

Local and regional development in the global North *and* South

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Abstract

Local and regional development has characteristically focused upon localities and regions in the historically industrialised and urbanised countries of the global North. Development Studies has been concerned with more recently industrializing and urbanizing nations in the global South. Each strand has continued to have only limited interaction but such disconnection constrains explanation and policy formulation in addressing global development challenges. This paper argues for stronger connection and deeper interaction concerning local and regional development between *and* within the global North *and* South. The basis for stimulating dialogue is situated in the critique of developmentalism, defining development regionally and locally, common issues and context sensitivity and place.

Keywords: Local, Regional, Development, Global North, Global South

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Introduction

Strong and enduring traditions exist in the study and practice of local and regional development. As a broad multi-disciplinary field, local and regional development has characteristically focused upon localities and regions in the historically industrialised and urbanised countries of the global North (Blakely and Bradshaw 2002; Fitzgerald and Green Leigh 2002; Stimson and Stough 2008). As a similarly wide multi-disciplinary endeavour, development studies has been concerned with more recently industrializing and urbanizing nations in the global South (Bebbington 2003; Cypher and Dietz 2004; Mohan 2011; Desai and Potter 2008). Such strands of work have tended to run in parallel episodes with limited interaction and cross-fertilization historically (see, for example, Gunder Frank 1979, Harvey 2006, Hirschman 1958, Massey 1987, Prebisch 1950). Each has been marked by evolving concepts, theories and language: 'First', 'Second' and 'Third World'; 'Developed' and 'Less Developed Countries'; 'High', 'Middle' and 'Low Income Countries'; 'Less Favoured' and 'Disadvantaged Regions'; 'Emerging economies'; 'Transition economies'; and, 'Post-socialist economies' (Scott and Garofoli 2007; Hettne 1995).

Yet there is growing recognition that such enduringly disconnected approaches are limiting in an increasingly globalised and inter-dependent world, creating gaps in our understanding and fragmenting our collective knowledge (Bebbington 2003; Jones 2000; Murphy 2008; Pike *et al.* 2006; Pollard *et al.* 2009). Continuing

disciplinary and sub-disciplinary demarcations as well as ring-fencing continue, reflecting academic culture, institutionalization and the political economy of the academic publishing business. They shape our perspectives and risk constraining explanation, policy formulation and praxis in addressing global development challenges including prosperity, livelihoods and wellbeing, demographic shifts, food and energy security, climate change, financial system instability, poverty and socio-spatial inequalities. To once again begin to bridge these boundaries, we argue for much stronger connection and deeper interaction concerning local and regional development within *and* between the global North *and* South. Conversation can benefit research across different camps by encouraging challenge and reflection upon prevailing ways of thinking to identify and frame new research questions, problems, gaps and contradictions, and innovative ways of tackling them. Our aim is to outline the basis for such dialogue in several shared concerns: the critique of developmentalism; defining development regionally and locally; common issues; and, context sensitivity and place. There are no doubt other areas but we see these as cross-cutting concerns of relevance across (sub-)disciplines capable of encouraging conversation. Rather than providing any kind of singular framework, attempting to answer all the questions or prematurely concluding what we envisage as an ongoing dialogue, our intention is to encourage discussion on these connecting themes better to tackle vital issues of local and regional development within *and* between the global North *and* South.

The critique of developmentalism

Dissatisfaction and critique of the particular post-war development project in the global South in development studies (Desai and Potter 2008), especially amongst post-colonial writers (Blunt and McEwan 2002; Hart 2001), mirrors critical reflection upon prevailing local and regional development models in the global North (Geddes and Newman 1999; Morgan 2004; Perrons 2011; Pike *et al.* 2007). From different starting points and empirical and academic domains, both fields have questioned the Rostovian linear stages through which each and every country, region and locality must travel to achieve a specific version of ‘development’ (McMichael 1996; Sheppard *et al.* 2009). A common sense of exhaustion is apparent too with traditional ‘top-down’ policy approaches from national centres that have proved too rigid and inflexible to cope with diverse regional and local circumstances (Crescenzi and Rodríguez-Pose 2011; Leys 1996).

