**Introduction**

The region is perhaps the most contested category in development planning and management. Occupational, employment, enterprise types, farm classification and other categories are not without challenge and contention. Likewise, time periods, poverty indices and other composite categories can generate considerable controversy. But few categories will consistently engender the debate, challenge, counter-proposal and sometimes conflict and rancour, compared to the spatial category we refer to as the region. And few categories are subjected to periodic revision, reconstruction and the associated case making and justification. This is so for a great variety of reasons. Among these is the fact that a regional definition can include and exclude some people and organizations from a variety of policies, programmes and their related entitlements (e.g. the EU’s “Objective 1” regions), a particular delineation might contravene accepted cultural and even ethnic delineations long cherished by one or more parties (e.g. Basque areas in Northern Spain and Southwestern France), some definitions may be seen to lack a particular rationality in that they do not accord with widely understood spatial relations (e.g. metropolitan commuters), they may be seen to prejudice a preferred future orientation of tributary territories (e.g. interregional industrial linkages), or they may exacerbate competition between national ministries and agencies and between these and local governments, or for many other reasons. As a territorial category the defined region inevitably brings with it many direct, indirect and collateral implications, some or most of which may be real, felt, perceived, expected, feared or otherwise entertained.

So, one way or another the region is a contested entity. It is something of an orphan, without self-evident legitimacy. The case for a particular regional design may be made on the basis of lineage, on the basis of an analysis of spatial distributions and flows, and sometimes on the basis of administrative practicality. But it is inevitably contested; conceptually and operationally. The region, as something to be designed, constructed and then to be managed and made operational, is a very significant challenge in the development agenda. It is even more so in conditions of transitions and adaptation, as we currently have in an expanded European Union.

Governance, still a nascent concept finding its conceptual feet it is no less tentative, and contested. Its purchase as an intellectual construct, as a useful concept for policy analysis and formulation, is as yet putative. But it has taken hold over the last decade. Its value in deciphering the fluid, sometimes ephemeral or emerging and tenuously legitimated contexts, that we have come to know as “shared power” contexts, or more dramatically “no one’s in charge” situations, have given it a particular currency. This is also of particular relevance in transitional and adaptive contexts, such as we have in the recently expanded EU.

It is the *confluence* of these two concepts that is the subject of this paper. Regions are challenging and challenged as spatial units of decision design and implementation. However, it so happens that governance, in its own indeterminacy, is particularly apt in (a) describing the conditions of regional negotiation, and (b) contributing to the crafting of negotiated processes of intervention and development.

This exploratory paper will address the region and governance as they relate to rural development planning. First, we will comment on the uneven and varied resurgence of the region as an organizing, symbolic and representative entity, drawing particularly upon examples of these spatial constructs in Europe and Canada. We will then look at some conceptual dimensions of these contested entities, as development planning constructs, through various theoretical lenses. From there we will briefly situate the rural development project in the regional construct. This will take us to a central theme relating to the concept of governance, and the nature of its application to the development
planning process in rural regions. Finally, selected and conceptual challenges relevant to the expanded EU context will be posed.

The region as a re-emergent reality

The region is universally one of the foundational underpinnings of development planning and management. Its illustrious roots go back to the towering European theorists Le Play and Paul Vidal de la Blache, and others, to innovators and protagonists such as Reclus and Geddes, and in the North American context to some of the seers of planning such as Mumford, Odum, MacKay and others. It has been a central epistemological category, a way of conceiving of reality, and a centrepiece of our modus operandi in designing development interventions through policies and programmes. Notwithstanding this lineage the region as an organizing framework has waxed and waned both in the research community and in the political arena, especially in the North American context. However, there is considerable and mounting evidence of the re-emergence of the regional perspective.

The bases of my evidence are (a) some general observations on the re-emergence of regional consciousness and political positioning on a global level, with the transformation of the nation state, and (b) more specific and concrete developments in different parts of Canada, Ireland and other parts of Europe. There is now a considerable body of evidence in the popular, academic and professional media highlighting the re-emergence of regional consciousness and political positioning within nations around the world (Drucker, 1994; Keating and Loughlin, 1997). Just as the world appears to be shrinking under the tripartite forces of telecommunications, economic blocs and world governance structures, and the appetite of global capital, regional groups from Lombardy (“Padania”), Catalonia, Scotland, the North American Northwest (“Cascadia”), Brittany, Friesland, Quebec, Connacht, and many other places are re-emerging to claim their voice. The term a “globe of villages” as against the “global village” may be a more accurate reading on the reconfiguration of human settlement systems on our planet.

