

CEPAL

Review

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Regions as the product of social construction

Sergio Boisier*

On 2 March 1988, the President of Peru enacted Law 24793 creating the Region of Grau, the first region in Latin America to have the status of an autonomous territorial entity endowed with a legal identity under public law. This is expected to have a strong impact as an example for other countries in which (territorial) decentralization figures prominently in political discourse and projects.

As in many other cases, among which post-1982 France may be regarded as a model, this groundbreaking step by Peru creates a situation in which "the institutional structure precedes the regional structure" in terms of the creation —not devoid of a justified degree of voluntarism— of a new territorial/societal structure. This poses a major professional challenge to regional planning, inasmuch as many of these new regions will need to be "constructed" in both a political and a social sense. To borrow a quite apt expression used by one prominent political scientist, in many cases such regions are veritable creations *ex nihilo*.

"Political construction" involves the establishment of the political and administrative apparatus for these new regions, which may even be accomplished by decree; "social construction", on the other hand, must be carried out by and with the embryonic regional society. The construction of a regional society entails the maximization of its capacity for self-organization, such that an inanimate, and in the final analysis, passive community divided by sectoral interests and having little awareness of its territorial identity can be converted into an organized and cohesive community aware of its identity as a society-region and capable of mobilizing in support of collective political projects, i.e., capable of becoming the subject of its own development. Utopian social engineering? A need to accomplish the difficult but essential task of bringing about a democratic form of decentralization? These are the complex questions addressed in this article.

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Not found as a finished product in nature, not solely the creation of human will and fantasy, the region, like its corresponding artifact, the city, is a collective work of art.

L. Mumford

Introduction

The somewhat shopworn observation is often made that planning—in any of its various dimensions—is going through a serious crisis. While this statement is undoubtedly true, it contributes very little to an understanding of the actual nature of the crisis, which is surely an important step in overcoming it.

Speaking in metaphorical terms, planning, in a broad sense, and the Iberian conquest of the American continent bear more than a passing resemblance. The tale of how these men ventured out to found new nations constitutes a saga that is virtually without parallel in the history of mankind, and it was accomplished with the aid of both the cross and the sword. The cross—or in other words a *doctrine*, in this case the Catholic faith—attempted, perhaps unsuccessfully, to imbue the conquest with a moral and ethical spirit, particularly in relation to the conquerors' treatment of the native population; the sword, i.e., *political power* was a very necessary expression of the drive to conquer these lands and to found new settlements, as well as a basic precondition for the channelling of resources and the shaping of an institutional structure for the new territories being brought into the domain of the mother country.

Planning should also be understood as a saga involving the founding of new territories. As was once observed by Michel Rocard, former Minister of Planning in France, comprehensive planning is nothing less than the organization of society within a given time frame, while regional planning (or the management of the territory, according to the terminology used in France) is nothing less than the organization of society within a given spatial framework. Indeed, time and space are the reference points which delineate the framework of human activity. Planning is, then, the *re-founding* of society in terms

of both these reference points. To this end, planning, too, requires both a cross (a doctrine) and a sword (political power).

If we accept the fact that man is the only living being capable of thinking and of shaping his own future and that this capability is an outgrowth of his free will, wrought by his own hand, then it follows that this capacity, which is inseparable from the idea of planning itself, can never be in crisis, inasmuch as it is an essential trait of the individual. It is possible, however, for there to be a crisis in the doctrine or the sword, or both at the same time. Perhaps this is the way in which the much-belaboured crisis of planning should be understood!

The challenge faced by planning in all of its forms—in this case, regional planning—is therefore twofold. The doctrine must be constructed or reconstructed, and its practical expression must be positioned or re-positioned within the power structure.

The reconstruction of the planning doctrine must begin with the very foundations of the theoretical edifice of regional development. This demands the formulation of some basic questions which relate to all spheres of the social sciences: What is man's position now? At what point in the thought process did we diverge from the idea of man as both an object and subject of development?

