Regional planning: the resilience of an imperative

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What is regional planning?

A strength of the idea of regional planning, and why its importance has featured in several seminal texts on planning thought for nearly a century, can be attributed to the fact that this form of planning practice has not been constrained by a single concept of "the region." Regional planning can address any single issue or interrelated set of supraurban issues that arises, which affected communities may wish to engage. This general understanding of regional planning thus often results in varying or oftentimes over-lapping constructs of a region. In other words, regions can be defined in both prescriptive and descriptive terms while addressing a regional problem and aiding other forms and/or levels of planning practice. These distinctions have been and continue to be essential to ongoing debates over the importance of regional planning and the meaning of "the region." Benton MacKaye is among one of the earliest known writers to ask what regional planning is. MacKaye claims that "regional planning is best defined by splitting the term in two. What is planning? and what is region?" (1940, 350). The region, according to him, is "more than an area, it is an area or seat of *movement*" (MacKaye 1940, 350; emphasis added). MacKaye's stress on movement equates the region to a "sphere" or space of flows, from the flow of water in a watershed to the flow of commodities (such as milk or financial services) and population. In other words, if the planner were to concern herself with the flow of a river, the range of that water-flow or its watershed would be the region to be planned – not an area of land restricted to the boundaries of an administrative jurisdiction.

However, MacKaye also knew all too well that both of these notions were "still in the making. They involve not merely what the dictionary states but what it is that planners really mean [by the region, by regional planning]" (MacKaye 1940, 349). Sure enough, notable scholars have periodically revisited this question and reassessed the idea of the region, and altogether this has amounted to a resilience of the "regional imperative":

> By defining regional planning as being most commonly a process arising from tensions and gaps within systems of governance, it [the regional imperative] will always be with us. So much of regional planning arises because of cross-boundary issues and tensions inevitable with any pattern of governance, regardless of whether or not it matches geographical regions. (Wannop 1995, 403)

This resilience of the regional imperative will be explored throughout the following reflection on regional planning. Before elaborating on any def-initions, it is best first to situate regional planning within a framework of what planning is. A dis-cussion of the abundant individual definitions of planning is well beyond the scope of this entry. Nevertheless, there are qualities of planning prac-tice that do feature in different types of plan-ning, from identifying a problem, projecting its

future socioeconomic and environmental ramifications, and generating or evaluating a set of alternative courses of action in the form of a policy statement, strategy, or definitive plan. The practice of planning is not, however, restricted to its regulatory fold or its formal processes. There is also "a presumption that planning is being done" in grassroots community-led development activities, as well as in the work of government agencies and of private sector engagement in urban regeneration and subnational economic governance:

> Primarily a *way of thinking* about social and economic problems, planning is oriented predominantly toward the future, is deeply concerned with the relation of goals to collective decisions, and strives for comprehensiveness in policy and program. Wherever these modes of thought are applied, there is a presumption that planning is being done. (Friedmann 1963, 169)

As already mentioned, what constitutes the practice of regional planning, and what it means to plan at the regional level, have been the subject of debate over several decades in academic and policy circles alike. This period has been marked by distinct shifts in regional planning thought and practice, which have sought to balance the principles of regional planning on the one hand, and the intra- and interlevel efficiency demands of supraurban governance on the other. Glasson (1974) outlines four sets of overlapping distinctions of general planning practice against which regional planning and its associated complexities and cross-boundary tensions can be understood, if not defined.

The first draws a distinction between *physical* and *economic planning*. Whereas the former has its origins in land use and development vis-à-vis direct regulatory controls, the latter operates through market mechanisms to address concerns with the economic structure of an area. The second distinction is between *allocative* and

innovative planning, which are divided according to function and area of concern respectively. Allocative planning is concerned with ensuring the efficiencies of an existing system, such as housing delivery, in accordance with changing policies. Innovative planning moves beyond efficiency measures toward the betterment of the system as a whole, such as affordable low-carbon housing developments. The third and related distinction concerns *single* or *multi-objective planning*. The previous housing example illustrates this distinction whereby the delivery of affordable low-carbon housing can be explicitly evaluated or measured against the multiple objectives of a carbon budget within a local climate-change strategy, and affordable housing targets across a period of projected housing supply need. The final distinction, between *indicative* and *imperative planning*, relates to the method of implementation. Indicative planning is advisory in nature, whereas imperative planning works from legally binding directives.

