships**

- The age old understanding and popularized notion of urban-rural conflict and competition, while highly variegated in its geographical presence, its intensity, and in its manifestation, is still evident across all regions.

# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**

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## **Findings – First Impressions – Rural & Urban Relationships**

- For many rural communities relationships with urban centres are growing with the advent of exurbanites, cottagers and second home owners, the changing rural economy (away from primary commodities), overlapping interests (e.g. local food systems), joint ventures (e.g. folk festivals), common environmental concerns, and extending commuter travel patterns.

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## **Findings – First Impressions – Rural & Urban Relationships**

- For rural communities close to urban centres relationships include common interests and conflicts relating to land use, infrastructure (e.g. water, waste management), tax bases, and other matters. While there are instances of formal and informal collaborative arrangements, most rural and urban communities remain divided by local government boundaries, with issues around differences in resources, responsibility and control.

# 'New Regionalism' and Local Development



## Findings – Summary

- Based on the project's case study regions, there is very little evidence of a paradigmatic shift toward 'New Regionalism' in Canadian development policy and practice.
- However, some of the factors associated with the conceptualization of 'New Regionalism' (e.g. withdrawal of the State, re-emergence of *place*) are unevenly present in Canada.

# 'New Regionalism' and Local Development



## Potential Implications

- The development potentials associated with an overarching, integrating and coordinating *regional construct*, which could facilitate multi-level governance and other processes, may not be assumed in the post-Fordist dynamics of regional development policy and practice.
- This begs the question of the need for a purposeful *intervention* to design, invest in, and foster the strategically important dimensions of 'New Regionalism', based on its normative premises.



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## Potential Implications

- In some contexts (e.g. most parts of Canada), this purposeful design toward a more localized development dynamic would have to involve substantive and substantial *devolution* of public policy design and decision making, with the associated re-allocation of commensurate resources.

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## Potential Implications

- The *spatial dissonance* evident between the cultural and other regional identities of rural residents and the official regions of senior governments militates against effective development collaboration.
- The *sub-regional* arena of multi-community and multi-local government collaboration offers the prospects and potentials of an appropriate and feasible scale of development collaboration.

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## Potential Implications

- The locally identified and designed *sub-regional scale* of development policy and practice may offer the best prospects of multi-level governance, place-based development, constructive rural-urban collaborations, and other facets of the posited 'New Regionalism'.
- The variegated processes of local, individual *community-based development*, including place-based development, are likely to be enhanced by being embedded in a more appropriate and effectively functioning sub-regional process.

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## Potential Implications

- The instrumental rationality of *place-based development* cannot be assumed to be self-evident, and an assured pragmatic practice, beyond asset-based tourism development, land use planning and a few other practices. It is not an automatic choice for economic development, social and cultural development and other pursuits.

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## Potential Implications

- Consistent with international literature and practice, the Canadian context provides rich evidence to re-confirm the variety, vibrancy, potentials and tangible effect of locally-based development initiatives. These range from local food systems, cuisine and cultural tourism, arts and crafts, and energy innovations, to creative collaborations, organizational development, and other initiatives in *competitive advantage*.

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## Potential Implications

- If *integrated* local development policy and practice is valued, beyond the rhetoric often associated with this term, then it will require a thoroughgoing, disciplined and consciously designed approach to local development policy and practice to effect its implementation.

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## Potential Implications

- Notwithstanding the widespread communication of the growing functional interdependencies between *rural and urban* communities, especially in an increasingly articulated globalized economy, antagonisms and zero-sum relationships between these persist, and influence most local development initiatives.

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## Potential Implications

- While multi-community collaboration is a well honed mode of local development practice, extending this horizontal process toward *multi-level governance* will likely require the active presence and support of government development programmes, and associated organizations and resource commitments.



# 'New Regionalism' and Local Development



## Potential Implications

- Beyond the 'quite' or informal *innovation*, knowledge generation and transfer that takes place in many rural communities, facilitating a more purposeful climate of innovation for local development may require the presence of public and private research and education organizations and infrastructure, and the associated investment in networks and application.

# **‘New Regionalism’ and Local Development**



*Thank you*

*Merci*

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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.ruralresilience.ca/>

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