Once having returned to the fundamental idea of the individual as a subject of development, it will then be necessary to form a consensus as to the idea that regional development should serve mankind rather than the territory in question. This must be the starting point for any effort to rebuild the theory of planning.

Aristotelian man—a *political animal*—is also a being who is attached to a given area from which he derives his livelihood, either by farming or by hunting—a *territorial animal*—and, as a result of his gregarious nature, he organizes this space into two environments: the *social environment*, which ranges from that of the tribe to that of the complex post-industrial societies; and the *territorial environment*, which includes everything from the tribal village to the global village described by McLuhan. These social and territorial environments have to be placed at the service of the human beings who

live within them, and this presupposes that man is capable of managing his environment or of acting upon it.

A number of different scales exist within the territorial environment which bear a definite connection with the possibility that individuals may act upon them. The first, the *global scale*, is that in which the possibility of effective action by the individual is non-existent, and it should therefore be regarded as a purely referential category. The second, the *national scale*, is that in which the individual may take indirect action through political/electoral mechanisms. The third, the *regional scale* is a medium-range environment for the individual, neither completely "macro" nor completely "micro", and one which offers many possibilities for action aimed at attaining both individual and collective objectives. The fourth, the *local scale*, is the optimum setting for individual participation, but is too restricted for the resolution of relatively aggregate or collective issues. In short, the territorial base constitutes one of the main interests of society at any organizational level. Following the national level, this interest focuses on the zone or region.

Its relative position within this spectrum notwithstanding, the regional environment is a setting of extreme complexity. In fact, due to its marked openness to and interconnection with environments external to it, it is even more complex than the larger territorial strata. Any consideration of this environment and any action taken upon it should therefore be undertaken on the basis of a strategic approach.

The idea of a strategy—of action or of regional development—in terms of thought and of action thus begins to take shape. In order to arrive at a clear understanding of what this means, it may be useful to compare this concept with a game of chess.

The player having the white pieces starts the game and theoretically has 20 opening moves from which to choose. Nevertheless, the player's accumulated social experience suggests that out of the initial range of possibilities, only three or four of these moves are suitable. The player thus examines each of these remaining possibilities and asks himself what the probable reaction of his opponent will be. Remember that, in theory, his opponent also has 20 different options for

his starting move, even though, in his case too, his socialized experience drastically reduces his range of choice. However, the second player has at his command an additional piece of information: the preceding move of his opponent. Now, of course, for the time being all this is still going on only in the mind of the first player, who thus begins to construct a veritable tree of action/reaction probabilities. In other words, he devises his strategy, which is simultaneously a selective form of thought (he does not evaluate all the options, but only a few) and a reactive form of action, since in order to decide upon each move he makes, he takes into account the past and future moves of his opponent.

In order to play chess, the participants must know the rules of the game (e.g., the type of board to be used, the names and positions of the pieces, the ways in which each of the pieces may be moved and the ways of bringing the game to an end). In other words, in order to play (in order to act), they require a *theory*. The above is invariable, regardless of the nature of the situation. Once the theory is known, chess is played in the same way everywhere.

In the clearly more complex sphere of social action, the theory needed in order to construct a strategy of action is not invariable; on the contrary, it changes and interacts with the existing set of conditions present in a given situation. Consequently, an effort to re-found the doctrine of regional development should not be based solely on the readaptation of the traditional or prevailing theories, since they may bear very little relation to the societal environment of the non-industrialized countries.

