

Editor's Note

Hideki Kaji

Director
UNCRD

Regional development theory seems to be approaching a turning point. A recent book questions whether traditional theories of regional development are now obsolete or whether they can be adapted in the light of new evidence.^{1/} Regional development practitioners, meanwhile, have been largely left to themselves in a more empirical setting rather than being guided by one theory or another. Regional development is multidisciplinary in nature and thanks to some early pioneers in regional science and regional economics, a language of technical terms has come to be used to name new concepts and phenomena although the roots of regional development planning can be traced to Western scholars. For this reason, skills in developing countries are in the mold of the resultant Western planning styles — incremental, advocacy, radical, transactive, and so on — all convenient labels to standardize a variety of nomenclature.

In 1980, the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) published the first issue of *Regional Development Dialogue (RDD)*, an international journal focusing on third world development problems. *RDD* Spring 1982 was devoted to the theme, “Regional Development: Prospect and Retrospect”.^{2/} In 1991, UNCRD undertook a reexamination of regional development trends and issues during its twentieth anniversary commemorative programme.^{3/} Now UNCRD has decided to launch a new journal, to be published annually, entitled *Regional Development Studies (RDS)*. *RDS* is intended to disseminate case studies and the results of research on various aspects of regional development in both developed and developing countries, and hopefully will provide new evidence that established theories on regional development can be adapted anew in the light of rapidly changing national contexts. It will supplement *RDD*, which will continue to be published as a means of stimulating dialogue on important regional development questions and as a means of linking concepts of theory with developments in practice. Whereas the long-established *RDD* features UNCRD-commissioned articles originally presented at its expert group meetings, seminars, and workshops, and revised for publication in *RDD*, material contained in *RDS*, except for a few outside

contributions, is composed of articles from UNCRD staff members and is the result of in-house research. Therefore, in addition to being a contribution to the ongoing debate on new directions for regional development theory, it is also designed as a mouthpiece through which UNCRD researchers may air their views and research findings to a global audience. All articles in *RDS* are refereed.

Regional development embraces a plethora of concerns. Gestalt thinking imposes a holistic and systemic view that would seem to encompass practically everything, and although it has been suggested by well-meaning commentators in the past that the work of UNCRD “encompasses practically everything,” this is not actually the case.

As long ago as 1971, the United Nations Economic and Social Council Resolution (UN/ECOSOC) 1582 (L) defined regional development as “a process of structural changes pertaining to particular parts of a country called ‘regions’”. It further stated that “the regional approach to development is considered a potential instrument for the integration and promotion of social and economic development efforts within a country.” The main concerns were listed as follows: structural change and social reform; popular participation; institutional and administrative arrangements; spatial distribution of population; human activities and settlements; and environmental considerations. The intra- and interregional interactions among the actors, resources, and information, both “soft” and “hard” elements, continue to be the focus of attention.

Based on these guidelines, the precise areas of concern to UNCRD are as follows:

Development Administration: Local Governance; Development Finance; Decentralization; Accountability; and Privatization.

Environmental Management: Natural Resource Management; Urban Environmental Management; and Sustainable Development Policy.

Local Social Planning: Social Arrangements for Local Social Development; Self-Organization by Local Communities; Local Social Systems in Development; and the Case Method as a Training Approach.

Regional Economic Development: Regional Economies (urban and rural areas); Business and Industrial Development Policy; Development Planning; and Urban Development.

Spatial Planning: Disaster Management; Infrastructure Planning; Land Management; Housing; and Transport and Public Services.

Planning Technology Development: Computer Applications; Geographic Information Systems (GISs); Remote Sensing; and Planning Models.

It is these research and training programme areas and their relationship to regional development which constitute the focus of *RDS*.

The UN Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 and the First UN Conference on Human Settlements held in Vancouver in 1976 (Habitat I) were held within a span of four years.^{4/} Two decades later, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or the Earth Summit) took place in Rio de Janeiro. Soon, Habitat II (the City Summit) will be convened in Istanbul. Global interdependency has led to commitments that will bind governments to specific agreements signed by their leaders. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves how much people should or could have become involved in decision making. Environmental protection is an essential part of regional development. The World Bank's *World Development Report 1992* ("Development and Environment") explores the development-environment nexus, and its *World Development Report 1990* ("Poverty") addresses the most pressing issue facing the developing countries: how to reduce poverty.