These interwoven distinctions offer a framework for comprehending the complexities of what constitutes regional planning as a form of planning practice. Following this planning typology, Glasson defines regional planning as "both *physical* and *economic* planning. Some regional plans may be purely *allocative*, but the majority includes certain *innovative* elements … In addition, regional planning is invariably *multi-objective*, but the method of implementation may vary greatly" (1974, 21; emphasis original). Regional planning is a geopolitical activity, and therefore it cannot be detached from issues of governance and democratic engagement. However, perhaps more importantly, this definition broadly maintains that regional planning practice equates to a presumption that planning is done both within and/or outside the regulatory fold of planning policies, plans, and politics. In other words, regional planning practice is not restricted

to formal regulatory processes over a designated physical area. MacKaye's early writings underpin this view.

As mentioned earlier, these definitions reflect ongoing academic considerations of the region as a space of flows. MacKaye defines regional planning as a "comprehensive ordering or visualization of the possible or potential movement, activity, or flow (*from sources onward*) of waters, commodities, or population, within a defined area or sphere, for the purpose of laying therein the physical basis for the 'good life' or optimum human living" (1940, 351; emphasis added). Where Glasson's definition sets out a framework for evaluating regional planning practice and its associated complexities and cross-boundary tensions, MacKaye leaves us with the originating principle behind a presumption of what it means to practice *regional* planning.

Principal dimensions of regional planning and their interrelations

Regional planning practice consists of the formulation and articulation of local and national objectives into a strategically guided ordering of activities or interventions in a supraurban space. It is this space of interactions that gives rise to regional planning, regardless of whether it constitutes a formalized set of activities. As Wannop (1995, 403) rightly points out, "regional planning arises because of cross-boundary issues and tensions inevitable with any pattern of governance, regardless of whether or not it matches geographical regions." Regional planning, as a form of planning practice, often has a specific method of procedure attributed to it (*procedural planning theory*), which is usually initiated by the state. Regional planning will also draw on a specific concept of development (*regional planning doctrine*) and a variety of theories from the social

and environmental sciences (*substantive theory in regional planning*), notwithstanding competing notions of what constitutes the planned region or territory. Altogether, the planning process, concepts of development, and substantive theories are underpinned by ideological assumptions. These assumptions are set within existing socioeconomic, political, and spatial organizations of societies, in turn shaping the contents of regional planning and determining its outcomes. In other words, these ideological assumptions shape *why* we plan, and to a lesser extent *how* we go about doing it. In *Territory and Function: The Evolution of Regional Planning*, Friedmann and Weaver (1979) carefully outlined these points in what largely remains to this day a concise overview of the principal dimensions of regional planning and its interrelations (Figure 1). The next section provides a concise overview of paradigmatic shifts in regional planning doctrine, charting its early advancement through to its subsequent fall and rise, and recent calls for its reconfiguration or transformation.

Epochs in the evolution of regional planning doctrine, 1925 to present

The French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache provides a useful starting point for a journey into the transformation of regional planning doctrine. Vidal was concerned with everyday life (*genres de vie*) in a region and its links to socioeconomic, ideological, and cognitive dimensions of practices. This Vidalienne tradition of research through regional monographs lies at the roots of what may typically be referred to as the studies of regionalism today.