This means that, as regards the doctrine of planning, our thought processes must centre on the inseparable trilogy of *situation/theory/strategy*.¹

For our purposes here, the first component of the trilogy, the situation, is represented by: i) the system of social relations of production, i.e., the political and economic system; ii) the

specific and localized manifestation of the system at a given point in time, or in other words its style, "essentially ... development policies in action, together with the contradictions and conflicts which are being produced deliberately or not" (Graciarena, 1976);² and iii) the prevailing paradigm of regional development, whose basic characteristics are a marked tendency towards industrialization, the concomitant tendency towards urbanization and a strong leaning towards centralization in respect of decision-making and administrative systems.³

In regard to this last characteristic, it should be noted that insofar as it refers to territorial decision-making relationships, centralization is closely associated with the counter-productive separation made between the *subject* and *object* of planning. Such a separation may have some value as an analytical dichotomy in some spheres of planning, but at the regional level its only effect has been that of greatly augmenting the already strong centralizing tendency of the paradigm. Within the framework of this dichotomy, the subject was and is the central —and, certainly, centralized— State, while the object was and is the region, which is regarded as nothing more than an artifact at the mercy of the subject and, as such, completely devoid of any legal, social or political capabilities since, naturally, objects are neither granted nor acknowledged to have any powers or capacities.

A theory of regional development is therefore needed which will make it possible to rationalize action taken upon the regional environment in such a way as to serve the interests of mankind; furthermore, this theory should: i) embody an explicit recognition of the nature of the social and political system of which the region is a part (for example, the existence of a large number of social actors, all of which are called upon to play legitimate, albeit contradictory, roles); ii) allow for the necessary national/regional congruity in terms of the existing style, as well as correctly identifying the limits of what is possible or the degree of freedom enjoyed in respect of regional objectives or policies; and

¹For an excellent discussion of the relationships among theory, situation and strategies of regional development in Latin America, see Helmsing and Uribe-Echeverría (1981) and, for a more general consideration of the subject, see, *inter alia*, Friedmann and Weaver (1982) and Gore (1984).

²For an analysis of development styles and regional development strategies, see Hühner (1981).

³An excellent summarization of the prevailing paradigm is to be found in Stöhr and Taylor (1981).

iii) offer opportunities for altering the prevailing paradigm, replacing the subordinative *subject/object* relationship with one of interdependence *between subjects*, or, in other

words, converting the region from an object to a subject, which involves re-positioning regional planning within a new power distribution matrix.

I

The linkage between the State and the region

As this process unfolds, two subjects or two actors, the State and the region, come to be regarded virtually as one, the State. This is why the current tendency is to define the region as an autonomous political-territorial organization endowed with a legal identity under public law.

What is the nature, then, of the distribution of functions or the social division of labour between these two agents of regional development, one of long-standing and one having made its appearance relatively recently?⁴

When regional development is seen as a process in which responsibilities are shared by the State and the region, it then becomes necessary to determine the ways in which these two actors are linked to one another before recommendations can be made as to what public policies will be the most suitable for promoting development.

The State influences the economic growth of a region through two types of processes. One is the apportionment, of public funds among the various regions (capital and current expenditures). In this way, the State—through the public sector of the economy—performs an important function in the interregional *allocation* of resources. Identifying and implementing procedures for providing a consistent form of guidance for this process have, moreover, constituted the traditional function and modality of regional planning.

As the only political agent having legitimate coercive power, the State imposes upon all other

economic agents a given economic policy framework, both "macro" and sectoral, which has indirect impacts of various types and extents on each region. In other words, the general framework of economic policy *is not neutral from the regional standpoint*.

Seen from this angle, the effects or impacts of a given package of economic policies may be either positive for a specific region (in which case this indirect State action adds to the direct impact of its allocation of resources to the region) or negative (in which case this indirect action cancels out or even outweighs this same State's direct actions in the region). Under certain circumstances, situations of this kind may give rise, within the framework of regional planning, to an additional function of a compensatory nature whereby it seeks to offset, through (political) negotiation processes, these adverse effects through, for example, increased fiscal expenditure, at least in some regions.

In the best of cases, then, State action in a given region sets up conditions which are conducive to economic growth. Bearing in mind the differences which exist between development and economic growth pure and simple, however, it is evident that the transition from one situation to the other will depend to a much greater extent on what the region itself can do—on its *capacity for social organization*—than on the actions of the State.