Many in each field would agree that such approaches offer a “simplistic perspective of progress” and that “the discussion of development could not be restricted to the economic sphere per se...it could not be oblivious to the urgent questions of poverty, neither to ethnic and gender inequalities” (De Paula and Dymski 2005: 4). A rethinking is shared, then, about the goals and processes of development and its multi-disciplinary basis such that:

instead of relying on one or two organizing ideas, we recognize the need for many – for a thick theoretical approach – because of the diversity of circumstances and of the many divides that arise within the nations of the South. Indeed, these divides equally affect the nations of the North, and make development theory equally applicable to the ‘advanced’ nations as well (De Paula and Dymski 2005: 23).

This view rejects calls for the dominance of any single framework or somehow ‘correct’ approach in order to reflect diverse ways of understanding.

Our first task is to conceptualise our critique and alternatives. The limits of only utilising theory from and of the global North in making sense of the diverse predicaments of localities and regions in the global South have been established (Murphy 2008). Mirroring criticism of the hegemonic ‘northernness’ of social science theory (Connell 2007), there is much value in ‘theorising back’ from analysis of empirical experience in the global South at dominant western, global North perspectives (Yeung and Lin 2003). As Murphy (2008: 857) asks of Economic Geography: “Is the subdiscipline better served by sticking to research topics and locations that have driven many significant theoretical developments over the past 20 years or does a more intensive, extensive and coordinated engagement with the Global South offer an important opportunity to test, extend or retract these theories?” Yet, although this stance acknowledges the dangers of

generalizing geographically parochial ways of thinking (Pollard *et al.* 2009) and recognises that the differences connecting local and regional development in the global North and South make are conceptually and theoretically important, we disavow a complete swing of the pendulum. Reaction against overly deductive and positivist approaches has often resulted in what it aimed to avoid: relativist and parochial studies of limited wider value for understanding and policy. Growing economic, political and social integration is making development challenges more 'global' but we argue that responses need properly to address context, tailoring development strategies and learning between the global North and South.

Defining development regionally and locally

The critique of any singular, homogenous definition is furthered by acknowledgement of socially determined meanings of development that reflect the relationships and articulation of interests across space and time. Definitions ascribed to 'development' can be geographically differentiated across and between scales and networks encompassing the supranational, national, regional, urban, local and community. Changing and contested determinations of development seek to encompass and reflect geographically uneven economic, social, political, cultural and environmental conditions and legacies in different places across the world (Laurie *et al.* 2005). The question of 'what kind of local and regional development and for whom?' (Pike *et al.* 2007) is constructed and deliberated in different ways by

social interests with particular values in different places – albeit not necessarily in conditions of their own choosing and with varying degrees of autonomy and resources.

Variation in what local and regional development means does not imply a wholly relative, context-dependent concept. What constitutes local and regional development across the world shares numerous characteristics and a growing sense that “causes and solutions...are increasingly integrated across borders and disciplines, and revolve around common if differently-experienced patterns of change and the capacity to control it” (Edwards 2007: 3). Critical in the common ground between the global North and South, meanings of local and regional development are being questioned and broadening beyond the thin abstractions of economic approaches and their narrowly quantitative measures to encompass social, cultural, political and environmental concerns requiring more qualitative assessment including wellbeing, equalities, political and cultural expression (Cypher and Dietz 2004; Lund 2010; Nel and Rogerson 2005; Pike *et al.* 2007; Sen 1999; Stimson and Stough 2008). Questions of sustainability have been especially important in widening its view beyond natural environments to encompass its inter-relationships with the economic, the social and the political (Morgan 2004). Development studies work is integral here in broadening the focus of local and regional development thinking through its emphasis upon livelihoods, basic living standards, poverty reduction, capabilities and non-market forms of value,

prosperity and wellbeing (Bebbington 2003; Sen 1999). Problematising the meanings given to development can question the dominance of narrow economic indicators – such as GDP per capita – as the sole measures of development (Hart 2001; Stiglitz *et al.* 2009).

