The evaluation of local and regional development policy

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Introduction

The past 20 years or so have witnessed the development of a substantial critique of evaluative work in local and regional economic development (LRED), most notably in the United States. As Clarke and Gaile argued in 1992, efforts to evaluate local economic development policy had become “a quagmire of good intentions and bad measures” (1992: 193), and a variety of contributions have since sought to change the bases for evaluative work. In general these have problematized traditional evaluative measures and methods, such as the focus on basic job creation/retention measures, and argued for a shift from narrow ‘process’ or ‘formative’ evaluation to a broader concern with the overall ‘outcomes’ and ‘impacts’ of policies (see, for example, Bartik, 2002; Bartik and Bingham, 1995; Reese and Fasenfest, 1997). This has also been associated with calls for a much wider range of criteria in evaluating LRED (Reese and Fasenfest, 1997; Molotch, 1991), albeit accepting the added complexity which would inevitably arise. Additionally, a number of contributions have exposed the essentially value-laden nature of evaluative processes and judgements and the often implicit theoretical positions adopted in evaluative work.

Yet despite this sustained period of attention there is little substantive basis upon which to frame judgements on some of the most basic questions regarding LRED. What counts as the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of LRED in a locality or region, and why? Is the form of LRED in a place appropriate given the economic, social, political and cultural challenges being faced? Is the programme of LRED sustainable? My contention is that the lack of clear guidance on some of these most basic questions derives from a theoretical tendency to underplay both the broader context of economic and state restructuring and the locally specific conditions within which economic development activities are situated, and within which their distinctive contributions are defined. Responding to this requires the elaboration of an alternative theoretical standpoint sensitive to the particularity of place, and to the multiple roles that LRED activity comes to play across production, reproduction, consumption, ideological, political and cultural spheres. In this sense evaluation would become a more complex, comprehensive and contextualised exercise than it has been to date.

In this chapter I briefly outline some aspects of the critical commentary around LRED evaluation, together with some of the
more important avenues which have emerged in response. In spite of the value of these subsequent contributions, little headway has been made in terms of situating local and regional economic development in context, or in establishing an explicit theoretical basis upon which ‘success’ or ‘failure’ might be judged. Indeed, it can certainly be argued that the theoretical foundations for LRED evaluation remain comparatively underdeveloped in a field dominated by more pragmatic and immediate concerns. As a result, evaluative exercises have been significantly limited in terms of interpreting the real ‘meaning’ of LRED policy and in appraising the overall impact of LRED as a strategic response rather than as a series of isolated projects. In light of this I argue for an approach based in regulation theory, a conceptual framework introduced in France in the 1970s which has subsequently come to exert considerable influence in studies of the state and social and economic policy more generally across a wide variety of contexts, both in Europe and in the US. This theoretical stance can assist significantly in locating LRED activity in a broader political-economic context, in explaining the evolution of LRED and its distinctive institutional and policy forms with reference to the evolution of the political economy and the state, and in establishing a framework within which to evaluate the scale, nature and overall contribution of LRED activity.

Evaluation: critical themes

While a broad concern for the measurement of policy performance has been apparent throughout the history of LRED policy, it is since the mid-1980s that a detailed and thoroughgoing critique of evaluation per se has emerged. This has incorporated, on the one hand, a direct examination of the conceptual and methodological challenges posed by LRED evaluation in particular, a point considered further below. However, it also acknowledged a changed political and governance context within which demonstrating policy efficacy and value for money became much more significant. Here neoliberal ideology and the hegemony of public choice theory and new managerialism underscored an ‘evidential turn’ (Taylor, 2005: 601; see also OECD, 2008) in local policy-making, based on the instrumental use of systematic research and scientific knowledge, and emphasising as the ideal form of relevant knowledge “quantitative methodologies, empirically-tested and validated” (Sanderson, 2002: 6). In the UK this was associated with the Blairite mantra ‘what matters is what works’ and a new era of policy-making informed by evidence of what was ‘proven’ to be effective in achieving particular outcomes (Nutley, 2003: 3), while the US paralleled ‘new managerialism’ with total quality management. These more rigorous contexts would, of course, be far less sympathetic to the scattergun “shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls” approach portrayed by some economic development practitioners in the mid-1980s (see Rubin, 1988). Third, particularly in the US, a serious questioning of the basic rationale for, and performance of, LRED policy effectively elevated the importance of evaluation processes and the pressure on individual programmes to justify their existence (see, for example, Peters and Fisher, 2004).