While the roots of this renewed regional consciousness are extremely diverse, the common thread which winds through this critically important socio-political phenomenon (or dare we say, movement) is a rejection of homogeneity and the placelessness which attends this global levelling. The other side of this involves some scepticism regarding the real benefits of modern mass consumerism and the essential Americanization of people and communities through mass advertising, branding, marketing and conspicuous consumption. This concern about cultural colonialism and this new celebration of local histories, traditions, arts, language, social ethics, distinctiveness, and landscape is fuelling a movement of regional consciousness, pride and challenge to political and economic mega structures. A growing spirit of self-reliance (maître chez nous) and social critique of externally designed and overlain structures is increasingly evident. Some bypassing of the established political centres of the nation state (e.g. Madrid, Dublin) takes place as these regional communities interact directly with supra-national centres (e.g. Brussels). Regional arts festivals and cultural centres thrive. Locally distinctive foods are re-introduced and promoted (appellations). For some regions, a vigorous redevelopment of the economy and the institution of culturally and politically appropriate structures and systems have taken place (e.g. Mondragon in the Basque country in Spain). For others the historical economic base is being reinvigorated by regional cooperative ventures, highly integrated regional production systems, and a renewed sense of place and people (e.g. Emilia Romagna).

This re-emergence of regional identity and self-determination is not universally accepted, either as fact, or as a desirable development. Neither are some of the causal factors accepted in full (e.g. Raulston Saul, 2004). Nation states are grappling with the demands of strong and often vociferous regional groups, just as much of their own political legitimacy and relevance is being eroded through supra-national political structures and the placeless and faceless behaviour of transnational corporations, and global capital. Some countries (e.g. China, Indonesia) are very concerned with the centrifugal forces of regional identity and associated claims and periodically enforce central authority with considerable brutality. However, the European Union has responded positively to regional identity, especially since 1991, and through regional development budgets, policies and programmes it has fostered the integrity of regional economies, the distinctiveness of particular regions, and has several initiatives to conserve heritage landscapes. This relatively recent initiative has not come and is not sustained without challenge, either from the continuing pressures to pursue a single productivist rural-agricultural development agenda, and the concomitant “de-territorialization of rural space” (Buller, 2000; 191), or from concerns over a pan-European agenda as a new form of state-driven autocracy (Bruckmeier, 2000). Notwithstanding this, the regional perspective as a territorial organizing framework has become increasingly embedded in European rural development policy and programme initiatives (Esparcia, 2000; Ray, 2000).
With the exception, perhaps of Quebec, the youthfulness of the Canadian confederated nation state might seem to preclude any thesis of regional re-emergence. Regionalism has always been a fact of life in the establishment and the development of Canada. Indeed, in a country which has been described as geographically ungovernable, regionalism is an integral component of the geo-political reality, and a consistent challenge to national policies and Federal-Provincial relationships. Besides the growth of regional (and some would say national) consciousness in Quebec, especially since the 1960s, we have also seen varying degrees of regional revival in Western Canada, and at times in Atlantic Canada. This re-emergence has been abetted by some shift in the demographic and economic centre of gravity away from Central Canada, toward the West, and a particularly active period of political organizing over the last three decades.

Besides the Artic or far north regional identity, which is strong in Canada, there is a tradition of distinctiveness and of pride in what might be called the near North. This far-flung area encompasses what used to be referred to as the “Mid-Canada Corridor”. It includes much of northern Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Here, many people and communities see themselves as quite separate and distinct from the more urban-industrial “south”. While this diverse area contains several cities (e.g. Thunder Bay) and other urban communities, it has developed as a northern resource region, or series of regions, with a common history of primary resources extraction (e.g. mining) and a limited amount of value-added processing (e.g. pulp mills). A significant proportion of its residents are First Nations communities. It exports its primary products to the “south” and overseas.

While it cannot be said that there is much evidence of any regional re-emergence in this trans-Canadian region, this mid-north or near north has a very strong presence in Canadian life. There is a distinctiveness, pride and sense of identity. In several provinces there has been something close to a government of the northern areas. The former Department of Northern Saskatchewan was a powerful presence, and spoke for those parts of the province north of Saskatoon. In Alberta the Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) is a powerful regional body with its own civil service contingent, budget and official presence in the northern community of Peace River. It speaks on behalf of Northern Albertan communities and interests and exercises considerable leverage and influence in the provincial cabinet. The Ontario Ministry of Mines and Northern Development is the de facto provincial presence in this part of Ontario. Northern British Columbia is clearly distinct from the interior and from the Lower Mainland. The presence of a University of Northern British Columbia is evidence of this distinctiveness.

It is not self-evident that other manifestations of regionalism within Canada’s provinces and territories are on the rise, though some might look to Cape Breton, the new territory of Nunavut and other developments as evidence of some re-emergence.