The widening and intersecting domains that frame a broader and more variegated sense of what local and regional development means makes any single discipline, theory, framework or approach ill-equipped to capture the evolving whole. In seeking to initiate dialogue within and between the global North and South, we see no need to establish some kind of disciplinary status for ‘Local and Regional Development’ (cf. Rowe 2008) or the dominance of any one conceptual and theoretical framework. More fruitful is recognition that “at the very least...there is no ‘one best way’ to achieve development. No one model should be privileged, nor should any one approach to economic theory” in order to “...reimagine growth and development as an inherently thick process, encompassing multiple social processes that can be illuminated differently by insights from different disciplinary fields” (De Paula and Dymiski 2005: 14, 11). Local and regional development in the global North has such long established multi-disciplinary roots in Economics, Geography, Planning and Urban Studies as well as (albeit less pervasively) Community Studies, Gender Studies, Political Science, Social Policy and Sociology (Bingham and Mier 1993; Pike *et al.* 2011). The long-established multi-disciplinary branches of development studies too (Mohan and Wilson 2005) provide

foundations and intertwine this rich basis in productive ways. Not in a zero-sum competition of which ideas provide the most convincing explanations but more in the spirit of establishing ‘trading routes’, negotiating ‘bypasses’, identifying ‘risky intersections’, even contributing to ‘post-disciplinarity’ (Grabher 2006; Sayer 1999). Checks and balances in conceptual and theoretical conversation emerge in an open context of accountability, analysis, exchange and argument; offering an ‘engaged pluralism’ which is active, inclusive and emancipatory (Barnes and Sheppard 2010). Critical to avoiding any charge of fragmentation and incoherence is a normative dialogue about the kinds of local and regional development we should pursue reflecting concerns including accountability, democracy, equity, internationalism and solidarity (Pike *et al.* 2007; Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2007; Lund 2010; Rigg 2009; Sen, 1995).

Common issues

Shared phenomena provide the basis for stimulating dialogue and configuring the possibilities for local and regional development in differentiated ways as part of intensified but highly geographically uneven globalization (Poon and Yeung 2009). Albeit localities and regions in the global North and South begin from different starting points and follow different pathways with highly uneven social and spatial outcomes, they confront common issues. Increased socio-spatial inequality is a persistent trend in the global North *and* South (Asian Development Bank, 2011;

OECD, 2007; 2011). In particular, the spatially imbalanced geographical concentration of economic growth and urbanization raises difficult questions for public authorities across the world in kick-starting such processes and managing their (dis)economies (World Bank 2009; Rigg *et al.* 2009) and the longstanding and (still) unresolved tensions between efficiency and equity in the pursuit of economic growth (Kuznets 1955). Inter-territorial competition now encompasses the race for businesses, investment, jobs, residents, skilled labour, visitors and spectacle events, and is acute for development institutions globally from US and Brazilian states to Russian oblasts and Chinese provinces (Chien and Gordon 2008). Migration flows and patterns are more complex, changing rapidly their scale and nature and troubling social provision regionally and locally (Fan 2008). Decentralisation and emerging multi-level and multi-agent governance systems are global trends capable of both encouraging and inhibiting development prospects in different contexts (Rodríguez-Pose and Ezcurra 2010; Rogerson 2009).

Critically, broader meanings of development enlarge the potential for overlapping areas of interest between the hitherto separate fields concerned with either the global North or South prompting us to ask new questions, identify pressing concerns and to reflect upon and challenge our existing frameworks of understanding. Gender is a longstanding concern in development studies (Lawson 2007) but has only more recently been considered part of local and regional development (Massey 1994; Perrons 2011). Macro-economic instability has

historically been an episodic concern in the global North such as in the early 1970s crisis of stagflation, fiscal deficits and recession (Harvey 2006). Such volatility was interpreted as a more regular, even systemic, occurrence in the global South issue (Sepulveda 2008) but has returned with a vengeance lately in the global North in the wake of the global financial crisis, recession, the sovereign debt crisis and bail-outs for Greece, Ireland and Portugal in the Euro-zone. State retrenchment and austerity typical of the Structural Adjustment Programmes visited upon global South countries during the 1980s are now being enacted across the global North in the wake of the global financial crisis after 2007 – again echoing experiences during the 1970s. Recognizing tensions between territorial scales and relational networks in understanding space and place, the local and the regional provide insightful sites of analysis for questions of development and social and institutional agency to mobilize potential and nurture capacities for collective action (Pike *et al.* 2007; Mohan 2011).

