Canadian Regional Development
A Critical Review of Theory, Practice, and Potentials

Développement régional canadien
Un examen critique des théories, des pratiques et des potentiels

Reflections on Rural-Urban Interdependence

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Document Reference

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Introduction

The popular media often represent rural and urban places as fundamentally in conflict. Urbanization and the resulting political tensions have exacerbated this view with challenges for resources and attention. This debate seldom reflects the fundamental interdependence of rural and urban places, however, and remains relatively uninformed regarding the empirical evidence demonstrating that interdependence.

Rural places provide the timber, food, minerals, and energy that serve as bases of urban growth. Rural places also process urban pollution, refresh and restore urban populations, and maintain the heritage upon which much of our Canadian identity rests. In return, urban Canada provides the markets for rural goods, much of its technology, and most of its financial capital and manufactured goods, along with a good deal of its media-based culture. Decisions and actions taken in one region will often have implications for those in the other – whether explicitly or implicitly. To understand both regions, therefore, one must understand the relationships in which they exist.

Interdependence means that changes in one place affect the other – a relatively abstract formulation but one that can be effectively applied to rural and urban places. We propose to examine the nature of that relationship with respect to four spheres of interdependence: economy, institutions, environment, and identity.

Economic interdependence is the most common focus of attention when rural-urban relationships are discussed. In most cases it is framed in terms of trade and exchange, whether that be of goods, services, labour, or finance. These exchanges often occur in a complex way – involving external exchanges and changing conditions.

Institutional interdependence is demonstrated in both formal and informal ways. Government policies, whether designed specifically for rural places or of a more general nature, will often reinforce the interdependence by virtue of their application. A medical policy favouring specialists and shared equipment will place transportation and accommodation demands on rural people. Accommodation of rural demands for hunting guns is bound to create resistance from those living in urban areas. A transportation policy designed for high density spaces is likely to isolate those where people are more widely distributed.

The environmental sciences have dramatically demonstrated the ways in which our common **environment** binds us all in a multi-levelled system of interdependence. Agricultural runoff can destroy the favourite recreation areas of urban dwellers, urban air pollution threatens rural forests, uncontrolled resource exploitation can poison urban water supplies, and urban sprawl can undermine rural communities while contributing to global warming that threatens us all. Of all the forms of interdependence, the environment has emerged as one of the most visible to the general public. The public concern with the quality of food, the purity of water, and recreational benefits of natural assets has been encouraged by the popular media, creating an

opportunity for recognition that is often missing from the common interests reflected in trade, institutions, or identity. For that reason our discussion of environmental interdependence will serve as a basis for several strategic options for improving rural-urban relations.

Rural-urban interdependence based on **identity** is seldom discussed in the literature. Research from the *New Rural Economy* project demonstrates, however, how it remains a powerful feature of rural-urban interdependence. People form attachments to places – attachments that deeply influence their perception, preferences, and choices. Social psychologists have also documented how this can easily become a central feature of how they view themselves and their personal and collective worth. Challenging or upsetting those identifications can lead to community and individual collapse – as illustrated most dramatically by the history of our aboriginal peoples. Our visions of ourselves, our communities, and our places in them are undergoing considerable change in the age of globalization and digital communication. In spite of the predictions that we will become indistinguishable in the information age, we find that places continue to matter – and the family, cultural, religious, and ethnic ties that so often go along with them. Such identities not only distinguish us but they also bind us – when urban perspectives and attitudes do not take into account local pride and commitments, or when threats are perceived to community integrity or respect. As we have found in the past, ignoring these aspects of interdependence can easily jeopardize the social cohesion of all Canadian society.

Themes

These four dimensions of interdependence provide a useful framework to organize our research regarding the four themes on new regionalism. To this end, we will discuss some of these implications, identify key research questions relating to them, and suggest some empirical indicators that are likely to help explore these implications and questions. The results will be summarized in Tables 1 to 3.

Rural-urban interdependence is directly relevant to the first of our other themes: *collaborative, multi-level governance*. This is most clearly seen in the focus on institutional interdependence where both formal and informal organizations and policies cut across the rural and urban contexts. Examples abound from economic, education, health, immigration, and cultural policies – policies that are often formulated in one domain but have important impacts in the other. The breath and limitations of those policies will be an important focus for our research – not only in their *de jure* specifications but in their *de facto* impacts as well. Elaborating the informal networks of governance should not be overlooked in this process.

Interdependence is also very relevant to the second of our themes: *integrated and sectoral or single objective approaches*. It is possible to identify trade, institutions, environment, or identity issues that link rural and urban places through agriculture or health, for example. From this point of view the challenge has been to ensure that the interdependence is not limited to one type of sphere – a tendency that is manifested in many of our government departments or academic disciplines. In this case, the integrated approach means recognizing the four types of

interdependence and their impacts in both rural and urban places. Interdependence can also be easily demonstrated with an integrated approach that cuts across the traditional sectoral differences. This sits well with the integration of our four spheres of interest above. In both cases they reinforce the value of recognizing the essential interdependence of these sectors, even as they introduce considerable complexity into the analysis. One of our primary objectives, therefore, is to identify and elaborate the nature of that complexity.

