

Place Peripheral: Place-based Development in Rural, Island, and Remote Regions

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A QUITE DIFFERENT REALITY

Economic geographers, development scholars, local development practitioners, and policy analysts who deal with remote regions, in both islands and rural areas, can be expected at some point to come face to face with a fundamental challenge. How are communities safeguarded and livelihoods sustained in such areas, even as these spaces become regarded, and regraded, as increasingly peripheral to/in the global economy, their inhabitants written off as net losers, their businesses, organizations, and infrastructure unworthy of investment? Such a crippling and fatalist diagnosis is inevitable if these people and places find themselves part of a script governed by an ongoing and inexorable process of out-migration and urban agglomeration, fuelled by the dictates of late capitalism and the allures of neo-liberal ideology. In this book, we have dared to present a vision, and an expectation, of a quite different reality.

Place Peripheral offers, we hope, a compelling overview of rural, island, and remote regional practices the world over, though with a clear focus on the North Atlantic. In this grand sweep, we have sought to effectively counter the dominant paradigm and discourses of development with a re-articulation of place, location, leadership, and identity. We offer these as key assets or resources, and as the bases for timely strategies that

reconceptualize the future of these places, and perhaps in this way assure them of a future. In unabashedly championing place-based development, *Place Peripheral* offers an opportune counterpoint to the narratives of marginalization, inferiority, victimization, and dependency that often dominate the study of rural and small island development in Canada, the North Atlantic, and beyond. There are other stories to be told.

We started this book by discussing “development in place”: how place-based development approaches have garnered increasing attention and how governance and capacity-building, with a focus on enhanced agency and capacity, can facilitate their pursuit. Here, we begin by exploring the idea and semiotics of “place peripheral” and what this phrase means in contemporary scholarship. In this discussion, there is a re-articulation of peripheral regions as central to processes of place-based and identity-based development efforts. Places are both meaning makers and meaning markers: with and through those who inhabit them, they produce and articulate notions of locality and identity to expand horizons of aspiration, forge new economies, refresh livelihoods, and embolden communities in fundamentally distinct and transformative ways that are not subservient to larger, urban centres and are more respectful of human scales.

AN EXCITING RE-PIVOTING

The main part of the book has been organized in two sections. The first part addresses the “why” question, and has a more theoretical and conceptual flavour: we investigate the very idea of place as the bedrock upon which place-based development initiatives unfold. Here, we dismiss such rash statements as the “death of geography” or the “death of distance”; instead, we posit that the socio-physical and cultural aspects of place remain critical to its attractiveness. While modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized connectivities, they cannot replace the materiality of human settlement and the layers of emotional geography that such sites command and attract. Nor are they equally accessible or yielding of equivalent implications for rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, ICTs have extended unlikely lifelines to the erstwhile isolated, reconfiguring many peripheries as new and exciting centres in their own right and

enabling particular, nuanced forms of production and consumption that enterprising peripheral communities can identify and exploit. Often, these forms commodify notions of the periphery itself — via place branding, cultural and natural assets, niche manufacturing, or boutique accommodation. It is this technology-supported re-pivoting that demands and deserves serious scholarship.

Through numerous examples and case studies, the chapters in Part I conceptualize and illustrate role and sense of place in core–periphery dynamics; contrasting appreciations of place and landscape between newcomer and native, seasonal and permanent residents; the changing nature of place and place expression through music and film, in particular the story and lyrics of an indie-rock band; and the effect of characterizations and attachments to place on education, location, and employment decisions. It is clear that matters of place are matters of deep significance — to development and to individuals’ lives. Part I introduces us to the difficult choices people make about place, whether the choice of a young person to leave a rural community for a post-secondary education in an urban setting, of a tourist to visit a remote North Atlantic island, of an urban refugee to relocate there, or of a policy-maker considering whether a small island community warrants attention and support. Such decisions bring questions of identity, meaning, and values to the fore and influence the dynamics that shape the places described in this volume. These dynamics include immigration, out-migration, and return migration, investment and disinvestment, artistic expression and cultural revitalization, volunteerism, the building of social networks, governance, local food production and consumption, and entrepreneurialism, to name a few.