The narrative of regional planning thought is one of a long and rich history of transformation. It begins at a distinct break in the advancement of regional planning thought and practice in the late
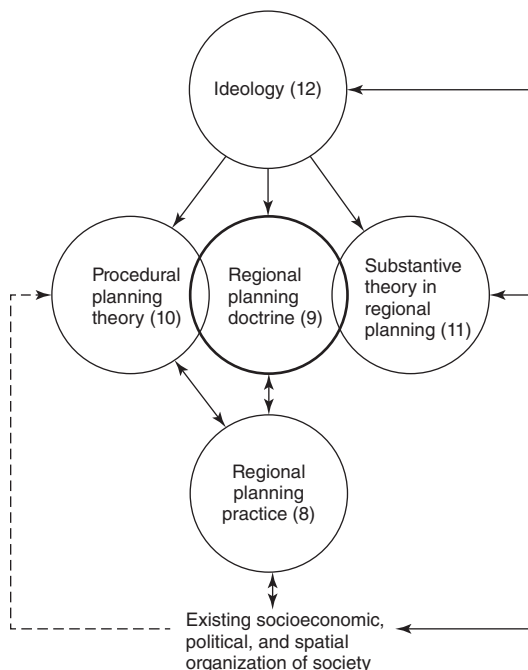
Figure 1 Principal dimensions of regional planning and their interrelations. Source: Friedmann and Weaver (1979), 2; reproduced by permission of John Friedmann.

1970s: "The broad field of development studies of which regional planning is a part, is currently in the throes of a profound transformation of its own which is rendering much of the received planning doctrine obsolete" (Friedmann and Weaver 1979, 2–3). Prior to this "fall" in regional planning was one the most academically rich and experimental periods in the evolution of regional planning doctrine. Fast-forward from this breaking point nearly 40 years, and regional planning is once again the focus of global debate (Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2014; Jones and Paasi 2013). During this period of nearly a century, the presumption of what it means to practice regional planning evolves into a tension between degrees of *territorial* and *functional integration*. Table 1 outlines four distinct

epochs in this evolution, adapting and expanding on the work of Friedmann and Weaver (1979) to accommodate subsequent developments in regional planning thought and practice.

The overview that follows is structured slightly differently. The first and second sections discuss the early advancement of regional planning thought and practice. The first stresses the *territorial integration* of natural capital and economic activity within a designated geographical region, followed by later thinking that increasingly concerned itself with the economic globalization of goods and services and its *functional integration* with regional (economic) development. The third section considers the departure from much of this received regional planning doctrine until the mid–1970s before its resurgence in the 1990s. A final closing reflection addresses recent calls for a *repoliticization* of this resurgent urban regional doctrine of innovation, competitiveness, and creativity in the face of global crises experienced locally in cities worldwide.

Territorial integration

The early thinking, nominally referred to as "territorial integration," was geared toward physical needs such as the integrated delivery of environmental conservation, housing, jobs, and critical infrastructure, and was thus geographically bounded by them. This resource development doctrine, internationally regarded as "comprehensive river basin development," was propagated by the work of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the United States (Figure 2). As the practical idealism of regional planners confronted the mundane concerns of attracting private sector investment and guiding future economic growth, their thinking increasingly turned to functional urban regions and their integration with the economic globalization of goods and services. Examples of territorial

Table 1 Epochs in the evolution of regional planning doctrine, 1925 to present.

1925–1935	Utopian planning: biosynthesis and a new culture; cultural regionalism Practical idealism: comprehensive river basis development	Territorial integration
1950–1975	Spatial systems planning I: 1 spatial development in newly industrializing countries (growth centers); 2 backward regions in industrially advanced countries.	Functional integration
1975–2000 2000–2015	Selective regional closure: Metropolitan growth and the rise of the "global city-region" Spatial systems planning II (information systems + social systems planning – smart cities/regions): 1 high-tech urban development in newly industrializing countries; 2 retrofitting city-regions in industrially advanced countries.	Fall and rise of regional planning
2015 to present	"Redistribution recognition dilemma"	Repoliticization of regional planning doctrine

Source: Adapted from Friedmann (1979, 8); reproduced by permission of John Friedmann.

integration today are enshrined in watershed- and ecosystems-based approaches, which are increasingly finding functional rural–urban linkages to multiple urban systems, such as the nexus of food, energy, and water.

