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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

- Transitioning resource towns
- Local empowerment
- Planning-development nexus
- Core obsolescence
- Mega-projects

Local economic restructuring in a once dominant economic base, resource remapping imperatives that privilege long neglected environmental values and aboriginal rights, and local empowerment are three intersecting themes that contextualize the idea of transitioning resource towns. Drawing especially from BC experience, this paper seeks to better understand transitioning resource towns from the perspective of the local planning-economic development nexus. While literature on resource town rejuvenation has emphasized local initiative and empowerment the role of local planning has been largely neglected. Yet local ('municipal') planning is a quintessentially local activity that profoundly shapes the routines of daily life through legally mandated 'official' plans that are required to draw upon community participation to meet collective community goals. However, the relationships between local planning and local development are problematical as they co-evolve in path dependent ways, sometimes in harmony with each other and sometimes not. Indeed, the onset of transitioning among resource towns implies important changes in the planning-development nexus. Initially, as resource towns boomed local planning played a subservient role in support of 'given' export-drive development. With the onset of transitioning, local planning is challenged to become part of more pro-active local efforts to promote development. In practice, transitioning can be a durable status as restructuring and remapping imperatives reframe local governance and impose significant, inter-locking uncertainties on the planning-development planning nexus, often in association with increased regional networking. Even though transitioning suggests a search for new identities, the geographic realities of resource towns often implies significant challenges to proposals are enticing. Yet, these proposals are speculative, often opposed by entrenched interests in social plan. Thinking about future development is also constrained by the inheritance of past plans that already in the

Fordism, the ICT or simply as globalization, has stimulated escalating interest in its distinctive implications for rural peripheries (Halseth, 2017; Wood, 2004). For many mature resource-industry based towns this transformation has been sparked by significant job losses in the activities that provided the rationale for their existence, in turn encouraging a search to transition to new forms of employment. In many

resource towns, the relationship between local development (Hayter and Patchell, 2015). "remapping" of forest peripheries in Canada (A olderbach, 2011; Hayter and Barnes, 2012) "giving geographies" (Moorcroft and Adams, 2012) has opened appreciation for environmental imperatives and traditions, both hitherto largely ignored by the commodification. Further, the "re-imagining" (

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transitional resource communities is increasingly driven by locally motivated (endogenous) “place-based development” that is modifying if not replacing reliance on (exogenous) “space-based development” (Markey et al., 2012). The intersection of local economic restructuring in a once dominant economic base, resource re-evaluations, and local empowerment underlies the idea of transitioning resource-industry towns and sets the context for contemplating their development and planning challenges to more sustainable futures.

Geographic remoteness and lock-ins to resource dependency - the staple trap in Canadian terms (Watkins, 1963) - pose formidable problems to resource-town transitioning, that for many observers are reinforced by neoliberal-inspired cost-cutting policies (Halseth, 2017). In response, if the development of resource towns were once orchestrated ‘top down’ by senior levels of government and large corporations, local actors are now seen as vital for creating desired community futures. In this regard, local empowerment has been recently analyzed from several overlapping perspectives, variously emphasizing: institutional capacity and asset building (Fischer and McKee, 2017), expert advice (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004), knowledge creation (Pelkonen and Nieminem, 2015); regional participation (Zirul et al., 2015), governance (Argent, 2011; Dumarcher and Fournis, 2017), the role of women (Gill, 1990; Reed, 2003; McLeod and Hovorka, 2008), forms of community leadership and entrepreneurship (McIlveen and Bradshaw, 2009; Reed and Gill, 1997; Stern and Hall, 2010), and community resilience (Deacon and Lamanes, 2015). Moreover, notwithstanding histories of booming and busting, and associated in- and out-migration, transitioning resource towns comprise established populations who wish to remain in place (Asscher et al., 2016).

Yet, as Douglas (2005, p231) insightfully observes: “local government can be an almost invisible backdrop in the rural development discourse”, even though it is “a sine qua non for rural development”. This neglect of local government particularly extends to its key function of local or municipal planning. Yet community or municipal planning is a quintessential local activity that is legally required, quasi-autonomous and intimately connected with local development, forming a local planning-economic development nexus. As two sides of the same coin, local planning and development are often conventionally distinguished in terms of a public-private interest dichotomy. In practice, local planning and economic development agendas dynamically interact. Development proposals, whether originating in the public or private sectors, typically claim a public purpose and are required to engage local planning, and planning is often elaborated in terms of social, political, environmental and economic development (Thomas, 2016; Hodge et al., 2017).

This paper’s overall objective is to better understand transitioning resource towns from the perspective of the local planning-economic development nexus. We particularly seek to connect hitherto ignored local planning perspectives to studies of local economic development with its associated themes of diversification, restructuring, rejuvenation, and more recently resilience. Such connections can add insights into transitioning resource towns for several, related reasons. First, local planning and development are symbiotically and problematically related, co-evolving in path-dependent ways that are both complementary and conflicted, sometimes in harmony with each other, sometimes not. As the Canadian case illustrates, legally required official community (municipal) plans (OCPs), based on obligations to properly

the planning-development nexus during Fordism as ('pre-transitioning ') prelude for exploring the distinctive, problematic nature of transitioning processes that is often reinforced by mega-project speculation, and complicated by the conundrum of obsolescing cores and aging infrastructures. [Fig. 1](#) locates the towns in BC that are mentioned in this paper.

2. The Fordist prelude to resource town transitioning

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nexus within transitioning towns. In Campbell River, for example, the

sites are presently unused. Meanwhile, at Port Edward (pop. 600), the costs of planning preparations following the cancellation of the Petronas project have been written-off. Further, given the time required to adequately prepare for mega-projects, the catch 22 situation can be

administration, transportation, professional and consumer services. Improvements in adjacent housing stocks, including to target a diversity of incomes and residents, could further the vibrancy of downtown cores. In this regard, in light of aging demographics, the provision of smaller living spaces for seniors who desire close access to health services and other daily needs without depending on auto use (a requirement in the suburbs) is a potential focus for new housing development in many transitioning towns.

In many cases, government intervention is likely needed to unlock key development sites that are tied up by fractured ownership, contamination or access challenges while public-private partnerships are an option to facilitate complex projects with multiple uses and higher levels of risk. Such intervention could incorporate helping to fund new housing and infrastructure improvements. As an opportunity for local planning to lead development, rejuvenating the cores of transitioning resource towns admittedly faces deep-seated problems, beyond the financial reach of local budgets. Regional networking and cooperation may o

planning and development activities in transitioning towns are con-

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