In this respect, the linkage between the State (as a government apparatus) and the region (as a social actor) is a decisive factor in determining the success of efforts to promote genuine regional development. Regardless of the amount of resources which the State may furnish to a region, the region will not achieve development if it lacks a regional *society*, a complex society

⁴The "agent of long-standing" is, contrary to what one might think, the *region*, whose emergence as a social and political unit considerably antedates that of the State.

having truly regional institutions, a political class, an entrepreneurial class, community-based social organizations, and political projects of its own for whose sake it is capable of concerting its efforts on a collective basis. This is why a contradiction in terms arises when one assumes that the State can, by itself, "develop" a region.

This would appear to be the pivotal issue as regards regional development. All else is subordinate to the achievement of an active arrangement between the State and the region. The region's natural resources, geographical positions, and absolute and comparative advantages are all certainly important elements and positive factors in stimulating the growth of the regions and in attaining a better balance among them, but in the final analysis, these factors are nonetheless subordinate to the political and social elements mentioned above.

A more up-to-date and integral concept of regional development thus demands a recognition of the existence of three complementary and interdependent functions within what is commonly referred to as "regional planning". The first such function, the *allocation of resources*, is economic in nature, centralized in respect of its execution and regionally exogenous; the second, that of compensating for or *offsetting* the adverse impacts of economic policy, is essentially political in nature, procedurally deconcentrated and also regionally exogenous; the third, that of *social activation*, is social in nature, clearly decentralized, and regionally endogenous. This is, of course, a more complex concept whose implementation is more difficult. It is also, however, potentially more effective and fulfils the first condition required for the rebuilding of planning theory.⁵

II

The agenda for building a regional society

What elements are required in order to construct a theory that will aid in this attempt to convert the region-as-object into a region-as-subject, which is the central issue of the present discussion?

Once such requirement is a different distribution of political power within society; this might be thought of in terms of a new "social pact" between the State and the civilian society—a society which is in part manifested and organized in its constituent regions—and political/territorial decentralization is the tool used to forge this new social pact.

Hence, *regional development and territorial decentralization* are two processes which in practice form a single self-contained process whose nature and dimension are clearly both political and social.⁶

In almost every case, regional decentralization entails the need to *construct* the regions in a *political* sense. As was once said, the regions

have to be "politified". In other words, the regions need to be endowed with bodies that will form an autonomous political and administrative structure, thereby allowing them to take on the status of autonomous political/territorial entities having a legal identity under public law. Although the names may vary, these regional bodies are: an elected or partially elected regional authority, a regional legislative assembly, a regional economic and social council, and the various regional administrative agencies.

If this process is to be a truly democratic one as well, then the share of political power given to the region must not be entrusted solely to a formal organizational structure or a hegemonic social group. There must be a "socially appropriate" depository for such power, and this can be no other than the organized regional society or community.⁷ In practice, this in turn implies the need to *construct* the region in a *social* sense.

⁵This is a brief summary of the hypothesis concerning regional development presented more fully in Boisier (1982).

⁶This idea is developed by Boisier (1987).

⁷Since many of the regions used for planning purposes are creations *ex nihilo* (Palma, 1982) or are very nearly so, it may be virtually a fiction to make the assumption that an organized regional society or community exists as a given.

The region's development thus also involves an important social dimension. In social terms, the construction or building of a region means optimizing its capacity for self-organization so as to transform an inanimate and, in the final analysis, passive community divided by sectoral interests and having little awareness of its territorial identity into an organized, cohesive community which is aware of its identity as a society and region and is capable of mobilizing in order to further its collective political projects, i.e., capable of becoming a *subject* of its own development. The construction of such an edifice is clearly a social task having quite specific characteristics, since not all forms of regional social organization serve to promote an equitable and democratic type of regional development. The kind of development we are speaking about here presupposes a regional society that is organized in a spirit of concerted effort and social participation.