At the other end of the geographic scale, is Ireland. Here ancient regional realities, some of them perhaps pre-historic, create a complex palimpsest across society and landscapes. Regional differences are still evident in music, poetry, family names, area economies, histories, popular sports, and landscapes, amongst many other factors. The amalgam of these factors creates varying degrees of regional identity, consciousness, association and loyalty among the resident, and removed population. The belated attention to regional planning in the 1960s has been reinforced by a mixture of development assistance protocols from the EU and powerful and sometimes vociferous regional constituencies. The last five decades has witnessed a very varied regional planning and development agenda (Horner, 2000). Ireland’s late entry here contrasts with that of Germany (e.g. the regional planning at the Regierungsbezirke level), and to an extent, France. While development planning regions have gone through some cycles of activity and inactivity (relevance?) and reconfiguration, there has been and continues to be an explicit national regional development policy agenda in Ireland. “Balanced regional development” is a central objective of the current National Development Plan (NDP, 2000-06). This is pursued on a number of fronts, including strategic infrastructure investments (e.g. motorways, telecommunications), preferential grants and other aids to private industrial and commercial investment, labour force training, and spatial planning (Government of Ireland, 1999). Most aspects of the NDP are spatially specified on a regional basis.

The recognition of a western presence and distinctive agenda was manifested in the recently constituted (1997) Western Development Commission. Essentially encompassing the ancient Province of Connaught (with County Donegal and without County Clare) and functioning as something of a counterweight to the hegemony of the burgeoning Greater Dublin Area, this western region has mobilized to ensure that its regional perspectives and priorities are given appropriate attention in the national development agenda (Government of Ireland, 1999). It administers a large development investment fund, provides a forum for government Ministers elected from Western...
The region: some conceptual dimensions of a contested regime

The region as a concept is by its very nature contested. What I have referred to as the autonomous (re)construction of the region, and the advocacy associated with its promotion, when contrasted with the intentional region elicits all sorts of issues. The overt rational instrumentality associated with the designated development region, usually associated with sector specific objectives and priorities (e.g. economic development, tourism development), contrasts with the often non-rational (not irrational) motives driving what I have called the autonomous regional project. The latter is often imbued with a cultural, historical, perhaps religious and ethnic and other meanings and histories. It is fueled by the power of the personal and collective consciousness. Questions of identity, authorship and ownership loom large in the dynamic of regionalism. In this active regionalism, there is in a way a cultivated inertia, or fixedness that contrasts with the often ephemeral and malleable constructs we associate with official administrative regions, development regions and similar exogenously derived constructs. Where this active autonomous regionalism is fortified by other socio-political agendas (e.g. ecologically-based agriculture, “green” production systems) it can gain further momentum and presence, as in the eigenständige Regionalentwicklung (Bruckmeier, 2000).

Perhaps the two most important and hotly contested dimensions of an intentional region are its legitimacy and its efficacy. The two of course are interrelated. The question of legitimacy is tightly bound up with the social, cultural, symbolic and other underpinnings of the region as an autonomous and, in Polanyi’s phrase, a tacit entity (Friedmann, 1987). The degree to which the development region, as an intentional construct, conforms to the understood spatial characteristics of the autonomous region, the greater is legitimacy; and for some, the greater the probability of its operational efficacy. One way of looking at this is to see regions as constructs that are negotiated through what Bryson and Crosby have called forums, arenas and courts (Bryson and Crosby, 1996). The development region, as a received construct, is first proposed, challenged and otherwise contested in the realm of forums (e.g. public debate, media, intergovernmental negotiation), and afterward its institutional codification and ratification is publicly enunciated in formal and official process (e.g. legislation, memorandum of understanding, launch of the development programme). The first stage (the design and use of forums) is critical as it is here that a social practice takes place that involves the “creation and communication of meaning” (Bryson and Crosby, 1996, 467). The problem or issues is articulated, the opportunities suggested and the appropriate regional delineation is proposed. The social process is shaped by bedrock principles of language, culture, and worldviews; an intensive and oftentimes contentious episode shaped by principles of signification as communicated through interpretative schemes (Giddens, 1979). Principles of domination come into play, rationalized by unequal distributions of power, in the arena phase as decisions on the regional design, policies and programmes are made. Then through principles of legitimation the regional population enters the phase of implementation, enforcement of decisions through bedrock norms, and the management of residual conflict. The spatial manifestation of the development project is reified and given legitimacy through these stages, as is the development programme. But the degree to which residual conflict and ongoing contesting of the regional construct itself continues (e.g. its borders) is to be found in the realm of courts. The complex power dynamics of the former two stages are extended through this stage. It is suggested that the more prominent this stage, the likely there will be some enervating incongruity between the intentional development region, and the autonomous region.
In a similar sense one might see regions as cartographic discourse. On the one hand it involves the design of binary realms, i.e. in or out, a space as in the region or not in the region. I have previously referred to this as the “lumpy logic” of spatial design. Not unlike the Economist’s “indivisibilities”, regions are invariant packages of space and we have difficulty with the notion of graduated or continuous surfaces where one can differentiate minute intervals and where one region blends into another. The “in” or “out” moniker is often associated with differences in access to bundles of entitlements and differentiated distributions of assets and opportunities. On the other hand the contested issues centre around edges; edges to be delineated, negotiated, challenged, articulated and justified, and perhaps over time redefined and defended, modified or abandoned. Given that there is a distinct episode of regional design, and sometimes regional re-design we can couch the process within a social learning dynamic (Kolb, 1984; Friedmann,1987). One could envision cycles of experiential engagement and dialogic process through which received knowledge as to what logically or otherwise constituted the regional spatial reach and boundary is explored and the collective understanding of what constitutes the region’s “edge” is recursively re-visited and validated. There is some evidence of this process in the evolution of LEADER 1 to LEADER 2 regions. However, this is not to gainsay the intervening and perhaps circumscribing effect of expert and otherwise authoritative positions that may determine what logically are, and therefore should be the region’s boundaries. Gaining their currency from scientific rationality and fueled by a positivistic and purportedly objective perspective, perhaps grounded in the diagnostics of regional science, the expert perspective may serve to supplant or at least minimize the alternative epistemology emanating from the social learning process.