The recognition of interdependence means that our third theme – *fostering knowledge flow, learning, and innovation* – should pay attention to the flow of knowledge and learning across those channels of interdependence. As the centres of power shift to urban regions, the number of people with rural roots declines, and immigration (often of urban-based people) increases, the challenges of informing urban people about rural conditions become greater. This includes providing accurate information about all four aspects of interdependence – in order to make the impacts visible and integrate a rural voice in the discussions. Researchers can play important roles in this objective.

Finally, the focus on *rural-urban interdependence* can inform the discussion of place-based development in many ways. Each of the four bases of interdependence can be explored with respect to their implications for place – just as they can be investigated with more abstract or space-focused approaches. In the former this means asking questions regarding the types of resources and assets that particular places may provide for exchange and trade. This fits well with the emphasis on comparative over competitive advantage that is part of the economic literature on trade. It also means that we should become sensitized to the place-specific manifestations of institutions over the more generic representations as formulated in policy documents. The demands of running a hospital in Whitehorse are very different than in Vancouver even though the policy formulations may be similar.

Environmental considerations put us firmly on the path to a place-based approach and analysis. Environmental impacts and events are inherently place focused since the nature of local geography, climate, flora, and fauna significantly modify more general phenomenon. The pollution from Toronto traffic has different impacts on Lake Ontario than they do on Sturgeon Lake, just as the populations in Aurora are likely to feel different about it from those in Gravenhurst. Those differences are likely to reflect the significance of the fourth sphere of interdependence: identity.

Place and identity are intimately linked. This is supported by the general theoretical knowledge regarding identity formation itself as well as the very concrete evidence we have from circumstances where identity and place have been challenged. The most general example is found in the tragic history of Aboriginal relocation and treatment within Canada, but it can also be found in the misunderstandings and ensuing conflicts generated by urbanites and seasonal residences in rural places.

A Matter of Scale

The particular geographic or scalar resolution in which these interconnections are examined creates an additional dimension that must be considered in all our analysis above. For example, place-based development in relation to identity will look very different at the municipal scale relative to, say, the continental scale. For better or worse, fragmented continental identity remains a significant barrier to continental place-based development in North America, whereas municipal identity often plays a reinforcing role in place-based development. This suggests three key dimensions to consider when looking at rural-urban interdependence and its relationship to our project themes: the four mechanisms of interdependence, the four themes, and the level of scale at which they are considered. We will consider five levels of scale: community, region, provincial, national, and international. These distinctions are selected since they all have institutional structures in place for decision-making and resource distribution. Table 1 summarizes some of the issues raised by considering our research themes to the four aspects of rural-urban interdependence discussed above. The third dimension (of scale) is implicit in each cell.

Indicators of Rural-Urban Interdependence

These indicators should be considered at all 5 levels of geography.

1. *Trade/Exchange*
   - Flow of goods
     - ° Addresses of producers
     - ° Indicators of transport (bills of lading, $ of goods, transport costs, transportation infrastructure
     - ° Addresses of suppliers
     - ° Business inventory
   - Exchange of services
     - ° Addresses of services (business inventory)
   - Flow of people
     - ° Commuting data
     - ° Residential mobility (census)
     - ° Population change
   - Flow of finances
     - ° Residential and business financing
     - ° Insurance financing

2. *Institutional Interdependence*

- Government organizations, resources, investments, facilities, and policies
    - ° Educational
    - ° Health
    - ° Welfare
    - ° Business development
    - ° Housing
    - ° Citizenship
    - ° Resource management
    - ° Utilities
- Private sector
    - ° Utilities
    - ° Banking and finance
    - ° Commerce
    - ° Corporate
    - ° Businesses
    - ° Unions
- Third sector
    - ° Co-operatives
    - ° Religious institutions
    - ° Voluntary organizations
    - ° Charities
    - ° Professional groups

3. *Environmental interdependence*

- Water sources and quality: potable, non-potable
- Air quality
- Land use
- Recreational use
- Garbage disposal

4. *Identity*

- Language (mother tongue and use)

- Religion (nominal and de jure)

- Ethnicity (original and current manifestations)

- Family networks

- Cultural events and manifestations

Table 1: Examples of rural development issues relating to four themes, four aspects of Interdependence, and levels of scale.

		Trade/Exchange	Institutions	Environment	Identity
(Geographic resolution / Scale) Community, region, province, nation, international	Collaborative governance	Higher level gov't support for market identification by local places	Impacts of models of local integration – market, bureaucratic, associative, communal	Cross environment collaboration (water, air, food, land use)	Relationships between formal and informal (traditional) structures of governance
	Integrated vs. sectoral approaches	Impacts across economic sectors	Locations of inter-department and inter-institutional collaboration	Local management of multiple environmental impacts	Changing identity formations
	Knowledge flow, learning	Channels of local knowledge regarding markets, finances, management	Types of knowledge transferred – obstacles due to nature of knowledge	Linking of natural and social sciences – sharing frameworks	Impacts of alternative ways of knowing (essentialist vs. narrative)
	Place-based development	Local asset identification	Local manifestations of general policies	'Translating' general trends to local implications	Place impacts on identity formation and change

Table 2: Examples of research questions relating to four themes, four aspects of Interdependence, and levels of scale.