Inter-dependency propelled by globalisation frames shared concerns around the “...increasingly desperate search of households throughout the world for safety, for security, and for freedom from want and freedom from the fear of want” (De Paula and Dymski 2005: 5). As Edwards (2007: 3) puts it:

HIV infection rates...are as high among certain groups of African-American women in the United States as in sub-Saharan Africa, and for similar

reasons. The erosion of local public spheres around the world is linked to decisions made by media barons in Italy, Australia and the US. The increasingly differentiated interests within the faster-growing ‘developing’ countries (China, India, Brazil and South Africa) make it difficult to see why Chad or Myanmar would be included as comparators but Ukraine, Belarus, Appalachia and the Mississippi delta would not.

Such common ground challenges existing conceptualization of the global North and South. To interpret the “continental drift” (Fold 2009: 13) in development trajectories internationally, one emergent understanding sees a “worldwide mosaic of regional economies at various levels of development and economic dynamism and with various forms of economic interaction linking them together. This notion allows us to describe global geographic space as something very much more than just a division between two (or three) broad developmental zones” (Scott and Garofoli 2007: 13). Potential paths for territories exist across a range of scales “arrayed at different points along a vast spectrum of development characteristics” (Scott and Storper 2003: 33). This way of thinking questions the macro-level binary of ‘global North’ and ‘global South’, reminding us of geographical differentiation within *and* between such geographies and disturbing the kinds of research questions we pose. These issues are thrown into sharp relief when we consider the rise of the BRIIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia and China), which contribute to the reshaping of not just patterns of market competition, but also the

geopolitics of development itself. The rise of ‘development states’ challenges the orthodoxies of the ‘Washington Consensus’ and demonstrates the extent to which convergent problems can be associated with divergent understandings and policy responses (Edigheji 2010; Chang 2006; Stiglitz 2002).

Context sensitivity and place

The challenge of reconciling the general and the particular connects understandings of local and regional development in the global North and South. Localities and regions across the world face shared concerns in securing and enhancing livelihoods, prosperity and wellbeing in the context of globalisation, urbanisation and decentralisation processes. But their agency in addressing those concerns is shaped by their historical geographies; reflecting particular economic trajectories, developmental aspirations and strategies, institutional arrangements, capabilities and resources (Bebbington 2000). Thus, “the very nature of local or regional development – where context exerts a pivotal influence – impedes the translation of theory into practice” because of “...the important influence context plays in determining the success or failure of economic development programs...not all local growth strategies work in all circumstances” (Beer 2008: 84, 85). Understanding the distinctiveness of places is important but can highlight the conditional and contingent nature of development regionally and locally. Over-emphasising context risks portraying local and regional development as particular,

unique and unrepeatable episodes from which other people and places can learn little (Bebbington 2003). Overly privileging context obfuscates the isolation of cause and effect relationships and frustrates the search for generalisable approaches and knowledge for comparative and systematic international understandings, methods and analysis (Stimson and Stough 2008). If ‘it is all different everywhere’ each situation ends up with a bespoke, idiosyncratic and contingent account of little explanatory use in different contexts.

But narrow adherence to more strongly deductive and positivist approaches often affords insufficient conceptual and theoretical weight to context and geographical differentiation. Such forms of analysis struggle too with the highly varied quality and comparability of subnational data available internationally. At worst, the particularities of place become unexplained residuals in quantitative models. But if we conceive of “the economy of any country as a purely macro-economic phenomenon (e.g. national GDP, unemployment, inflation, export performance, and so on)...we often fail to grasp its full meaning because we tend to abstract away from its underlying geography” (Scott and Garofoli 2007: 7). Highly abstracted views are especially problematic when concepts and theories develop into universalising logics whose applicability is appealing to academics and policymakers for broader explanation. Current international debates demonstrate this issue. An opposition exists between, on the one hand, local and regional development informed by ‘new (economic) growth theory’ pursuing ‘spatially