Functional integration

Regional economic development is no longer (since the 1950s) preconceived as bounded to a physical locality. A scientific base that underpinned theories of urbanization, industrial location, and inter-city ties supported this new regional planning doctrine (also known as "regional science"), leaving regional planning practice to follow as a newly established "scientific endeavor." This transformation in regional planning doctrine was bifurcated. One dimension of these regional policies stressed the spatial organization of urbanization and industrialization through "growth centers" in newly industrializing countries by means of public subsidies to private enterprise and the use of public investment as the main instrument of spatial policy. Peri-urban or hinterland development (including rural development) would be incorporated through the centripetal forces of economic diffusion from core to periphery. The second dimension stressed uneven development in industrially advanced nations,
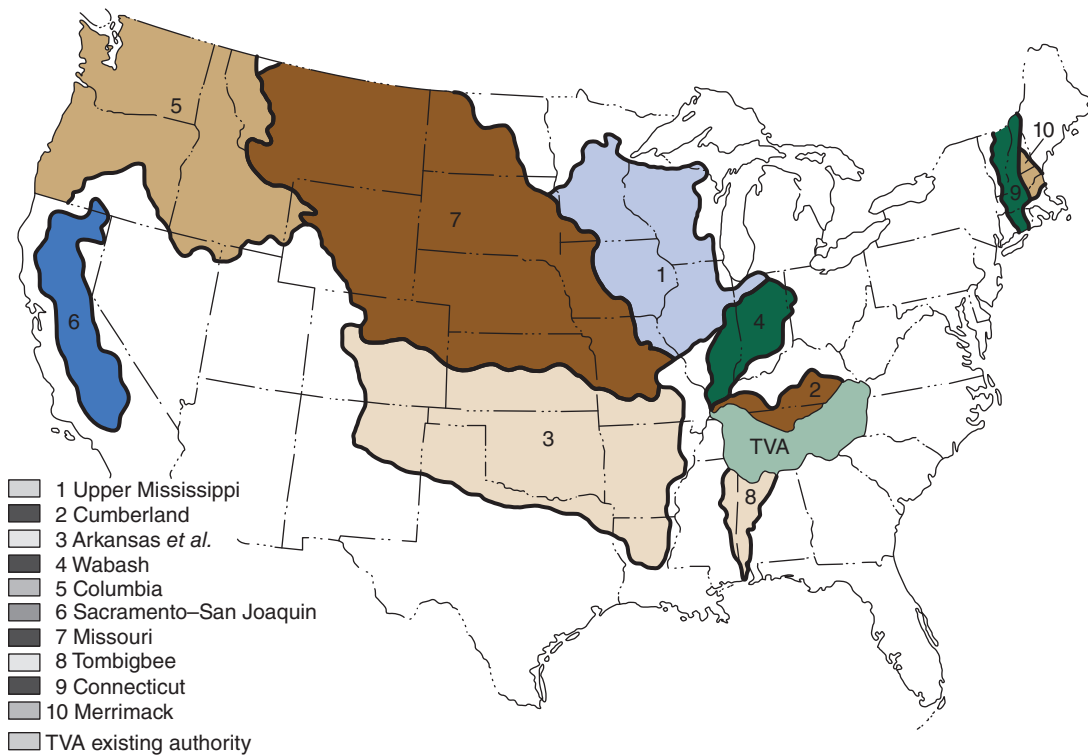
Figure 2 Proposed valley authorities, 1934 (Friedmann and Weaver 1979, 76; reproduced by permission of John Friedmann).

or "backward" or "less developed" regions. Regional policy with regard to the latter regions remained ambivalent and disproportionately focused on core regions, and the emphasis on the regional increasingly merged with the concept of metropolitan planning. Much of the regional planning of this period was associated with the creation of regions for the coordination of state–local actions. In Europe, this involved European-level strategic frameworks and directives down to national strategic frameworks at the member state level and its delivery through local plans. The French *amenagement du territoire* and German land-use planning traditions embodied these policy developments, later challenging the presumptions of what it meant to *practice* regional planning among the newly acceded

member states of Central and Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007 (Adams, Giancarlo, and Nunes 2011). Local government reform in England in the 1990s similarly reflected the same, including the creation of government offices for the regions (1994), regional chambers (1998–1999), regional development agencies (1998–1999), the Regional Coordination Unit at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2000), and the elected London Assembly and Mayor (2000).