Regions may also be conceptualized as representational spaces. They often depict a territory comprised of an undisputed core and a distanced decayed realm of association and affiliation with that, usually urban core. Not all regions are thus configured and there are notable exceptions in, for example, the rural regional design in France (Buller, 2000). This classic depiction of the nodal region, functionally organized around an urban core and its tributary settlement system and spatial economy, is in itself a cohesion surface, of decreasing density. Toward the asymptotes cohesion, at least as depicted in attachments to the core, attenuates and attachment is often contested between two or more contiguous regions. With the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding cohesion and affiliation we can expect questions concerning the legitimacy of the “edges”.

If we see regions as human constructs, tangible manifestations of mental designs, it makes sense to bring in concepts around communications and associated concepts of power. The development region might be presented as an edict, a fait accompli, a policy proposal, a technical algorithm, an aesthetic rendering or otherwise. Whatever the case and the motives, it is communicated, and its enunciation engenders a communicative process, often of contest, counter-proposal and negotiation. Communicative action theory provides us with a number of important concepts which are germane to this process (Habermas, 1984). Certainly the core issues surrounding the concept of “ideal speech” and the matrix of communicative possibilities that face the citizen, the community, the policy maker and others, is relevant (Forester, 1989). The challenges that abound in addressing systemically embedded distortions in communications come to mind. These may involve stereotypes of various ethnic groups (e.g. the Roma people), or areas (e.g. the Newfoundland “outports”), or occupations (e.g. small scale farmers). More perniciously they may involve bigotry or thinly disguised racism. They may involve increasingly dated and unhelpful generalizations (e.g. “Eastern Europe” as dilapidated rustbelt). They may simply carry uniformed urban views of rural communities and environments. Whatever the genesis, systemic distortion is in many ways the least visible, the more robust and the most dangerous when we address the perpetuation of asymmetrical power relations. Indeed it is the process of the reproduction of hegemonic power relations that is a centrepiece of communicative action theory. Other modes of communicative distortions can be equally problematic, especially when they involve purposeful, contrived distortion for exploitative reasons.

So we may indeed see the construction of the development region (and eventually the development project itself) as an exercise in communicative action. The size, shape, core, boundaries and other facets of this territorial construct are communicated in various ways. The means of communication, the motives in the communications process and other considerations can all be interpreted through the lens of power, power relations and the reproduction of regimes of contested power. When one considers that development regions are more often than not designed to facilitate transformative process (e.g. economic restructuring), the question of addressing established power structures and processes becomes a fundamental imperative.

So, implicit and explicit theoretical constructs relating to the development planning process help to explicate the formative regional development design phase, as we configure the regional space itself. Theory and associated
concepts also inform the development practice, after the negotiated or imposed regional design is in place. Various regional development constructs (e.g. growth pole/center theory, export-base theory, innovation diffusion concepts) will shape or otherwise condition the design of the development agenda (e.g. locational incentives, labour force retraining, infrastructural investments). Normative development theory will also contribute to our designs of development process (e.g. egalitarian and democratic process for participation, gender perspectives on access and opportunities). There is in fact a continuum from conception through regional design and through programming. Across these various theories and concepts are either implicitly operational, or can in a more explicit manner be brought to bear on the development project. A particular challenge in times of significant transition, such as is evident in the expanded EU, is to unearth the implicit theories and concepts that are operative, and ensure that they are subjected to critical scrutiny.

