Geography 4320: Regional Development Seminar
TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

The concepts of the region and regional development have a very long pedigree in the discipline of Geography. Indeed, in many ways the regional idea is one of the discipline’s central organising ideas. During the 1930s and 1940s geography was mostly about defining and describing (ad naseum) regions in both the developed and the developing world. While the focus on regions fell out favour between the 1940s and the late 1960s, by the early 1970s and through the 1980s the idea of the region was revitalised in both policy circles and theoretically. Currently, regional development is very high on the agenda of academics, policy makers and governments.

Our focus in this course is to understand the region in theoretical terms and in a policy context. In both cases we want to ask the question: how do we understand the region and regional development in a globalising world? What are the policy options for people interested in making regional development work in a global economy? Our case studies will cover both the developing and the developed world. We will see that the idea of regional development is conceptualised differently in these contexts. We will also situate the regional concept in the contemporary period: the events of the last 2 years have and will reshape the global economy with important implications for the region and regional development. At the same time, the World Bank’s 2009 development report is called ‘Reshaping Economic Geography’. So this is an amazing time to be reading and thinking about regional development.

Course outline

Weeks 1-2 (St John’s)

1. Regional Development in a globalising world

In this introductory seminar, we will discuss some of the key ideas in regional development through a recent text by Pike et al. We will begin by discussing the first two chapters – ‘Introduction’ and ‘What kind of local and regional development’. You will be responsible for discussing one of the (many) different approaches discussed in Chapter 3.


2. Regions in crisis

In this seminar we will focus on what has been a key theme in regional geography, i.e. the closure of industries and their impact on regions. From the geographical work that has been done we know that the impact goes beyond jobs – it affects the entire community. Our case is the de-industrialisation of the US mid-west. We will watch the movie, Roger &
It is one of Michael Moore’s early documentaries – it’s a good one! We will discuss the movie and several readings around it. One is a review of the movie written for the radical geography journal, Antipode. There are also two separate early papers on the US and Canadian auto industries.

Natter, W. and Jones, J.P., 1993: Pets or meat—class, ideology, and space in Roger & me. Antipode 25, 140-158. For everyone.


3. Local and regional food systems

The industrialisation and globalisation of the food system in the last 50 years is being challenged by the shift to local food systems. A key concern for consumers involves finding more about where and how their food was produced. The academic literature provides interesting insights on what the local means. We will also watch the movie Food Inc and will focus on the following questions: How is the local and global represented in the film? What is ‘local’ to us here? Does the idea of a ‘foodshed’ make sense for thinking about where our food comes from?


4. Global production networks and regional development

Global value/commodity chains/production networks have become very important frameworks for understanding economic activity in a globalising economy. I will spend some time during this session going over what it means to do a commodity/value chain analysis. The readings focus on the most recent iteration of this framework, the global production network. This ‘new’ framework is of interest to us because several writers have linked the idea of GPNs to regional development. The solution to regional development in this way is seen as finding ways of grounding production networks in particular regions. The paper by Gavin Bridge adds a resource base case study.


5. Knowledge regions

One of the very important developments in regional development has been the issues of knowledge and learning. These ideas link to the difference between high and low road approaches to regional development. Knowledge and learning are definitely ‘high’ road approaches. They also reflect changes in the global economy away from resources towards services and knowledge. The link between knowledge and regions is made through the idea of learning regions. Here the argument is that some regions are able to learn more effectively than others; they have the attributes to become more competitive in global markets. These issues are controversial, however, and not everyone is convinced that knowledge is the future. The 2008 financial crisis perhaps underlines the problem of knowledge in a number of different ways.


6. Regional development in Britain – case studies

Weeks 3-6 (Harlow campus)

Fieldtrips

Day 1 Harlow to London supermarkets: What’s in a label? (London approx. 35 min by train).

The debates on food labeling are interesting, complex and heated. On the one hand labels are supposed to provide us with all sorts of information about the food commodity at hand: it’s price, where it’s from, how it was produced, how many calories it has, and whether it has chemicals and other substances we want to avoid. It provides us with a way making informed choices. For some it represents resistance to neoliberalisation. Yet the debates on labels and choice are complicated – an important source here is Julie Guthman (2007) work on neoliberalisation and labels. Reading this article is a must before we go on this field trip.

Being close to London and most of the country’s supermarkets gives us a great opportunity to explore labeling in the ‘majors’ (i.e. supermarkets). We will visit and take notes at the following supermarkets: Tesco, Sainsbury, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, and Asda (owned by Walmart). You will focus on the labels especially in fruit and vegetables and in fresh meat. The idea is to get a sense of the scope of information in the labels, the stories they tell, and the norms they identify (e.g. organic, sustainable, local etc). We also want to be able to identify certifications where they exist, and we want to be able to compare labelling between the big five supermarket chains.

