

## Review Essay/Note de lecture

### Third World Regions

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**Regional Development and Settlement Policy: Premises and Prospects.** David Dewar, Alison Todes, and Vanessa Watson. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986; 175 pages; \$29.95 US; ISBN 0-04-333023-1.

This volume integrates the body of theory regarding regional development with notions related to settlement policy. At the same time, its main focus is upon the Third World, although the now-industrialized part of the globe and its influence upon nations of less developed countries is incorporated. The strength of the work resides in its articulation of the previously separate traditions of regional development and settlement policy. It avows that it is directed towards those researching and studying regional settlement in the Third World; however, its primary function would appear to be its role as a textbook, for it covers well-travelled terrain. Also, its relevance to the Third World is suspect and mars the work (as is indicated below), and it is somewhat dated (being the outcome of a research project on urbanization in South Africa conducted in 1983-84).

The book is impressive, for it provides an overview and critique of recent shifts in development theory while at the same time indicating the implications for programs and policies relating to settlement. Simultaneously, it considers the utility of settlement policies in national and regional development. That the field of Third World regional planning has undergone such dramatic shifts in the recent past is a reflection of the great difficulties that have been encountered in attempting to overcome the knotty problems of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Regional planning theories are discussed chronologically in a thoughtful fashion, from the 1930s (concern with planning for depressed areas) to the early 1980s (concern with planning

for enlarged political and welfare goals). The progression in thought mirrors the increase in knowledge about the Third World and the increased sophistication of theories and models of planning. Forever at the forefront are the issues of alleviating these difficulties and of employing scarce resources to do so.

After a depiction and evaluation of the export-base and sector theories of the 1950-60 period and their application in settlement policy, the work moves on to a consideration of four schools of thought regarding the promotion of national and regional development in the Third World: redistribution through growth; basic needs; agropolitan development and selective territorial closure; and accelerated growth. Much of this review material has not previously been discussed in the planning literature; thus this fourth chapter is the heart of the book's contribution.

The following chapter relates these perspectives to settlement policy by focusing the debate around three key issues: large cities, an integrated settlement hierarchy, and small centres. Here is a marriage of theory and empirical reality, of theory and policy, which very strongly complements the previous summary. This is the augmentation which enhances the previous chapter.

However, despite the above positive evaluation, and despite a thoughtful and organized presentation, the text raises several issues that reflect certain shortcomings in the discipline's entire approach to Third World planning:

1. There is a striking tendency to pay homage to influential theories of the past. There should be reference to and acknowledgement of the classics; however, the forces shaping the Third World have evolved, and new concepts and agents are at work. Since planning theories deal with more than superficial reality and focus upon the processes shaping regional or national space economies, these novel forces must be recognized. When the bibliography of this work is perused, however, the dated set of references is immediately striking. This is because it details and critiques the history of the basic approaches in the discipline. To take a specific example, the 1981 World Bank report on *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* has been updated, rethought, and critiqued several times, although this book does not seem to recognize this.

Planning is for the future, and although the world tends to contain recursiveness, models that have failed to bring the desired changes in the Third World in the past need not be trotted out again as if they were Holy Writ. This would be a minor issue if people in the Third World were living in comfort; however, thousands are barely surviving in hunger and starvation in decaying economies.

2. Notions from the developed world cannot be easily transferred to the Third World. There is a core and a periphery in the global economy, and the factors that shape the space economy of each vary. Capitalism in the core is different in its impact from dependent capitalism on the periphery, and the NICs do not reflect the reality of the majority of the Third World and its future—they are exceptions spawned by the New International Division of Labour.

The bibliography references the book by Gore, *Regions in Question*; despite the fact that the non-transferability of regional theory to issues relating to Third World development was one of the strong messages of this work, the present authors seem oblivious to it—which would be a minor issue if such a perspective did not also reflect the voice of the discipline's literature. Here, for example, there is reference to Third World countries such as Kenya and Mozambique; however, it is inferred that the empirical experiences of nations such as the USA or Italy bear lessons for them.

3. The major actors are not addressed by the theories of regional development. It is impossible to separate political matters from economic issues, and such convolution is stronger in the Third World. Thus, any attempt to specify policy must address the realm of politics and how it influences planning and the nature of the economy. Certainly, there is interest in training planners for the future and not for the past; it is important in education that the historical evolution of theories be considered. However, there needs to be much more. The state, the market, and the peasant in the Third World must be understood, for they are the players who are moulded by the workings of the international system.

4. The literature on underdevelopment discusses several agents in the empirical reality that is the Third World; yet most planning literature is quiet about these notions, and thus lacking in relevance. How do issues such as "the uncaptured peasant", "the limited penetration of the market mechanism", "the role of the state", "the structuring effect of the global economy", "the conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund", "World Bank development programs", and "the economy being but one part of an integrated whole" affect endeavours? "Very little" is the loud answer of much of the work considered here. The cost of this lacuna is great.

5. There tends to be an unresolved tension between regional development theories, with their assumptions, and the empirical reality of the Third World, with urban economies that are out of kilter with national systems, semi-subsistence economies, and informal employment. The discipline is able to deal with abstract theory (mostly from the past), but is far less comfortable with empirical reality. It is as if the development problems of places such as Sri Lanka and Sierra

Leone are beyond concern. However, planning has to be more than abstract notions and moral platitudes. There is a real world, which has to be assisted.

Many of the above comments may seem unfair, for the authors do deal with notions such as how the lessons of regional development from Europe cannot be transmitted to the Third World, where different conditions prevail, and how the NICs are not a model to the Third World, and they explain the "spatial engineering" theme. Yet the overall message of their book indicates a different approach. It is as if the above notions were added in; however, they do not inform the text (perhaps this is the result of conflicting mindsets of the authors). Also, most of the extant work in the field of development planning suggests similar notions.

Thus, the two incorrect implicit assumptions that are legacies of the theories regarding global development of the past must be corrected by regional planning: 1) the geographical patterns that regional development addresses are the outcome of processes, and it is within these operations that policy and planning directions reside; and 2) the experience of the developed part of the globe cannot be transferred into the Third World, where the entire planning context is different. To these must be added the facts that "economic development" is not the same as "economic growth", that the meaning of Third World development must be specified, and that "regional development" is not the same thing as "Third World development".

As well, the strong feeling of unease that emerges after reading this work results from the fact that the world is unlike the one depicted here. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, transnational corporations, global markets, east-west rivalry, and foreign aid programs are the external actors who affect Third World nations. Inside these countries, unrepresentative states often control the space economy, and many people are in the process of exiting from the formal economy by moving into the urban informal sector and back into rural subsistence. Population migration from the countryside to the city is massive, and most governments lack the tools to control such mobility. This is the reality that planners face and that theory and policy must address.

Unfortunately, this volume represents the voice of the 1970s, with only minor alterations. Planning must move beyond this blinkered and historical view, for in most of the Third World people are starving and the world is falling apart. In one sense this text should be exonerated; the volume evolved from work undertaken in the early 1980s, publication was delayed until 1986, and the book was not received for review until 1988. In another sense, however, the repetition (even with a partial critique) of the tired, old theories of the past cannot be excused.

This is an interesting work that will appeal to many readers. However, it suffers from certain fundamental problems that make it unsuitable for other than historical purposes. If regional development is to employ its theories and models in the Third World, it would be appropriate to address the reality of the contemporary situation rather than to rely upon notions developed by a certain mindset of the past, when the underdeveloped regions were colonies and dependencies. Regional development thinking regarding the Third World is in need of recasting.