In a book published recently in Chile, Jordi Borja, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona and a specialist in urban geography, discusses a very similar concept:

"Decentralization is a comprehensive process presupposing, on the one hand, the acknowledged existence of a *subject* [underlined in the original] —a territorially-based society or community— capable of assuming responsibility for the management of collective interests and endowed with a sociocultural and political administrative identity and, on the other hand, the transference to this subject of a range of *areas of responsibility and resources* (financial, human, material) which it does not yet have and which it can manage on an independent basis within the prevailing legal framework" (Borja, 1987).⁸

There will invariably be a need to undertake what may be referred to as the "construction" of a regional society whenever the *institutional structure* predates and attempts to create the *regional structure*. In some cases (Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque provinces in Spain may

⁸In the same volume, Borja said that "...It is generally agreed that territorial divisions should be based on units having a social and/or cultural *identity* [underlined in the text] and common interests which justify the existence of representative political structures and which facilitate civic participation.

be good examples), the *regional demand* is what triggers decentralization and regional development efforts. In others (France and Latin America in general), the *governmental supply*, which may arise out of different rationalities, precedes the demand and superimposes a given regionalization upon the territory in question.⁹ This immediately opens up a vast and ill-defined realm of exploration as regards how a region is to be defined and how this gives rise to regionalization initiatives. The history of this matter demonstrates that priority was mistakenly placed on the discussion of the nature of what might be called the *container* (size, boundaries, etc.) whereas what should have been emphasized was the structure of the *content*. In practical terms, this led to the *failure of most* regionalization efforts. The above situation provides direct evidence of the need to "construct a society" as has subsequently been attested to by events in, for example, France since 1982.

"Generally speaking, they [the first experiments with decentralized planning] have served as a vast seedbed for social experimentation... They have provided, at least in some cases, an opportunity for a rapprochement and for a wide-ranging discussion among various groups and interests which, despite the fact that they were all situated in a single territory, had become accustomed to considering each other as outsiders..."

"Perhaps the main point of immediate interest as regards these first experiments with decentralized planning is that they were forms of collective self-teaching, ways of learning to assume the collective responsibility for a territory and for its future. Although they fell far short of generating a self-focused type of development at the 'grass-roots' level, they did help to revive local and regional networks of contacts

⁹In this context, an observation made by J. Friedmann 20 years ago retains its validity. He noted that even though each of the regions in Chile had an economic profile of its own, the cultural variations among them were slight. He asserted that, generally speaking, Chileans were a quite homogeneous people whose attachment to their native land was very weak. According to Friedmann, the regions of Chile were therefore artificially-created economic units rather than organic historico-cultural or political entities. The provinces, which are the units that form the regions, were described by him as being no more than administrative subdivisions modeled after the prefectural system in France (Friedmann, 1969).

and caused a territorial awareness to emerge or re-emerge within a portion of the population and its leaders. This territorial awareness becomes all the stronger as the agents of a territory have the opportunity, in the course of their work together, to see for themselves that they may have common interests" (Planque, 1985).

The task of building a regional society begins with an effort to find out how many and what types of agents of development are present in the region or, to be more precise, how many and what types of agents of the development of the region there are, and proceeds to the identification of the linking mechanisms which bind them together and which make it possible to speak of an interrelated *group* of agents rather than merely an unrelated series of them. These two pieces of information are basic to the establishment of mechanisms of social activation.

In a recent article, Wolfe presented a list which could, in principle, be used as a direct means of identifying the existing agents *in* the region or *of* the region. Wolfe used the following categories: 1. political leaders, 2. planners and other public technocrats, 3. other bureaucrats, 4. capitalists and entrepreneurs, 5. managers and other private technocrats, 6. military officers, 7. judges and lawyers, 8. trade union leaders, 9. leaders of associations of professionals, 10. owners of mass communication media, 11. academics and intellectuals, 12. leaders and spokesmen of religious movements and organizations, 13. leaders of student organizations, 14. leaders and ideologists who reject the market-oriented economy, and 15. leaders of movements of the rural and urban poor (Wolfe, 1987). In considering this list of agents, it is important to bear in mind that they all have a distinct *rationality of their own*, which may not necessarily coincide with those of the others. To put it another way, they all interpret the regional issue and, in particular, their place within it (the relative costs and benefits of a given position) in a certain way. This constitutes one of the main obstacles to the mounting of a concerted social effort within the region.