The sustainable development paradigm provides an opportunity to discuss these and other issues, i.e., not only global ones but local ones, too. Another area which cannot be ignored is international cooperation or assistance that frequently propels regional development inwards and away from the larger external environment. Institutional and organizational issues are also of relevance to regional development; strategic planning and management as applied to the public sector, for example, will inevitably find space in the pages of *RDS*.

In this maiden issue, the above concerns of the developing countries are dealt with as area-specific expositions or by country grouping. Countrywide analyses related to regional economic development are provided on Mexico, China, and Sri Lanka by Adrian Guillermo Aguilar and Francisco Rodriguez, Lin Jia-bin, and Ranjith Samaranayake, respectively. (It is with deep regret, however, that we announce that Samaranayake passed away while the manuscripts were being reviewed for possible publication. The article on poverty in Sri Lanka, therefore, is his last.) Celia L. Umali offers the agribusiness systems approach to balanced agro-industrial development among regions, particularly with ASEAN countries in mind.

The articles on environmental management are principally concerned with urban issues. Samba Mukoko addresses the problem of city administration in setting environmental policy priorities given trade-offs between economic growth and environmental improvement. He offers a typology of Afro-Asian cities. Masaji Yoshida, on the other hand, deals with historic city conservation in the Arab country of the Republic of Yemen. He examines how culture can impinge on physical planning and how this can affect official development assistance (ODA).

The market and government interventions such as development controls are examined in the context of mega-cities in Southeast Asia by Tetsuo Kidokoro while the dual-structured land market of Shenzhen City, China is discussed by Zhao Hui. Mieko Hinokidani, An Kyung-Ohn, and Shoji Sumita report on the findings of their empirical work on housing for the urban poor in the Republic of Korea. Particular attention is paid to the country's unique rental housing system.

Planning information in the form of computer graphics has great advantages in increasing both the decision maker's and the layman's understanding of given situations. Kam Tin-Seong and Ren Fuhu address the dilemma in GIS mapping to identify land uses from land cover data. Their extensive list of references should whet the reader's appetite to better understand a technology which appears to have a great deal of potential for planning applications.

However evolutionary planning may be, the fundamentals do not change. To draw an analogy, mores change but morals do not. While grappling with problems, a basic understanding of the human situation in the given ecological and cultural context is important. A study may be devoid of elegant mathematical formulations, but good or bad planning will continue to be practiced just the same.

With the launching of *RDS*, UNCRD intends to demonstrate its renewed commitment to more informed exchanges of knowledge and experience reflecting the dynamism at the local and regional levels.

UNCRD would like to acknowledge the generous support of the members of the International Editorial Advisory Board who have reviewed the manuscripts for the *RDS*. The articles have been revised by the respective authors to respond to the reviewers' comments.

NOTES

- 1/ Edward M. Bergman, Gunther Maier, and Franz Tödttling, eds., *Regions Reconsidered: Economic Networks, Innovation, and Local Development in Industrialized Countries* (London: Mansell, 1991, reprinted 1993).
- 2/ Moonis Raza, "Editorial: Regional Development: Prospect and Retrospect," *Regional Development Dialogue (RDD)*, 3 (Spring 1982):iii-xiv.
- 3/ See Peter Hall *et al.*, eds., *Multilateral Cooperation for Development in the Twenty-First Century: Training and Research for Regional Development* (Presentations at the Meeting of UNCRD's Twentieth Anniversary Commemorative Programme, held in Nagoya, Japan, 7-8 November 1991) (Nagoya: UNCRD, 1993). The meeting was designed to encourage dialogue among researchers, trainers, and practitioners concerned with regional development. The theme "Multilateral Cooperation for Development in the Twenty-First Century" provided a framework for the discussion of emerging trends and issues in regional development such as globalization and regional development; mega-cities and rural areas; development of least developed regions; environmental dimensions of local and regional development; emergency relief, rehabilitation, and disaster prevention; managing regional development; and required directions for research, training, and networking.
- 4/ The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm, from 5 to 16 June 1972 and was convened pursuant to a General Assembly decision of 3 December 1968. The First UN Conference on Human Settlements was held in Vancouver from 3 May to 11 June 1976.