With regard to underlying conceptual issues, authors have argued that ‘economic development’ has cultivated very specific ‘growth’ objectives focused on job creation, business attraction and an enhanced local tax base. This is in contrast to any broader notion of ‘development’ and the associated construction of new innovative capacities, increased adaptability, and engagement with questions of social justice and quality of life (Reese and Fasenfest, 1997: 196–198; Wolman and Spitzley, 1996; see also Beauregard, 1999; Foley, 1992). Such a narrow focus is not, of course, entirely surprising, and as Beauregard (1999) demonstrates there are strong reasons for an employment focus in evaluations of local economic performance. Yet it betrays an
underlying value system which effectively privileges formal, commercial and business-oriented economic activity at the expense of the informal sector and broader notions of democracy, equity, and social and environmental justice (Reese and Fasenfest, 1997; Pike et al., 2007). In addition, it references a somewhat underdeveloped theoretical basis for economic development activity whereby “state and local economic development strategies evolve incrementally without (any) underlying economic theory except that more jobs are good and less jobs are bad” (Beaumont and Hovey, 1985: 328; see also Valler and Wood, 2009, forthcoming). In this sense the task of evaluation is immediately coloured by a partial and in some senses limited understanding of the basic constitution of local economies (Beauregard, 1993).

Beyond these foundational concerns the evaluation of LRED activity faces numerous methodological challenges, not least because evaluation of a policy action requires an assessment of what would have happened in the absence of such activity. Coulson (1990) outlines the problems of ‘displacement’ (where job creation in one place is at the expense of jobs in another), ‘deadweight’ (where the outcome would have been the same in the absence of policy action), ‘indirect impacts’ (including multipliers), and ‘leverage’ (which can lead to accounting difficulties), all of which add to the complexity of evaluation. Further problems include, but are certainly not limited to: determining which outcomes can in fact be measured, and which ‘proximate’ outcomes might be appropriate where ultimate outcomes are difficult to measure; imprecise or inadequate information from respondents; potential biases in sampling; significant resource constraints; and the thorny issue of demonstrating clear causal relationships (see, for example, Bartik, 1992, 2002; Foley, 1992). Despite these obvious difficulties, however, an enormous literature has emerged around the evaluation of local economic development programmes, deploying a range of techniques designed to overcome or allow for these and other methodological problems. Limitations of space preclude a detailed rehearsal of all the twists and turns of this debate, and readers are directed to relevant literature in Further reading below. However, some of the most important directions can be identified.

As a first step, there has been a general acceptance, at least in principle, of the need for a more sophisticated approach to evaluation, along with a clearer focus on outcomes (see, for example, OECD, 2004). This has a number of implications including, for example: a concern for unexpected results as well as delivery against predetermined criteria; a focus on the interaction of programmes and policies across a wide range of sectors; the need for longitudinal data; the use of comparative research and control groups; and questions over the specification of appropriate evaluation criteria. In practice, of course, this raises significant challenges including those alluded to above, and these may in turn constrain the evaluative exercise undertaken. Yet in many different national contexts, and across both academic and policy circles, it is apparent that the focus on outcomes evaluation has sharpened. In the UK, for example, HM Treasury issued a ‘Framework for the Evaluation of Regeneration Projects and Programmes’ in 1995, setting out a general framework for the ex-post evaluation of expenditure projects and programmes with regeneration objectives, covering social, environmental and economic objectives and distinguishing between ‘monitoring’ (the collection of performance data) and ‘evaluation’ (the examination of a policy to distinguish how effectively and efficiently it delivered predetermined objectives). In this sense there has been something of a turn towards outcomes evaluation in local and regional economic development and cognate fields even if, as the OECD admitted in 2004, the core task of determining programme effectiveness has tended to be ‘somewhat obscured’ by a focus on formative evaluation and the improvement of programme operations.
A second key dimension of the evaluation debate has been the call for more sophisticated and rigorous statistical approaches, particularly in response to the counter-factual problem. How might we identify the precise impact of firm- or area-based policies on levels of economic activity such as business creation/expansion, employment generation, and productivity growth? Bartik (1992, 2002), for example, has argued for experimental comparisons between ‘control’ and ‘treatment’ firms or areas where such policy differentiation is practicable, or statistical comparisons of economic impacts across recipient and non-recipient firms or areas where it is not. These methods would adopt randomized criteria to avoid selection biases and a variety of statistical techniques to allow for differences in other variables which affect outcomes, thereby “generating objective quantitative evidence on the bottom line for the program” (Bartik, 2002: 29). Evaluations should, however, examine not only the impacts of policies on local business growth, but also important public benefits, namely:

- fiscal benefits for government, and
- increased earnings for the unemployed or underemployed. Fiscal and employment benefits can be estimated using regional econometric models which are combined with special modules that consider the structure of local taxes and government budgets, and the local labor market.