The first "amended" rule of Orwell's animal farm applies to these agents, in that, although all of them are "agents", some of them are "more agents" than others. In this sense, a particularly important role is played by those agents having a

direct influence on resource use, either because they bring in resources from other regions or because they have an influence on the *regional* appropriation and reinvestment of the surplus.

In terms of the form taken by their activity, these agents may act either individually or collectively. In the latter case, they are grouped in public agencies that are usually consultative in nature, such as regional development councils or the like, and the legitimacy of their representative role is a matter of crucial importance.¹⁰

Two factors which are just as important as the number of agents present in a region are the distinction between agents *of* the region and agents *in* the region and the analysis of the substantive links among them. The linkage of the agents or their adherence to a common framework (something which still falls short of concerted effort) is manifested in a shared cultural frame of reference or in a regional political project. The first denotes an ascribed regional identity; the second, an acquired regional identity. Whichever the case may be, what is involved is the *principle of identity* described by Touraine as the first of the elements which serve to define a "social movement" (in this case, a regional one). As indicated by Laserna (1986), this identity relates to certain basic conditions or qualities shared by the collectivity, which in the case of a regional cultural identity have to do with the physical setting, traditions, forms of social organization, myths and expressions linked to the language, literature, music, dance and other forms of collective expression.

As an element serving to bind the agents together, a regional political project functions as an alternative and/or supplement to the regional culture. At each stage in their history, all regional societies have some sort of political project; this project may be either explicit or implicit, may involve many objectives or a few partial goals, may be a project of change, a conservative project or one of compromise, and may involve a greater or lesser degree of coerciveness as regards the distribution of power and social

¹⁰This topic is beginning to become a subject of intense debate in Chile, for example, where regional development councils are scheduled to begin functioning in 1988. These consultative regional bodies, set up by the government, are based on a good idea, but their representativity and legitimacy are debatable.

resources. In addition, all political projects are based, either explicitly or implicitly, on a set of values and beliefs concerning the structure of society and how it should function which give rise to a certain view of the type of future society that is desired and of the process of social change that will help to create it. In this sense, a political project has a predominant ideology, which has an influence both on the identification of social goals and on the legitimacy accorded to the means that are to be used to reach those ends (Solari *et al.*, 1980). The existence of a regional political project presupposes the existence of a regional "society", which is precisely what has to be constructed in order for it to be possible to structure a regional project. The logical conclusion, then, is that the construction of a regional society and the specification of a political project are simultaneous and interactive tasks.

Regional society, ideology and regional movements would appear to be three basic concepts subsumed by the overall idea of "building a regional society". The idea of a regional society should be understood as that of a social sphere, in a broad sense, in which a set of particular social practices and relationships take place and are repeated. This concept refers to a structural and political unit set within corresponding social spheres which are constantly interacting with others and changing in accordance with the various phases of national development (F. Calderón, cited by Laserna, 1986). The social sphere and the accompanying geographical sphere are linked by a reciprocal delineation or one-to-one correspondence.

The ideology in question is *regionalism*. This term, strictly speaking, represents the idea of the region in action as an *ideology*, as a social movement or as the theoretical foundations for regional planning (Schwartz, 1974) because, apart from being a physical entity, the region also gradually becomes a collective consciousness. As H.W. Odum observed long ago, regionalism represents the philosophy and the technique of self-help and of self-development, together with the initiative by which each area is not only aided, but is also committed to the full development of its own resources and capacities. This, on the one hand, contrasts with the regional dependence of a nation or with the sub-marginality of one region as compared to

others; on the other hand, it also contrasts with foreign exploitation. It presupposes that the key factor in the redistribution of wealth and in equality of opportunity is each region's capability to create wealth and, through advances in respect of the consumption of goods, to maintain this capability and to retain this wealth by means of well-balanced programmes of production and consumption (H.W. Odum as cited by Friedmann and Weaver, 1982).