Rural in Europe: the quintessential region
As has often been noted, the record of rural development policies, programmes and practices has been one of contrasting perspectives; some solely focused on particular sectors (e.g. housing, agriculture, tourism, labour force), occasionally with an implicit spatial or territorial context as backdrop, and others with an explicit territorial or spatial focus. The latter has sometimes, though by no means always, been characterized by an integrated approach to development, attempting a blending of social, environmental, cultural, economic and other perspectives. Less frequent are rural development perspectives that are characterized by an integrated approach to all sectors while at the same time integrating these with explicit spatial dimensions (e.g. rural subregional settlement systems functions and interaction).

However, I think it is accurate to state nowadays, particularly in the EU, that rural is conceived of as a territorial entity. This contrasts dramatically with the Canadian context, where notwithstanding extensive research and public debate on rural development issues, policies and development challenges (e.g. Wall, 2002; CRRF, various dates; Statistics Canada, various dates) and a lengthy history of regional resources development and regional economic development (Weaver and Gunton, 1982; Douglas, 1994; Hodge and Robinson, 2001), there is very little regionally-based rural development, and certainly not integrated regional rural development. The exceptions, important exceptions, are the activities of the 300 Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDC) that are active across rural Canada (Douglas, 2003), and similar regional economic development agencies active in some of the country’s provinces (e.g. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador). However, these are primarily economic development agencies, and more so rural small business development agencies (e.g. grants and loans, business advisory services). While in Europe issues of poverty, economic restructuring or social exclusion might be the centrepiece of policy formulation, the “rural” moniker immediately situates the issues and opportunities in a place-based context. Indeed the fundamental footings of the EU’s central thrust in rural development today (e.g. the ongoing LEADER Programme), i.e. the principles of subsidiarity and partnership, automatically elicit a spatial frame of reference in their application. This is reinforced by milestone policy commitments, such as the Cork Conference (1996), explicitly calling for “a clear territorial dimension” in all rural development policy (Commission, 1996). The very thesis of rural development process in Europe today, premised as it is on endogenous development, bottom-up priorities, devolution and decentralization, locally-based planning and implementation organizations (e.g. Local Action Groups or LAGs in LEADER+), sensitivity to contextualizing the development agenda (i.e. to local conditions and priorities), “participative redistribution”, area actor networks, a push for “interlocality” transfers of know-how and lessons, and other dimensions, speaks to a fundamentally spatial basis for development. The ambitious project for “a new system of social reproduction” in rural Europe (Kovách, 2000), is territorial, and the rural region is a quintessential territorial artifact.

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Having said that, it should be acknowledged that there is a growing concern to re-articulate urban and rural. The rural development focus is seen as artificial, partial and perhaps unhelpfully exclusive. So while the EU in particular is noteworthy for its overt attention to the rural development agenda, there is another perspective that presses for a more spatially and functionally holistic interpretation of the development dynamic (i.e. urban and rural), and as a source for solutions (Satterthwaite and Tacoli, 2003; Weluwita and Okpala, 2004; Tacoli, 1998; CEG, 1999). This is desirable. However, it is important that the rural development imperative not shift to situate the rural in the region (i.e. the rural backdrop of an urban-centred region), as against designing the rural region per se, and securing a development agenda that addresses its dynamics and priorities.
Plural distanced pluralities: governance in rural regional development contexts

Other than recounting some of the key characteristics of the concept of governance, we will not attempt to encapsulate the broad-based discourse surrounding this concept here. Stoker’s comment that “governance is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action” captures the essence of the concept (Stoker, 1998; 17). The salient characteristics of governance systems and episodes include shared power contexts involving various combinations of actors and institutions from government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other elements in civil society in fluid, horizontal relationships. These arrangements are often highly instrumental, sometimes informal, involve blurred boundaries in responsibility and authority and are more like customized collaborative networks than formal hierarchically defined structures (Rhodes, 1996). They contrast with and indeed are seen to largely replace the conventional formalized and often bureaucratic government-based arrangements that clearly reflected an unquestioned set of power relationships based on authority, sanctions and exclusive access to strategic resources. Here the emphasis shifts from “power over” to the pragmatics of “power to”; novel, fluid and at times unconventional partnerships and coalitions are formed to facilitate agency. Much of this is associated with the rise of neo-liberalism, the resurgence of the market as the optimal institution for the most efficient and efficacious allocation of public resources and public policy, and the so-called demise of the welfare state. On this basis governance is interpreted as a process through which government can find a way to exercise some power, as its quota of power and legitimacy diminishes, while at the same time sharing some powers and accessing others as it engages civil society and private interests through various forms of participatory process. Through these more fluid, contextually responsive arrangements compliance can be negotiated, locally autonomy can be incorporated in the process and outcomes, operating codes can be learned and crafted through the process itself, and in the recognition of pervasive uncertainty, more opportunistic, flexible and adaptable strategies formulated and implemented. Governance as a concept and an organizing framework, within “a new topography of political relations” is seen to have considerable purchase in rural development (e.g. Marsden and Murdoch, 1998; Giguère, 2002).