(Bartik, 2002: iii)

While a closer examination of these techniques is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is certainly worth noting challenges associated with the production of local and regional economic data which in the UK case has been characterized as limited, historically skewed towards manufacturing rather than services, and unresponsive in the face of economic restructuring (see ‘The Allsop Review’, HM Treasury, 2004). Similar concerns are frequently voiced in the US (for example, Feser and Sweeney, 2006) and especially in developing and transition economies where data problems are often severe. Accepting this, though, it is apparent that detailed statistical investigation and appropriate modelling can offer important insights into the evaluation of individual economic development programmes. Already a vast literature exists around the economic impacts of enterprise zones (e.g. Boarnet, 2001), job-training schemes (e.g. Giloth, 2000), tax increment financing schemes (e.g. Dye and Merriman, 2000), and the effects of state and local taxes on business location and growth (see Bartik, 1991, 1992; Buss, 2001), amongst many other programmes. These studies have gone some way to produce relatively clear and defensible claims of programme impact in a field characterized by significant uncertainty and complexity. There are, however, obvious difficulties in this area which effectively limit the development of this type of evaluative work in practice. It is expensive, resource-intensive and complex; there are practical difficulties in identifying appropriate comparator groups; and there may be multiple sources of potential bias. It is telling, for example, that Bartik (2002: 12) is aware of only a single case of economic development evaluation in the US utilizing data from an experiment using random assignment.

A third – rather British-flavoured – strand in the debate highlights the concern with explanation, and the task of opening up the ‘black box’ of policy mechanics to identify more precisely how and why a policy works or fails (Ho, 1999: 424; Turok, 1989; see also Jones, 1999). In place of basic output measures or value-for-money indicators evaluation should seek a detailed understanding of the causal processes and mechanisms which generate specific outcomes in particular times and places. As Turok (1989) argues, this requires some form of theoretical apparatus in order to identify key processes and relations, to situate policy in context, and provide a convincing explanatory basis for the diversity of outcomes. The link between
policy and outcome in LRED, for example, is often indirect and complex, requiring careful theoretical analysis and detailed empirical investigation. Additionally, local economic policy operates in a much broader context of economic, social, and political forces as well as distinct local conditions all of which are integral to the production of outcomes and cannot be detached from evaluative analysis. In this sense evaluation necessarily requires a convincing theoretical and empirical account of specific outcomes, which would in turn enable policy learning and the build up of cumulative knowledge in contrast to the shifting fashions and occasional leaps of faith which have tended to characterize LRED policy.

Developments along these lines have yielded fruitful theoretical insights, not least around the formulation of a ‘realist’ approach to evaluation (Ho, 1999, 2003). Here the focus is thrown on the causal properties and liabilities inherent in policy forms, properties which may or may not be realized depending on the diverse contexts in which they are situated. This then requires an explicit theorization of the proposed policy response, setting out the mechanisms through which specific programme elements would counter perceived problems and a consideration of context in relation to the measures adopted, in order to explain diverse policy outcomes. However, despite the obvious importance of such understanding, in practice these insights have been limited in terms of application and unfortunately somewhat marginalized in the face of more instrumental concerns. In part this probably signifies the need for further middle-range theoretical development in order to ground these more general philosophical insights, and to demonstrate the value of such explanation in comparison to more basic measures. It also suggests the potential value of analyses of cross-national policy transfer and learning, given the contingent and uneven outcomes created by ‘policies in motion’ (Peck, 2003: 229). Such processes of international experimentation and differentiation can often throw causal dynamics into sharp relief (see also Hudson et al., 1997; McCann, 2008).