By combining theoretical foundations with an empirical analysis of case study experiences, this first section contributes to a growing literature that unpacks how place works to sustain and renovate communities and economies in what might appear at first glance as unlikely locations for such renewal. The authors in Part I also introduce tensions associated with differing visions and representations of place, along with consequent changes in landscapes and relationships. They draw from and critically examine concepts such as authenticity (and inauthenticity) and identity

re-engineering. Rather than seeing tradition and modernity as either/or scenarios, the certainty and necessity of change are acknowledged and the possibility of “renovated place associations” is presented. In other words, understandings of place can “put a new face to old constructions of cultural reference” (Walsh, Chapter 5).

NO SILVER BULLET

These renovated understandings and associations are important, but they are hardly enough. Understanding place in order to be better able to negotiate it is a complex undertaking. The rich interdisciplinarity that is one of this volume’s strengths — ranging from geography to cultural studies, from ethnomusicology to planning, and from economic sociology to tourism marketing — is essential but hardly sufficient to secure a deep sense of the subject matter. Moreover, if place matters, how a sense of place informs policy may be possible to understand only through unique contexts, so that out-of-context extrapolations and translations are fraught with danger and slippage. And we must also be just as wary and suspicious of lofty rhetoric that speaks of small islands and remote rural regions manifesting “resilience,” bravely “bouncing back” against the odds, when this exercise could be a case of misguided triumphalism, propagandistic wish-fulfillment, or the unfolding of a top-down technocratic branding exercise. Build it; but they will not necessarily come. Indeed, we need to be bold and investigate cases where place-driven developments have not just succeeded but also failed — something that, admittedly, we and our collaborating authors have largely neglected in this book. We also need to examine whether any registered successes — including those that feature in this collection — have been maintained in the medium term; and, last but certainly not least, we need to interview and give voice to those who leave the periphery, not just to those who stay.

We have sought to translate and flesh out these largely theoretical reflections into practical lessons in Part II of this book. Here is the “how” stuff: we showcase some of the many applications and designs, as well as dangers and pitfalls, resorted to for creating more sustainable, livable communities and regions. There is reference to place-based local economy

initiatives in Chiloé (Chile) and Prince Edward Island (Canada); the contributions of arts and culture-based programs to rural revitalization in Shetland (Scotland) and Gravelbourg (Canada); parallel cultural renaissances and efforts to network and share lessons island-to-island in Newfoundland (Canada) and Tasmania (Australia); a place-branding exercise for the Isle of Man; and reformulation of the “territorialization-regional identity” nexus in Newfoundland and British Columbia (Canada). The chapters of this section are more descriptive and oriented around the emergence and operationalization of specific development interventions; the policies, processes, and partnerships that have supported their implementation; and their socio-economic consequences, where these are identifiable.

Peripherality remains, at its heart, a social construction, though with vital material expressions. Yet, if it is a social construction, then it is important to unpack the (re)production of peripherality as much as its reconfiguration. Peripheries don't become centres overnight and, in fact, may never escape the material and economic characteristics that have been used to assign them this label. Moreover, as the authors in this volume have assiduously pointed out, regions considered peripheries by some may be considered quite differently by others. There is no magic bullet in the development of peripheral regions; nor is there any single meaning we can assign to place or to periphery: the core themes of this volume. In examining and/or engaging in place-based development, we are effectively dealing with processes of meaning-making; and, as such, the exploration of multiple meanings and their implications for development is critical to these processes, to the future of rural, remote, and island locales, and to the quality of life of their residents.

WHAT IS PAST IS PROLOGUE

We set out to investigate how island, rural, and remote communities can address the challenges presented by globalization through governance and capacity-building strategies predicated on a deep sense of place. This place, to most, may be described unambiguously as the periphery; but it is, for all intents and purposes, the centre for those that choose it as their home or base. Place peripheral can be, and is, place central. Such a paradigm switch

is easier to identify after the event, and proper longitudinal studies of this transformation at work are hard to come by. It is our hope and intent that our work will inspire others to deploy other methodologies in pursuit of such a sorely needed critical scrutiny of development in, and for, place — and to start, or continue, to tell those other stories that need to be told.