Fall and rise of regional planning

Public uneasiness surrounding events such as the student protests of 1968 and the 1973 oil and economic crisis inadvertently spread to the planning profession. "Growth centres did not

grow, backward regions did not flourish, poverty continued to accumulate in cities, inequalities remained engrained as deeply as ever in the landscape" (Friedmann and Weaver 1979, 7). In the years that followed and for nearly two decades, there was a marked disaffection with regional economic development and planning, before a resurgence of interest in regional development policy. This disaffection was part of an ideological shift as planning was seen as interventionist, opposing market-led approaches to development shaped by planning. The resurgence that followed in the 1990s and 2000s included a re-engagement of the functional integration of economic growth and development through a renewed interest in the role of relational assets in global economic restructuring processes and the emergence of transborder regional economies (Krugman 1991; Storper 1997). It was a process that led to the creation of planning regions in Europe, for example, and the institutionalization of European spatial planning (Waterhout 2008).

This period also coincided with growing experimentation in the practice of regional planning and policy, a rethinking of the notion of regions and a re-examination of the idea of territorial development. Principal examples of the application of this thinking include the European Commission's (1999) *European Spatial Development Perspective* and the World Bank's *World Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography* (Gill 2009), both of which captured academic attention on a global level. Notwithstanding the critiques of their apolitical stance on development, both reports frame nearly a decade of political and academic thought on the spatial organization of commodities and labor flows within city-regional systems and across polynucleated megaregions, and its integration with the restructuring of the global space economy (cf. the "European global-macro region" in

Pain, Richard, and Van Hamme 2014; and the "global city-region" in Scott *et al.* 2001).

Repoliticization of integration

Where the previous period ended and gave rise to the fourth and last of the epochs in the evolution of regional planning is unclear. However, there has been an emergence of the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), which are ubiquitously integrated into the design and planning of new cities and the ecological retrofit of others. This trend in smart city-regionalism reinforces the idea of the region as a space of flows. It also echoes the aforementioned ideas of regional science at the tail end of the advancement of regional planning thought and practice (1950–1975), while at the same time engaging decentralized processes of data gathering (e.g., citizen science). Smart city-regionalism has accompanied an enthusiastic growth in the suite of microtechnologies, apps, and urban-scale operating systems. These technological advances may well see the emergence of new norms and routines which reframe the presumptions of regional planning practice. The continuing stress on the space of flows of human labor, environmental resources, and financial investment is evident in this regional doctrine. Yet this emergent doctrine, the practice of which has been most evident in its incorporation within spatial planning processes and its contribution to urban management, sits alongside enduring questions of uneven development uneasily.

It is manifest in new high-tech developments and informal settlements within rapidly industrializing "global regions," and in the retrofit of global city-regions within advanced industrialized economies. Examples include newly built cities such as Songdo (South Korea), and the retrofit of others such as Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). In some respects, this urban response is not far

removed from the systems approach to urban and regional planning (McLoughlin 1969) where planning practice is explicitly more rational, autonomous and, "scientific," or value-free, ignoring the politics of planning, sources of change, and conflicts between actors. It is closely aligned with global financial investment in new ICT markets or with the commercialization of new ICT products and services, and with the marketization of associated city-regional planning services. Its practice invokes visions of urban utopias and intelligent urban responses to global urban and environmental change, but in what sense are its motivations addressing a "regional problem" (Massey 1979)?

The apparent global race to delivering on smart, or "intelligent," cities partly reflects the global capital investments in advanced producer services in ICT, the attraction of reduced expenditure on public services, and a desire to re-empower underresourced public authorities. It is an example of resurgent urban regional innovation, competitiveness, and creativity in the face of global crises experienced locally in cities. It echoes the "Third Way thinking" that Hadjimichalis and Hudson (2014) attribute to the schools of thought in new economic geography and new regionalism in the 1990s and early 2000s. Both schools championed the entrepreneurialism, competitiveness, and labor flexibilities of "model regions" in Europe and in other global regions. Under the economic pressures of regional divestment and new global competition that paralleled political economic adjustments to the formation of the euro-zone, new theoretical approaches and local and regional development policies were developed around "learning regions," "regional innovation systems," social capital, trust, and reciprocity. The ways in which the schools

