

Narratives of Governance

ISRN

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**Kevin Morgan
School of City and Regional Planning
Cardiff University**

Introduction

- Conceptual landscape undergone big shifts in past 30 years:
 - *industrial districts, clusters, innovative regions, creative cities, resilient city-regions etc*
 - *does this reflect policy, politics, new evidence or fashion?*
- The ISRN contribution
- The Causality Question
- The Metrics Question
- The Governance Question
- Political Narratives of Place

ISRN contribution

- Biggest problem of the conceptual landscape of past 30 years was the disconnect between (grand) theoretical claims and (modest and contested) evidence base
- A key analytical contribution of the ISRN was to subject the theoretical claims (of clusters, creative cities and city-regions) to rigorous empirical scrutiny
- Another distinctive feature of the ISRN was that it drew on a national context which embraced a wide array of cities/city-regions, which varied in size, location and industrial structure

The causality question

- The theoretical explanation for the ‘creative city’ draws on two theoretical perspectives
- The first is **knowledge-based**:
 - *(physical) proximity is deemed to be essential for knowledge transfer in the ‘new economy’ (Scott, Storper et al)*
 - *the new economic geography is predicated on the positive relationship between proximity and productivity (Krugman, Venables et al)*
- The second is the **cultural-turn**:
 - *cities as meeting places, consumption centres and aesthetic sites, where the themes are flows, mosaics & mobilities (Jacobs, Glaeser et al)*
 - *the amenity-conscious, latte-loving creatives who populate cool, tolerant cities (Florida et al)*
- But the causality of the above remains unclear and contested

The metrics question

- The metrics we use to assess the qualities of a place are far from being a neutral analytical lens – they tend to extol certain narratives over others
- ISRN research has shown this to be the case with the creative class narrative – a narrative that sets some cities up to fail because it extols certain kinds of professional talent and cultural diversity
- The cities that are designed to fail are the ‘small white cities’ (Kingston, Halifax, St John’s) and other ‘ordinary cities’ (Hamilton and London)
- The above cities are beginning to develop narratives of development that are not based on the Floridian template – highlighting such things as liveability, affordability and well being etc
- The ecological turn will reinforce this trend by spawning new narratives of territorial development based on notions of sustainability and resilience

The governance question

- The most ubiquitous city-region governance question in Canada and Europe revolves around the question of ‘fit’ – or the lack of fit between functional economic space and territorial political space
- This question generates two kinds of political response:
 - (i) the creation of a unified governance system for the city-region to enable strategic planning (Stuttgart)
 - (ii) inter-municipal collaboration through strategic alliances (Greater Manchester)
- But does this governance question merit such attention?
- ISRN research suggests that governance and strategic planning are most advanced in Montreal and Waterloo – but does this deliver a tangible developmental dividend? Or does it exert a lock-in effect?
- The GTA is said to be the opposite: a weak regional governance system with strong, self-referential cities. Apart from Metrolinx, does this really impose developmental opportunity costs?

Political narratives of place

- New narratives of place are beginning to emerge which suggest something more transformative than neo-liberal boosterism – narratives with the accent on liveability, sustainability, resilience, human capabilities, wellbeing etc
- Creative cities and city-regions in Europe are developing sets of metrics that are more capacious than hitherto, more ecological than economic
- But they face the same dilemma as their Canadian counterparts – “cities in Canada simply lack the fiscal resources to effect the needed transition on their own, no matter how deep their reserves of civic capital, how dynamic their civic leadership, or how well organized and inclusive their developmental coalitions” (David Wolfe)
- The key challenge for all is how to manage creative destruction in a just and sustainable manner, when the spaces of creativity are different to the spaces of destruction