		Trade/Exchange	Institutions	Environment	Identity
(Geographic resolution / Scale) Community, region, province, nation, international	Collaborative governance	How do general trade policies affect local communities? How do local and regional manage these policies?	In what venues does inter-government collaboration take place? With respect to what issues?	Where do water, air, food, industrial, transportation, and natural resource management policies conflict? How are they managed?	How do formal governance organizations engage with identity-based groups? What types of support are provided?
	Integrated vs. sectoral approaches	In what venues do sectoral-based organizations interact: among themselves and with other sectors – at all levels and between levels?	Where do sectoral-based policies conflict? How are these conflicts managed at the local level?	What mechanisms and strategies do regional and local groups use to manage conflicts in natural resource policies?	In what ways do sectoral-focused policies affect local and regional identities?
	Knowledge flow, learning	What are the networks used by private sector organizations to plan, assess markets, manage crises?	How is knowledge from organizations with non-bureaucratic norms integrated or resisted by gov't organizations?	In that ways do the language and concepts of the natural sciences exclude them from integrating knowledge from other organizations or people – at multiple levels?	Which types of identities are dependent on narrative forms, which are dependent on essentialist forms, and what are the consequences?
	Place-based development	What are the ways in which local assets are identified by economic-focused agents?	Which tools of governance are most adaptable to place-based opportunities and constraints? Which are not?	Where are local conditions anomalous to the more general regional or national environmental trends? Why?	Under what conditions does local place become an important element of identity?

Table 3: Examples of indicators relating to four themes, four aspects of Interdependence, and levels of scale (numbers from July 18 version of interview).

		Trade/Exchange	Institutions	Environment	Identity
(Geographic resolution / Scale) Community, region, province, nation, international	Collaborative governance	Economic indicators (census, trade); Policy/Organ documents; interview: 7Economic? 13structure changed? 27Region changed? 10, 34, 37Collaboration?	Policy/Organ documents; interview: 10, 11, 13Collaboration? 14, 15Planning? 32Finances? 34-38Collaboration?	Policy/Organ documents; Interview: 7Environment? 10, 11Collaboration? 15PolicyImpacts? 22Public? 32Funding? 33OtherActivities? 34-38Collaboration? 43Share?	Interview: 26, 27PlaceIdentity? 30Brand? 47OtherIdentities?
	Integrated vs. sectoral approaches	Interview: 7Activities? 10-13, 34-37Collaboration? 16Plan? 18System? 40Open? 43Share?	Policy/Organ documents; Interview: 10-13Collaboration? 15Policies? 22Public? 24Links?	Policy/Organ documents; Interview: 5Purpose? 7Activities? 10-13, 34-37Collaboration? 15Policies? 18System? 21Plan? 24Links? 40Open? 43Share?	Demographic (census-language, MT, Ethnic, etc.); Interviews: 5Purpose? 6-9OrgChange? 25-27Region? 30Brand? 31BuyLocal? 45, 47Identify?
	Knowledge flow, learning	Interview: 10-13, 34-37Collaboration? 14-16Planning? 31Solicitation? 39-43Knowledge	Interview: 22PublicKn? 10-13, 34-37Collaboration? 14-16Planning? 31Solicitation? 39-43Knowledge?	Interview: 9Resources 10-13, 34-37Collaboration? 33EnvActivities? 39-43Knowledge?	Interview: 10-13, 34-37Collaboration? 26RegionRationale 27RegionChange
	Place-based development	Interview: 5-7Mandate? 16, 17, 21, 28, 29Assessment? 31LocalSupport? 25-33Place?	Interview: 5-7Mandate? 16, 17, 21, 28, 29Assessment? 25-33Place?	Interview: 7-8Activities 25-33Place?	Interview: 30Brand? 31BuyLocal? 45, 47Identity?

The *Canadian Regional Development: A Critical Review of Theory, Practice and Potentials* project is a multi-year research initiative funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The project is investigating how Canadian regional development has evolved over the past two decades and the degree to which Canadian regional development systems have incorporated ideas, policies and practices associated with "New Regionalism" into their policy and practice.

The project is conducting an empirical assessment of Canadian regional development using a multi-level, mixed methods case study approach in four provinces: British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, and Québec. The assessment of regional development across the case studies is based on 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.

Kelly Vodden (Environmental Policy Institute, Grenfell Campus and Department of Geography, Memorial University) is leading the project, together with co-investigators David Douglas (School of Environment Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph), Sean Markey (Geography, Simon Fraser University), and Bill Reimer (Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University). In addition, graduate students at all four universities are engaged on the project.

Further information on the project can be obtained at *http://cdnregdev.ruralresilience.ca*. The project has been financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Leslie Harris Centre for Regional Policy and Development.