Finally here, a number of authors have argued for evaluation to incorporate broader social, welfare and equity impacts which go well beyond traditional economic measures, a point which chimes with contemporary calls for a broader and more holistic definition of ‘development’ per se (see Pike et al., 2007) and is consistent with the theoretical standpoint we elaborate below. Such impacts might include, for example, quality-of-life indicators such as life expectancy, educational attainment, health and income disparity, housing quality and the like, alongside further qualitative information regarding the nature of employment and economic activity generated (Reese and Fasenfest, 1997). These measures potentially offer a more rounded picture of LRED outcomes, though there are clearly serious difficulties involved in selecting appropriate indicators and attributing causality. An increasingly important concern is the question of political empowerment and the need to engage recipient communities in the design and conduct of LRED policies, giving rise to ‘participatory’ and ‘empowerment’ evaluation focused on stakeholder participation, capacity-building, and active learning rather than judgement or accountability (Brooks, 2008: 28; see Fetterman, 2001). This has, in some instances, supported a range of innovative participatory procedures and a significant re-examination of the respective roles of stakeholders, evaluators, and communities in evaluation processes. It has thereby underscored a more reflexive examination of the evaluative task, and generated an enhanced sensitivity to the complex and contested nature of LRED policy. It has also found particular resonance in developing economies where urban expansion and population growth, infrastructure shortfalls and burgeoning urban poverty may be accompanied by ‘back-to-front’ development taking place in advance of formal planning and regulatory procedures. In these
contexts participatory approaches may go some way to recognize and validate the role of the urban poor in developing towns and cities (Majale, 2008: 273; see also Atav, 2007; Hordijk and Baud, 2006). However, the scale of participatory activity overall has been marginal in comparison to the emphasis on formal performance measures, targets and outputs which dominate contemporary governance arrangements. As the OECD (2004: 4) states, the conventional approach has been to:

> evaluate individual policy instruments and programmes against their explicitly stated objectives. In this way, programme evaluations tend to produce isolated and often disappointing findings, without due regard to the interaction and cumulative impact of policies that, by design or not, work in a ‘target-oriented’ way.

(OECD, 2004: 4)

It is in this context that we seek a more convincing and comprehensive theoretical account which might facilitate broader and more satisfying judgement. This requires linkages to be drawn between the nature and conduct of LRED activity and the broader context of political-economic dynamics and state restructuring. For this we turn to the broad insights of regulation theory as the basis for an overarching conceptual frame for the evaluation of LRED activity (see also Valler and Wood, 2010, forthcoming).

A regulationist contribution?

The regulation approach

By now the contours of the original regulationist account are well known. Beginning from an assertion of the contradictory and crisis-prone nature of capitalist society, regulation theory emphasizes the social norms, mechanisms and institutions which may come together to derive a contingent and necessarily temporary stability in capitalist accumulation processes (Aglietta, 1979, 1998; Boyer, 1990; Jessop, 1990, 1997; Lipietz, 1987; Peck and Tickell, 1992, 1995). This establishes a distinctive theoretical starting point in which the economy tends neither to an automatic equilibrium as in conventional economics, nor to an inevitable breakdown as in Marxist theory (Friedman, 2000: 61). Rather, an ‘accumulation system’, or characteristic set of relationships between production and consumption, emerges to a position of dominance within an economic arena and may come to be sustained in the medium term by a ‘mode of regulation’ or collection of social and institutional supports which together provide a degree of coherence and stability to an overall ‘regime of accumulation’. Such stability is necessarily temporary, acting only to mute or disguise both the inherent contradictions of capitalist production and the tensions which necessarily exist within institutional forms. Each regime of accumulation thus contains the seeds of its own destruction, beyond which capitalist production and regulation must be thoroughly transformed to secure its future survival. Capitalism therefore proceeds historically through periods of stability and growth, when accumulation and reproduction are relatively steady, and periods of crisis, when the conditions for capitalist social reproduction are found wanting.

Within this overarching framework regulationists have offered specific accounts of political-economic restructuring, most notably around the emergence and consolidation of Fordism (Aglietta, 1979) and the putative transition to post-Fordism (Lipietz, 1987). Much of this early literature is well known and there is no need to rehearse it here. Additionally, a wide range of authors have deployed regulationist insights to position and inform their analyses across a variety of spheres, including, for example, UK urban politics (Goodwin et al., 1993), UK urban and regional development (Peck and Tickell, 1992; 1995), US urban policy (Florida and
 Jonas, 1991), and US housing (Florida and Feldman, 1988). Such accounts have achieved notable advances in these various spheres by contextualizing particular policy fields in a broader political-economic and institutional arena, and making critical connections between economic, social, political, cultural and institutional practices. Regulationists have also elaborated on a number of apparent weaknesses in initial formulations of the regulationist approach, most notably in responding to accusations of structuralism and economic determinism. Yet the central theoretical and methodological contribution of regulation theory has proved notably robust, and it might be argued that as “a perspective and form of analysis” (Goodwin and Painter, 1996) regulation theory has come to exert significant influence. Though concern for the underlying “generative structures and mechanisms that shape the actual movement of social forces” (James, 2009: 184) was largely superseded after the late 1990s by a more concretized focus on ‘governance’ forms, the basic importance of sensitivity to macro-economic change and political strategy and struggle continues to resonate (see especially James, 2009). Indeed, despite the relative absence of explicitly regulationist accounts of policy and institutional change since the late 1990s such insights offer a distinctively holistic and wide-ranging analytical frame within which to account for such change, albeit in combination with appropriate meso-level theorizations. Additionally, as we set out below, the approach also provides a foundation for an alternative, theoretically nuanced approach to evaluation, though this point has been little recognized to date.