> theoretically responded was (at best) de-politicized at a time when what was needed was a frontal

attack against neoliberalism. It is unclear as to whether this de-politicization was deliberate or an inadvertent and unintended effect because policy implementation based on these theories is blind to their effects on socio-spatial inequality. (Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2014, 212)

In *Territory and Function: The Evolution of Regional Planning*, Friedmann and Weaver (1979, 2–3) foreshadow the fall of regional planning with the bold claim that "the broad field of development studies, of which regional planning is a part, is currently in the throes of a profound transformation of its own which is rendering much of the received planning doctrine obsolete." Nearly 40 years later, in a critical retrospective look at the rise of a regional planning doctrine at the turn of the century, Hadjimichalis and Hudson (2014, 208) point to a time (now) that "is ripe for a paradigm shift in theory and that this should involve a reconsideration of earlier theoretical approaches that fell out of fashion for a variety of intellectual and political reasons, and of current radical social movements." While both sets of authors suggest a break with regional doctrine, the latter is aimed at a repoliticization of the consensus that has come to characterize regional planning doctrine at the turn of the century and onto which the ethos of smart city-regionalism has been grafted. Hadjimichalis and Hudson (2014, 215) argue for a double paradigm shift

> back to earlier political economy paradigms that fell out of political and intellectual fashion, although without repeating the mistakes of the past, particularly those related to clientelism and bureaucratic statism; the other is a step forward integrating lessons from emancipatory grassroots social movements and social struggles across Europe and beyond.

Against these paradigmatic shifts in regional planning doctrine – from its early advancement,

through its subsequent fall and rise, to recent calls for its reconfiguration or transformation, the regional imperative persists: "By defining regional planning as being most commonly a process arising from tensions and gaps within systems of governance, it [the regional imperative] will always be with us" (Wannop 1995, 403). Likewise, "the search for some timeless and universal best planning practice is a quest for the Holy Grail" (McLoughlin 1992, 283).

Future directions for regional planning research and practice

Following Hadjimichalis and Hudson (2014), future directions for research and practice could consider urban and regional planning under global crisis. Crisis rhetoric has been couched in the modish take-up of delivering resilience to global risks to infrastructure, economic growth, and health and wellbeing. These challenges or crises are often attributed to population growth, global finance, terrorism, coastal flooding, food, energy and water shortages, affordable housing, and pandemics. Reference to such crises as the "new normal" suggests that cities, regions, and nations alike may be in a constant state of struggle or conflict with processes of global environmental change.

On the one hand, historical-materialist considerations link such crisis scenarios to societal modes of production, or a society's ability to produce and reproduce the means of its own existence, including the institutionalization of environmental injustices as manifested in class struggle and different ways of thinking which are reflected in contemporary planned economic activity. This context subjects the state apparatus of traditional planning practice to institutional pressures of social movements, civic contestation, and an ever more pronounced "legitimacy

crisis" (Habermas 1976). On the other hand, the permanent place of crisis and conflict is variably embraced by businesses communities and individuals, yet aimed at accepting and redirecting everyday experiences of crisis positively.

However, whereas an acceptance of crisis as a constant in everyday urban life may prompt positive collective responses from businesses, communities, and individuals to global crisis, the extent to which these "resilience dividends" (Rodin 2014) are able to address the structural challenges of uneven geographical development and sociospatial and environmental justice becomes ever more pressing.

Future regional planning research and practice would help to advance new conceptualizations of the interconnections between insurgencies and radical-subversive planning, cities and global crisis. Potential themes would include but not be limited to (i) the limits of traditional planning practice and/or cultural change and flexibility in planning under global crises; (ii) the legitimacy of urban regional planning; (iii) theories of change and stability in planning thought, positioning planning as critical theory and praxis globally; and (iv) the place(s) for radical-subversive planning beyond the boundaries of professional planning practice and planning laws and regulations.

SEE ALSO: Multilevel governance; Polycentricity; Regional definition and classification; Regional development policies; Regional geography; Regional planning: China; River basin management and development; Uneven regional development

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