Just Regions: Putting Social Justice into Regional Development

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Just Regions: paper outline

• Introduction

• Limitations of mainstream thinking

• Spatial justice, equality and democracy

• Rethinking regional development
Introduction

Paper seeks to contest dominant narratives and argue for alternative progressive regionalism

– Globalisation post Cold War
– Regional competitiveness agenda
– Crisis = opportunity to rethink around a regional social justice agenda
Part of broader agenda around alternative local/regionalist projects


Limitations of mainstream regional agendas

• Neoliberal policy environment – capital mobility, regional competition, flexible labour markets, Schumpeterian business innovation, welfare reforms

• Regional competitiveness agenda
  – Locally orchestrated supply-side approach replacing traditional regional policy
  – Business led – marginalising or co-opting other social actors

• Internalist conception or regions, deficit of skills, enterprise, social capital

• Limited role of regional institutions in pro-market agendas, coupling assets to GPNs

• Crisis, recession, austerity reinforcing inequalities, state retrenchment + tendencies towards inter-regional competition, regressive regional nationalism
Progressive sub-national politics at city scale, urban social movements (e.g. Occupy, Right to the City, Living Wage, Transition Towns)
Spatial Justice, Equality and Development

- What kind of regional development and for whom? (Pike et al 2007)
- What are regions? – relational and internally fractured
- Tensions between equality, democracy and diversity
- Rethinking social justice: distributive, productive, appropriative – questioning control + ownership of regional economic decision-making
- Democratic participation: local + regional democracy
- External dimensions of regional development – geography of responsibility (Massey 2005)
Rethinking Regional Development

• Progressive regionalism – relational, outward-looking, multi-scalar, cooperative not competitive
• Spatial particularism v social justice, equity v diversity
• Key elements:
  – Decentred, locally orchestrated agendas with wider participation and inclusion (e.g. Danish renewables sector)
  – Spatial targeting of most disadvantaged areas: opposite of fiscal federalism but beyond spatial Keynesianism
  – Agenda of labour rights, living wages to ‘raise the floor’ of basic standards
  – Inter-regional networking and collaboration (e.g. public-public trans-local partnerships in utilities)
  – Revised (but not weakened) role of national government + institutional redistribution alongside devolution
‘multi-polar polity in which the regions can run discrete areas of national life (rather than just a limited set of their own affairs) as well as count on action by the state to redirect opportunities towards them, bolster their bottom-up strategies, and regulate inter-regional competition. This is not an argument for a ‘hand-out’ approach to local regeneration, but recognition of the principle of spatial mutuality and connectivity. (Amin 2005: 625)