Chapter 98
A Comparison of Resource Equalization Processes for Subnational Rural Governance and Development:
Case Studies of England, Scotland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines issues of resource equalization for subnational rural governance and development in case studies of England, Scotland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The aim is to consider the extent to which each case study has provided the pre-requisites for adopting the "new rural paradigm" identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for governance and development of rural communities. Neither federal nor unitary forms of governance in the case studies satisfactorily meet these requirements. The only case study that approaches the paradigm is Scotland, where recent devolution of governance has strengthened long-standing adherence to territorial-based regional development policies.

INTRODUCTION: THE NEW RURAL PARADIGM

Geographical space is subject to processes of economic and institutional change which variously privilege and disadvantage different regions and localities. Within the context of what has been termed "uneven geographical development" (Harvey, 2015, p. 146) between and within countries, this chapter investigates how resource equalization processes are addressed in the subnational rural governance and development systems of five comparable administrations. The chosen case studies are all countries or parts of countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This organization provides a forum for examining policies pursued in its member states to promote economic and social development.

In focusing its attention on the evolution of rural policy and governance amongst its members, the OECD has identified the emergence of a "new rural paradigm" (OECD, 2006a). In essence this recognizes the need to switch the emphasis in subnational rural governance and development from sectoral-based measures focused specifically on farming, forestry, fishing, and extractive industries towards territorial-based forms of assistance for rural communities. Such a switch is now being advocated as best-practice, not only for the high-income rural areas epitomized by our five case studies, but also more broadly for the rural parts of low-income developing nations. This is in recognition of the costs they have incurred by allowing "enclave" sectoral developments that often bypass or disadvantage their own rural communities (Ambrosio-Albalá & Bastiaensen, 2010; Green, 2013).

Our consideration of the implications of this new paradigm for England, Scotland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand offers insights into how their systems of subnational rural governance and development are evolving to promote the interests of their rural communities. In particular, we examine, first, what mechanisms, if any, exist to offer rural residents access to public services on a basis which is comparable to that enjoyed by urban residents; and, second, what arrangements are emerging to promote territorial or area-based approaches to development which prioritize the interests of rural communities over those of the industries located in their area. Before we consider these specific issues in more detail, however, we conclude this introduction with a brief review of the key elements underpinning this new approach to subnational rural governance and development.

What the OECD has identified as a new paradigm reflects changing residential and employment patterns in rural communities, which are nowadays far less dependent on traditional sources of rural employment such as farming, forestry, and fishing, or on extractive activities such as mining and quarrying. These changes have yet to be adequately reflected in the systems of subnational governance and patterns of development policies applied to rural areas, and this disjunction creates tensions that, in at least one of our case studies, Canada, have led to outbreaks of civil protest and disobedience. The history of British Columbia's "war in the woods" illustrates that rural regional development and planning can no longer view land and natural resources simply as commodities (Hodge & Robinson, 2001; Jackson & Curry, 2004). As the OECD policy brief issued on the paradigm states:

[N]ew approaches to rural development have not yet been accompanied by a substantial reallocation of resources to integrated rural policy. Designing such policies for different communities or territories requires seeking more coherence among sectoral policies and the pooling of knowledge held by a wide variety of public and private actors. Traditional hierarchical administrative structures are likely to be inadequate to administer these policies effectively. (OECD, 2006b, p. 1)

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