However, the concept of governance remains nascent, still emerging amid a somewhat disjointed and far flung discourse. Not surprisingly, its application is not accepted as either universal or unquestioned (Graham et al, 1998; Murdoch and Abram, 1998; Douglas, 2005). Even some of its earliest formulators alert us to the paucity of cause-effect constructs and to the degree to which governance may simply be code for ideological positions relating to less government and the pre-eminence of the market (Stoker, 1998).

Notwithstanding the above, if we view regional development in the expanded EU, particularly in the Central and East European contexts, as itself an emergent project, we can see some potentially fruitful confluences between governance and rural regional development. At a very general conceptual level if we interpret the regional design and development undertaking as an exercise in Polanyian social order (Polanyi, 1977), the triadic underpinnings of market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity come to mind. From the development policy perspective Uphoff recasts this in terms of remuneration, threat and persuasion (Uphoff, 1993). It is not too great a leap to link these notions with some of the conceptual underpinnings of governance in rural development contexts.

In the complexities of dealing with pluralities, very often the distanced pluralities that make up rural regions, designing the region itself and then the development agenda and associated processes is an extremely demanding and onerous undertaking. Government alone, whether central, federal or national government, or provincial, regional or district government, cannot do it. Neither does the private sector attend to the social welfare, environmental, cultural and many other dimensions of the regional development agenda in rural contexts. Indeed the private sector will usually bypass many central considerations in the rural economy (e.g. the informal economy, household management, micro- and other alternative financial systems). Civil society may function as a residual agent addressing market failure and issues not yet accepted as priorities in the public policy agenda (e.g. sustainable livelihoods, social exclusion). Or it may function more proactively. But it does not have access to the resources of either the State or the private sector. Neither does civil society organizations (e.g. community volunteer groups) have the formal legitimacy. So the concept of governance would seem to capture this collaborative, sometimes self-organizing triadic space that lies at once between these interest perspectives and within which new power relations may be negotiated to expedite commonly sought after agency. This of course goes beyond the well documented processes of multi-community cooperation (Korsching et al, 1992; Baker, 1993) or even partnerships (Hughes et al, 1998).
Space is at once the “glue” that binds the rural region together, while at the same time through distance it serves to attenuate and erode regional affiliation and common cause. So the negotiated degrees of congruity between the autonomous regional and the intentional rural region can become a centrepiece of the governance process. While sectoral agendas (e.g. housing, child-care, tourism) are tabled, articulated and promoted, and while interest group (e.g. central government, treasury, local government, community coalitions) agendas are communicated, the spatial framework, the territorial operating domain will be negotiated, delineated and codified. Here the administrative logic of central government and/or the political logic that responds to different geographically placed constituencies come face-to-face with imperatives that might be enunciated by core urban interests, and the development interests voiced by smaller communities and more remote and perhaps peripheral rural places. Here communicative action intermingles with varying agendas of place-based social mobilization, in various forums, in which the potentially co-opting powers of the state and its allies are fended off or neutralized by place particular interests within the rural region. Outside of whatever decision-making powers are assigned to whatever levels of authority within the region, the inevitable dialectic of localism versus globalism gets played out here (Goetz and Clarke, 1993; Keating and Loughlin, 1997). The “push” factors of externally derived forces contend with the “pull” factors of indigenous interests to shape the region and the regional development plan itself (Hodge and Robinson, 2001). And the region that is designed and brought into being as a product will in itself reflect the resolution of powers. To that extent the region itself is a fundamental development product, a summative manifestation. On the other hand because of its configuration it is a formative product setting the stage for the development dynamic itself in all its complexities (e.g. plans, projects, resource allocations, development phasing).

The entire interrelated processes of designing and concluding the extent and shape of the territorial unit, the region, the formulation of the development plan itself, the design of development programmes and projects, and then setting up the executing organization and associated monitoring, reporting and managing agencies (e.g. Steering Committees), may be interpreted through the varied lenses of governance. The state must decipher the changing nature of its domain. It undertakes a search process to identify partners in a game of anticipated trade-offs, assessing a future (but uncertain) flow of benefits and costs against the costs of decisions today. At the same time, knowing that it alone cannot accomplish the development agenda (e.g. rural micenterprise expansion) and/or that its legitimacy will require supplementing, it will set about a number of tactical activities (e.g. selective decentralization, limited devolution, targeted resources transfers). Some rural interests will interpret their enhanced leverage as a distinct opportunity; an opportunity to neutralize externally sourced “power over” and associated claims over certain resources and move these powers off their statutory footings toward themselves. The often beleagured local government may see an opportunity to reinforce its legitimacy as spokesperson for rural society (Woods, 1998). The state and its agencies may be forced to determine, reveal and act upon their non-negotiable “dominant strategic line” (Murdoch and Abram, 1998; Douglas, 2005). This operating milieu is illustratively simplified in Figure 1.
One can see the regional entity (defined territory and organization) as a negotiated position between the centre (potentially several centres, such as Warsaw and Brussels, or Bratislava and Brussels) and its local constituencies. This is the conventional depiction of the polarized power dialectic. However, one can also envisage the regional positioning as being between a decision-making and a decision-taking regime that is characterized by many if not all the attributes of governance systems, in contrast to the formally legitimated and traditional modalities of government and its machinery. However contested, the region and its organization might be constructed with strong advocacy, representative and intermediary functions. Or it might be designed and empowered as a decentralized administrative arm of government, and no more.