blind' policies to support the agglomeration benefits of geographically concentrated growth (World Bank 2009; see also Rigg *et al.* 2009). And, on the other hand, a 'place-based' approach tackling persistent economic inefficiencies and social exclusion in specific places through more balanced and distributed endogenous growth (Barca 2009; OECD 2009). In development studies debates too, place has morphed into an ecological determinism in accounts that portray countries of the global South as 'trapped' by their geography (Mohan and Power 2009).

The nature of our abstractions is central to addressing the differences that context and place make to our theories of local and regional development in the global North *and* South. Rejecting the 'thin' abstractions of neo-classical economics, De Paula and Dymski (2005: 3) claim that "theoretical models can best help us imagine new possibilities if they are institutionally specific, historically informed, and able to incorporate diverse social and psychological processes". The theoretical purchase of 'thick' abstractions affords heightened sensitivity to context dependence *and* an enhanced ability to interpret the particularity of place in appropriate conceptual, theoretical, analytical and comparative frameworks (see, *inter alia*, Bebbington 2003; Beer *et al.* 2003; Lund 2010; Markusen 1999; Pike *et al.* 2006; Rigg 2009; Sen 1999; Scott 2002). Given the challenges of "finding exactly the right mix of arrangements to fit any concrete situation" (Scott and Garofoli 2007: 17), our argument is for more critical reflection upon the appropriateness of

our frameworks of understanding, research methods and policy to better frame approaches to particular regional and local circumstance.

Concluding remarks

As a way of bridging longstanding and enduring boundaries between existing fields, we advocate stronger and deeper dialogue about local and regional development within *and* between the global North *and* South. Rather than just observing potential areas of overlap, pushing any singular approach or offering a predetermined framework, we identified several proposals to stimulate engaged and pluralist discussion about the prosperity and wellbeing of people and places internationally: the critique of developmentalism; defining development regionally and locally; identifying common issues; and tackling context specificity and place (see, for example, Barnes and Sheppard 2010). Our argument echoes Edwards' (2007: 3) call "for development professionals to recognise that problems and solutions are not bounded by artificial definitions of geography or economic condition, and to reposition themselves as equal-minded participants in a set of common endeavours. By doing that, we could instantly open up a much more interesting conversation".

Emphasising the importance of context and recognizing the limits, we maintain that different places cannot be treated the same through rolling-out universalising,

‘one-size-fits-all’ models and promulgating the dominance of specific sets of ideas and practices from particular parts of the world to the rest. Knowledge production and networks are distributed and concentrated; flows are geographically uneven – cross-cutting, permeating and transcending boundaries as well as being channeled and controlled by various powerful interests (Pollard *et al.* 2009). Our intention is to avoid simply ‘going South’, testing global North perspectives on local and regional development in more diverse and varied contexts or diffusing ‘leading edge’ notions and practices from ‘core’ to ‘periphery’ (Murphy 2008). Rather, our argument is that encouraging dialogue can stimulate reflection upon and challenge to our prevailing ways of thinking, mobilize fresh thinking and innovative possibilities for often intractable problems. We endeavour to work in such ways in our efforts to understand local and regional development (Pike *et al.* 2006, 2011), for example in examining the relationships between decentralisation and spatial disparities (Rodríguez-Pose and Ezcurra 2010) and investigating adaptation, adaptability and resilience in historically industrialised regions (Pike *et al.* 2010). While making understanding and explanation more challenging and difficult, such internationally grounded research in local and regional development provides meaningful tests of our conceptualization, theorization and interpretation. The task is pressing given the impacts of financial instability, heightened inequalities and intensifying environmental pressures on local and regional development prospects across the world. Indeed such dialogue should include and be of relevance not just to academics and researchers but to policymakers and practitioners in the global

North *and* South. As a contribution to bridging boundaries – or at least rendering them more open and permeable – we intend this piece to initiate just this kind of engagement and dialogue.

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