Regional social movements —which are an expression of the regionalism of a society— are, as defined by Laserna (1986), collective actions that give an explicit form to an identity associated with a given territory to which these movements attribute, or on the basis of which they lay claim to, a number of particular features (economic, cultural, ethnic, historical, geographical, political, etc.). In order to conserve the broad inclusiveness of the territorial basis of this identity, such movements are constantly faced with the need to establish forums and mechanisms for concerting social efforts and are thus prompted to engage in democratic practices in order to allow their heterogeneous members to express themselves.

Based on the foregoing, it is possible to delineate the sequence of actions which lead to the regions' achievement of the status of *quasi-States*, or to their establishment as such, i.e., as subjects born of a highly decentralization-oriented process of constructing a *regional society*.

The starting point for this process is an analysis of the *fabric of society*, a concept which refers to the identification of agents of regional development of *the region* (after the style of Wolfe) and of the *linkages* which bind them together. As already noted, the substantive linkage of these agents may be accomplished by reference to a *common culture* or by means of a regional *political project*.

The fabric of society also defines the set of community-based social organizations (neighbourhood councils, centres providing services for mothers, youth centres, sports clubs, etc.) through which the population, by virtue of a group effort, manages to achieve certain objectives that are free of political implications in the sense that they affect neither the resources nor the superstructure of the society. These organi-

zations are a vehicle for "micro-participation", which is somewhat similar to the concept of grass-roots democracy. Some time ago, Friedmann used the concept of "social development enclaves" to explore a similar subject matter.¹¹

As regards the idea of a regional political project, the notion of building a regional society relates to the specific proposals which go to make up such a project. These proposals generally take the form of various types of demands aimed at achieving a different *position* for the region within the national political and economic system. This is an ongoing issue rather than one arising out of a specific situation at a given point in time; by the same token, any political project is a long-term effort, although it is, of course, initiated in the "here and now" rather than at some distant point in the future. It follows from what was said in the preceding paragraph that all regional political projects, either explicitly or implicitly, challenge the quantitative and/or qualitative domination to which the region is subject.

Regionalism as the ideology of a regional political project, is embraced by a *regional society*. The existence of such a society, inasmuch as it is a concrete manifestation of an organic and ideologized social fabric, attests to the existence of a *socially constructed region*, which gives expression to its own political project through *regional movements*. The main, most long-lasting and most comprehensive demand of these movements is the *demand for the decentralization* of an autonomy which will ultimately lead to the formation of a *politically constructed region*. This, in its turn will give rise to the idea of the region as a *quasi-State* in legal and political terms, in other words, as a political institution endowed with some of the attributes ascribed to the State as an association of individuals. This concept is of particular importance as regards the supplantation of the typical relationship in which the region is subordinate to the

State by a new type of *concerted*, interdependent and co-operative relationship between the two subjects which would permit the use of new regional planning and management tools, after the style of the *plan-contrats* employed in France since its decentralization under Mitterrand.¹²

An important aspect of this idea has to do with what prompts concerted regional efforts or what moves people to undertake them and the subsequent leadership of regional movements. In an interesting contribution to the study of regional movements, Abalos (1985) stated that the issue of participation in such movements may be addressed on two different levels: one regards the ability to call people together and thus to garner mass support, while the other relates to the origin and nature of the leaders and activists in these causes. According to Abalos, regional movements attempt to mobilize the people on a vertical basis, i.e., without reference to intra-regional differences in status, social and economic class, and power. Their proclamations thus serve to unify the various social sectors and occupational groups.