Regulation theory and LRED

From a regulationist standpoint contemporary LRED activity is best viewed within the context of overall patterns of institutional change and policy experimentation directed towards the establishment of some form of ‘post-Fordist’ mode of regulation (Goodwin, 2001: 74). On the one hand the structures and practices of economic development activity at sub-national scales will be critically influenced by broader processes of restructuring in state–market relations, innovation and competition systems, formal regulatory frameworks, governance structures, patterns of social organization, political and ideological commitments, and economic, social and cultural policy. Clearly national policy shifts will impact directly on institutional forms and policy development and implementation in localities and regions. Yet this cannot in any sense be seen as a simplistic or undifferentiated projection of national changes onto localities. Rather, regulatory practices operating at a variety of scales necessarily find expression locally, both reflecting the pre-existing character of uneven development, and being actively constituted locally (Goodwin et al., 1993: 69).

Additionally, of course, localities and regions come to play different roles, with different degrees of success or failure, within overall national regimes of accumulation. For it is apparent that regions and localities are characterized by distinctive accumulation-regulation couplings and will be inserted differentially into both wider spatial divisions of labour and regulatory structures. As Peck and Tickell point out (1992: 352), “some regional economies … will be favoured by national accumulation strategies while others will not”. But it is also clear that different regulatory functions operate at different spatial scales (Goodwin, 2001: 78; Peck and Tickell, 1992: 352), and that a whole variety of social, cultural and institutional forms contribute to distinctively local or regional regulatory effects. Peck and Tickell, for example, highlight the potential role of local growth coalitions, inter-firm networks, labour market structures and institutions, housing markets, venture capital arrangements, forms of local governance, local economic policies and relations in civil society (1992: 353). As a result economic development activity will
also reflect the search for a ‘regulatory fix’ at the local or regional scale, as localities with distinctive economic, social, political, cultural and institutional histories seek to position themselves within the context of a broader accumulation strategy (Goodwin, 2001: 78).

Overall, then, regulation theory promises significant advances both in contextualizing LRED activities broadly within the search for a resolution to the crisis Fordism and the experimentation over new post-Fordist regulatory forms, and in approaching the diverse mechanisms and forms of regulation operating in particular (sub-national) spatial contexts. This has important theoretical implications for evaluative work. In particular we can derive two very broad basic criteria upon which to construct evaluations of changing policy forms and institutional frameworks.

These relate to the specific contributions of economic development activities in (i) managing ongoing crisis tendencies, and (ii) facilitating the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Clearly, this is not to suggest that individual economic development initiatives could in any way be evaluated in these abstract terms per se. Rather, LRED activity, operating in conjunction with an array of socio-political, institutional and cultural forces and processes, may come to play distinctive roles in the production of ‘regulatory effects’, which are themselves necessarily “greater than, or qualitatively different from, the sum of individual effects” (Painter and Goodwin, 1995: 335). Such effects are emergent properties of a social system and are inherently relational. They may incorporate specific political compromises, institutional forms, social expectations or fiscal and organizational arrangements, but it is important to note that regulatory effects do not emerge directly from these individual elements, but through critical interrelations amongst these and other forms, and may therefore be specified only in terms of the broader system.