The course assignment for this class is to assess your research results against Guthman’s important 2007 paper cited below.


Distance: 60 km
Cost:
Time for visit: All day.

Day 2: Local and global food – Dominion brewery and Ashlyns

The local food movement has grown dramatically in both North America and Europe. England is no exception and there are two relatively close sites we can visit to explore first hand how local food is produced, consumed and valorized in England. There are two sites we will visit on this day. The first is the Dominion Brewery, an independent brewing company that prides itself on its local production of fine beer. And the second
is Ashlyns which is a farm and retail enterprise that produces and sells a range of local produce.

One of the most interesting papers on the local food movement is by Claire Hinrichs. Her work is based on the US experience, but she nonetheless says some things about how and why we value local, and why local is not necessarily better. That paper provides us with some ways to think about what these companies are doing, and how and why local may be working for them (or not).

http://www.dominionbrewerycompany.com/
http://www.ashlyns.co.uk/

Your course assignment for this class is to read the Hinrichs article (and others you might want to read on the local food movement) and compare them to what you find at the Dominion Brewery and Ashlyns.


Distance: 40km in total
Cost: £200 for honoraria;
Time for visit: All day.

Day 3: Sustainable agriculture in the English countryside

The sustainability of our food production system is an obvious goal – food production contributes significantly to climate change and so having a more sustainable system of production is important in terms of our overall goal of mitigating for climate change. Within the EU there are many initiatives under way to reduce inputs into farming and we will visit two farms in the region. The first is the Apricot Centre, and there we will do a guided tour of their facility to learn more about how they farm sustainably. The second is the Oak Tree farm, a low carbon farm.

http://www.apricotcentre.co.uk/visits
http://www.the-oak-tree.co.uk/

Your course assignment for this class is to situate the sustainable production methods on these two farms in the context of UK policies on sustainable agriculture. To what extent are the initiatives on these farms meeting, falling short, or going beyond UK policy?

Distance: 250 km return
Cost: £200 for Apricot Centre, £100 for the Oak Tree Centre, £XXX for transport.
Time for visit: All day.
Day 4: Organic farming – conventional or alternative

Organic farming is an important part of what we consider to be alternative agriculture. It is juxtaposed against industrial agriculture with all its high inputs and resource use, as well as its damaging impact on the environment. However, things are not that simple because organic agriculture is undergoing a process of conventionalization, which means that it is being taken over by the formal and industrial food sector. The debate, however, remains open and we will be exploring for ourselves how and whether organic agriculture is becoming conventionalized. We will be partnering with the UK’s Soil Association to visit several organic farms in the region around Harlow.

The course assignment is to assess the debate on conventionalization through our field visits. You will need to read Lockie and Halpin (2005) below as well as responses to this paper.

http://www.soilassociation.org/visitanorganicfarm/southeast


Distance: 160 km  
Cost: £200 honoraria,  
Time for visit: All day.

Day 5: Fair trade London

Fair trade represents a way that consumers can turn their consumption choices into goods for developing world producers. It is based on the premise that normal trade is unfair and makes life very difficult for producers in poorer countries. Fair trade typically puts a small price premium on goods, which are then supposed to go directly to producers and their communities. It started with coffee and has since grown very rapidly, although as a percentage of overall consumption it remains small. We will be partnering with the Fair Trade Foundation in London where we will learn about how fair trade benefits developing country producers. We will also be visiting other fair trade outlets in London.

The course assignment is to assess recent writing by geographers and other social scientists on fair trade in the context of our field visits. Fair trade represents a paradox in that although it continues to grow very rapidly, academic writing is very negative on its developmental impact. The articles by Goodman and Dolan below represent your starting point for this assignment.

Distance: 60km return  
Cost: £100 honoraria; £xx transport costs.  
Time for visit: All day.

**Day 6: Transition towns – new models for regional development for a post-carbon future.**

Transition town is a concept developed in the late 2000s which aims to transform communities into places that are vibrant, more self-sufficient, sustainable, and above all less dependent on natural resources like oil. There are now hundreds of towns around the world, mostly in the developed world, that are partners in the transition town network ([http://www.transitionnetwork.org/](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/)). The transition town network represents an interesting and novel approach to regional development and we will be partnering with the network to find out about its goals, its successes and also its challenges. We will be visiting several towns around Harlow that are attempting to transition to a post-carbon future.

The **course assignment** is to assess the transition town idea in the context of regional development theories and practices. Does the transition town concept represent a viable regional development model, or is it more about opting out of the system?

Distance: 240km  
Cost: £200 for honoraria  
Time for visit: All day.