In Canada the Community Futures Development Corporations have played a very important role in rural economic development, since 1986 (Douglas, 1994). Operating under a Federal government programme, it is administered on a macro-regional basis. For example, for western Canada it operates through the Western Economic Diversification agency and for the Atlantic region it operates through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. Nowadays the 300 CFDCs cover most of rural Canada. They provide services for small business development (e.g. loan financing, advisory services), and with varying degrees of activity, for local economic development and some strategic planning (Douglas, 2003). They were initially designed to function as multi-community collaborations working on a labour market area basis. The regions are therefore, primarily local economic regions. The initial design was very much informed by a community development agenda, and stressed social inclusion as a major criterion for the CF Committee composition. This has waned over the years and the economic development, primarily the small business development function has predominated. While there is enormous variation across the country, these rural (economic) development organizations do manifest some of the attributes of governance systems. They do not reflect the fluidity and boundary blurring that might better manifest governance structures, as they are constituted with formal Memoranda of Understanding with the Federal government, and are subject to annual audit, review and funding confirmation. With considerable variation across the country, they do bring together locally appointed representatives of the business sector, some community representatives and others, including in some situations, representatives of local government. The economic and the business development emphasis limit the degree to which civil society, more broadly defined, engages in the collaborative arrangement. On the other hand, the constitutional oddity of a Federal government programme essentially going around the Provincial presence and operating through locally-based coalitions and networks manifests the pragmatics of instrumental rationality to create structures that facilitate “power to”, regardless of formal spheres of authority. In this instance one government (Province) vacates its legitimate space and another (Federal government) occupies it, while the locality deals directly with the national government and access resources it would otherwise not have.
There are of course many other examples of regional or at least multi-community collaborations across Canada. Most provinces have some form of regional development organizations (e.g. Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador). Economic development is the dominant agenda (e.g. job creation and retention, value-added production, diversification). They operate on very modest budgets and to varying degrees have boards and committees made up of local business people, Provincial officials (ex officio), locally active residents (e.g. educators, Chamber of Commerce members) and occasionally, local government representatives. They provide the local and to an extent, the regional economic development function that cannot be provided by local government, and provide a regional perspective and presence for some Provincial initiatives (e.g. small business support, infrastructure, education). They have strong partnership, liaison and coordination functions, and sometimes engage in marketing, promotion and external investment recruitment. While area economic development planning is common, strategic planning is less common. There is very little decentralization and less devolution from the Provincial governments. These rural regional (economic) development organizations are collaborative vehicles and are active across a variety of partnership arrangements. They do manifest some of the characteristics associated with governance systems. And all of this is done through collaborative structures that are non-statutory and capable of being re-designed or terminated.

Ireland stands out in some contrast to Canada. The fact that Ireland subscribes to the European Spatial Development Perspective of 1999, has regionally articulated its National Development Plan with budgetary allocations and other commitments, has formally adopted the concept of urban gateways in this Plan, and gone on to develop and release the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) in 2002 with a detailed specification of settlement systems roles and functions and rural regional development strategies, attests to substantial commitment in this field (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002). The processes of partnership formation and management, many of which were pioneered with some success in Ireland (Sabel, 1996), and the introduction of several types of development organizations since 1990 can be interpreted through perspectives that are central to the concept of governance (McDonagh, 2001). In contrast to the two (super)regional Assemblies, which are largely populated by State appointees and member County representatives, early attempts through a pilot area programme for Integrated Rural Development (1988-90) fostered a climate of local participation, community volunteer engagement, self-reliance and local initiatives through partnerships. This seeded the vibrant proliferation of public-private area-based partnerships throughout rural Ireland (Sabel, 1996). The flexibility in these multi-community, multi-interest partnerships, the bridge they offered between local and State agencies, and the degree to which they facilitated better targeting of resources allowed for the participation of a wide cross-section of rural residents including government, private sector, trade unions, farming organizations, volunteers, community representatives and other civil society groups. These area-based partnerships, constituted as not-for-profit companies, grew from 12 in 1991 to 38 by 1995. An intermediary organization, Area Development Management (ADM) was set up at arm’s length from the government in 1992 to channel funds, monitor progress, provide advice and assist in the setting up of partnerships. If one adopts McDonagh’s view that the movement for “new forms of governance is largely concerned with inclusive or collective regulating of society”, for the strategic development of communities’ locales (McDonagh, 2001; 174), then these vibrant area-based rural partnerships would appear to fit within this definition.