In this context the starting point for understanding the ‘meaning’ of LRED activity is in defining the ways in which localities and regions come to find a degree of “local economic integrity” (Eisenschitz and Gough, 1993) or “structured coherence” (Harvey, 1985) which temporarily stabilizes capitalist reproduction in particular times and places. This emerges from the combination of a wide variety of processes and practices operating at multiple scales, each with their own geographies and spatial structures, and will therefore vary spatially (Painter and Goodwin, 1995: 335). For Harvey:

At the heart of that coherence lies a particular technological mix – understood not simply as hardware but also as organizational forms – and a dominant set of social relations. Together these define models of consumption as well as of the labour process. The coherence embraces the standard of living, the qualities and style of life, work satisfactions (or lack thereof), social hierarchies (authority structures in the workplace, status systems of consumption), and a whole set of sociological and psychological attitudes towards living, enjoying, entertaining and the like.

( Harvey, 1985: 140)

This, in turn, suggests a distinctive approach to evaluation focusing on the extent to which, and the ways in which, LRED activity reinforces, reshapes or even undermines such coherence in particular places. Clearly, LRED activity may be implicated in many aspects of such coherence, ranging across production and consumption relations, social and political forms, and cultures and attitudes. Indeed LRED policy may come to play a variety of roles – simultaneously economic, political, institutional and cultural – in the construction of successful regulatory processes.

Further, as we have outlined earlier, localities and regions are inserted differently in wider spatial divisions of labour and regulatory structures, and are characterized by
distinctive social, cultural and institutional forms. Patterns of structured coherence therefore vary widely between places, and the contribution of LRED activities to such coherence will be similarly diverse. Evaluation must in turn be a more complex and comprehensive exercise than it has been to date. For if regulatory processes and effects are different in different places, evaluating the contribution of any one particular type of institution or activity across these places may involve measuring different things (see Valler et al., 2000). For example, in considering the potential contributions of workfare programmes to distinct forms of structured coherence in different places we might reflect on how the key emphases of workfare-based policy, namely “flexibility for enterprise; geographic rescaling of economic and social intervention; replacement of entitlements with obligations on the part of citizens; and coalitional power-holding spanning governmental, civil society, and profit motivated actors” (Krinsky, 2006: 158) might perform differentiated roles in, for example, responding to fiscal crisis, channeling and containing political opposition, enhancing labour market flexibility, overcoming important institutional scleroses and managing social polarization (see Valler and Wood, (2009) for further related discussion). The key point is that the contribution of these diverse roles in establishing or reinforcing effective regulation in particular places will be distinctive. From this viewpoint it is only once we have defined the form of structured coherence in a place that we may distil the contribution of LRED activities in these particular arrangements. In turn the broadest evaluative questions around LRED activities – of their ‘success’ or ‘failure’, ‘appropriateness’ or ‘sustainability’ – can only be determined in context, that is with regard to their specific contributions to particular accumulation–regulation couplings in localities and regions. Evaluative work should therefore reflect the particularity of place and the distinctive character of regulation in any given case.

Conclusion

A call for further attention to the theoretical foundations for evaluation must, of course, be tempered with some degree of caution. Plainly it would shift the focus away from the basic quantifiable output measures which dominate contemporary policy discourse, and require both policy-makers and academic commentators to look beyond immediate policy structures and prerogatives. It would generate additional complexity for evaluators in thinking through the emergent and differentiated regulatory affects which characterize specific places, and which are far less amenable to communication through basic, mechanistic data. In this sense there would be no simple off-the-shelf method for evaluation in the broadest sense. There are also critical conceptual challenges, not least the question of how to operationalize a focus on structured coherence, given that the notion is based on “loose and heterogenous” foundations (Jessop, 2006: 147). Yet if we wish to move away from “isolated and often disappointing findings” we must recognize that different types of question require different types of evaluation, and that ‘success’ or ‘failure’ can only be evaluated in context.

Taking this forward requires significant theoretical and methodological development to refine high-level abstractions into more specific middle-range concepts and concrete claims. As a starting point, approaching the tendency to structured coherence in particular territories would require, first, a detailed and frank assessment of the position of specific places within the wider global, national and regional division of labor; second, a clear understanding of the regulatory challenges and tensions posed by the location of a particular place – with its distinctive political-economic history and socio-cultural and institutional forms – within this broader environment; and third, a focus on the key interrelationships between economic, social, political, cultural and institutional relations which act to mitigate such crisis tendencies.
It is this focus on the emergent properties of a social system where the value of the approach lies, and against which the distinctive contribution of LRED policy in particular can be judged. Clearly, though, these are very first steps along these lines and there is much progress to be made in developing these insights. But despite the novelty of the approach such theoretical and methodological development also offers the tantalizing prospect of informing policy which seriously addresses the distinctive problems of localities and regions, rather than serially reproducing inappropriate LRED policies irrespective of local context.

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References