The implementation of the LEADER programme, through three generations, in Ireland also reflected much that is associated with governance systems (Commins and Keane, 1994; McDonagh, 2001). Ironically the organizations that were set up explicitly to undertake regional planning, most of them rural regional planning, do not manifest any of the salient characteristics one would associate with governance systems. After a chequered lineage over three decades (Horner, 2000), the government re-introduced regional planning regions in 1994. The mandate of the Regional Authorities is best described as weak and somewhat indeterminate. They are expected to coordinate and integrate central government services in each of the eight statutory regions, review local planning authority plans in light of EU programme provisions, review and advise on Structural and Cohesion Fund programmes, ensuring regional input, and produce their own reports. The Regional Authorities have very modest resources and are made up of elected representatives from the constituent local governments, supported by a committee of senior staff from these local governments. Some of the RAs also provide advice and consult with the overarching Regional Assemblies. Beyond reasons of political rhetoric and/or contrived “optics” to appease the EU and its commitment to regional and locally-based rural development, the rationale for these consultative organizations is unclear. What is clear is that they are not rural regional development planning bodies, and have not been constituted on the basis of commonly held principles of governance. One interpretation is that they manifest the continuing “dominant strategic line” of a highly centralized State, unwilling to cede power or countenance substantive devolution. So the government-to-government architecture keeps civil society and other interests as potential participants, at bay.
Policy and other challenges for the new EU

Over a half-century of trial, experimentation and application the EU has amassed a considerable body of experience in regional development planning in general, and rural regional development in particular. A critical reflection on this, and careful attention to the differences in contexts and policy conditions that pertain to the Central and East European contexts, should assist in the design and implementation of productive development policies and programmes in an expanded EU.

We have placed the expanded EU context and its associated challenges within a broader context within which we have posited that a re-emergence of regionalism and regional development practice are widely evident. The challenge is to harness the strong, vibrant, well rooted and positive regionalism that abounds in like Poland, Slovakia and elsewhere and turn this pride of place, and the associated regional social capital to effective use in rural regional development. The considerable development potentials that are available in multi-community collaboration, dense social networks, and the amalgam of differentiating assets that go to make up the rural territory (itself the unique asset), have been well argued elsewhere (e.g. Douglas, 1999; Davies, 1995). The challenge is to recognize these autonomous regions, as real socio-cultural constructs with potent development possibilities, and where possible, to integrate the intentional development region with this indigenous region.

We have suggested here that there are a number of insights available to us from the confluence of perspectives associated with regions, regionalism and regional development on the one hand, and on the other, perspectives from the nascent concept of governance. It is evident that governance is not an intrinsically benign modus operandi, providing sure guidance for normative theory and practice. It is an interpretation of practice. A practice that is instrumental and characterized by coping behaviours responding to shifting, uncertain and sub-optimal conditions of power, access to resources and agency. The collaborations are driven by shifts in ideological positions, pragmatism and the driving force through which individual agency and agendas are sought out, and through customized collective arrangements that are different from previous formal structures, usually though not always, of government.

We have noted that the evidence of governance, or governance-like arrangements in regional and rural development initiatives in Canada and in different parts of Europe is very uneven. Some EU programmes (notably LEADER) overtly foster governance systems. We have noted the complementarities between the normative underpinning of EU development policies (e.g. subsidiarity) and the attributes of governance systems. But development organizations and associated programmes may be set up with little evidence of governance in their design and operations. We have noted that the regional process of design and the process of formulating development policies and programmes can be critically interrogated through the application of selected theories and concepts. It is suggested that these can furnish important perspectives, ex ante, to influence the design process in the expanded EU, as well as ex post facto, as means of monitoring and evaluating the rural regional planning process.

The search for regions that can be credibly identified and delineated continues; where do they “naturally” exist, where do they present opportunities for creating agglomeration economies, “critical mass” and competitive positioning? (Drabenstott and Sheaff, 2002). The search sometimes extends to national schemes, usually as urban-centric formulations (Carbonell and Yaro, 2005). As the expanded EU addresses these challenges one is strongly reminded of the great Lewis Mumford’s advice, as related by Friedmann. He recalls how Mumford proposed “a view of planning as a self-educative process of social transformation projected onto an entire region. From the hands of experts into which nearly everyone had placed their trust, Mumford would devolve planning, as a form of regional praxis, to the people themselves.” (Friedmann, 1987; 198). The latter involves the “intelligent absorption” of the plan by the regional population and its translation into action through the appropriate political and economic agencies. Mumford called for “positive organs of assimilation” (Mumford, 1938; 380). Maybe this is where the concept of governance may find pivotal application.
References


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