Another aspect refers to the origin of regional activists. Abalos (1985) asserted that, while precise definitions are impossible, it would seem reasonable to assume that such leaders have, insofar as dealing with regional political problems is concerned, abilities, knowledge and perspectives on the issues which are superior to those of the majority of the local population.

It is likely that this capacity for calling people together and for encouraging concerted effort can be more fully developed in institutions (belonging to or established in the region) which, by their very nature and focus, function on a multisectoral and supra-class basis. This fact, in combination with the social prestige accorded to those institutions which are repositories of scientific knowledge or which take a

¹¹Friedmann referred to the "active peripheries" as social development enclaves possessing a strong potential for organizing themselves in order to achieve sustained economic growth. He proposed that this potential be termed "their capacity for social development" (Friedmann, 1973). Note the similarity, although it goes no further than that, of the concept of *capacity for regional social organization*.

¹²This comprehensive contract is prepared by the Chairman of the Conseil Régional on behalf of the region and by the Administrator of the region for the Republic and on behalf of the State. These planning contracts have three main components: specific action programmes in which objectives and costs are specified; concerted efforts to modernize the economy as regards the inputs and outputs of the production process and to promote greater social justice; and strategies for dealing with specific regional characteristics (Benko, 1987).

moral stand, would seem to indicate that institutions such as universities or the Church (the latter term being used in a broad sense) are in a particularly good position to serve as "inductors" into a regionally concerted societal effort.

Such concerted efforts, whether between the region and the State or among the actors or agents within a region, may be regarded as the outcome of genuine processes of social synergism which are characteristic of an open system, as are all regions. The ideas formulated by Haken are therefore applicable here. Haken contends that the various components of an open system are constantly trying out new mutual positions, new movements or reactions, which invariably involve numerous individual compo-

nents of the system. Under the influence of a steady stream of energy inputs, one or more of these movements or reactions will prove to be superior to the rest (Haken, 1984). In the re-creative venture represented by regional planning and decentralization, these inputs of energy are nothing less than the collective political will of the people to reach a higher stage of development and democracy (Boisier, 1987). The answer to the implied question as to how much political energy needs to be injected into the system in order to induce such a synergetic process is that it is a large amount but —as evidenced by the relatively recent cases of France and Spain— not nearly so much as would be entailed by any revolutionary utopia.

III

The State and the domination of the region

It is impossible to understand regional underdevelopment or development without considering the State. Since not all the actors involved in a given regional situation are equal, it is essential to bear in mind the forms of domination that are at work and the distribution of the resources of the society in question (Solari, *et al.*, 1980).

But which State or which concept of the State is of primary interest here? Clearly, we are more concerned with this agent as a political entity than as a public institutional *apparatus*. Nonetheless, all of the numerous facets of the State are involved.

If the task of building a regional society leads, as observed earlier, to the emergence of a regional *quasi-State*, the purpose of this is to permit the regions —or at least some of them— to form appropriate linkages with the State. This, in its turn, requires that an understanding be gained of the various rationalities (political, economic, legal, etc.) which account for and guide State action.

O'Donnell (1984) sees the State as "the specifically political component of the domination of a territorially-delimited society". Maranhao (1982), for his part, says that: "The State is essentially a social relationship of domination

and is revealed as an instrument of class insofar as it provides a basis for and organizes relationships of domination through institutions customarily holding a monopoly on the means of coercion within a defined territory, thereby ensuring the existence of a system in which the components of civilian society are linked to one another on an unequal footing" (Maranhao, 1982).

In respect of some of the functions performed by the State by virtue of its ability to dominate, the statements made by the above-mentioned authors bear repeating here. For example, Maranhao argues that: "Nevertheless, to the extent that these State institutions are regarded as having a *legitimate* [underlined in the original] right to ensure the continued existence of the system of social domination, the State is seen as a *mediator of social conflicts*." For his part, O'Donnell says: "The State ensures and organizes the reproduction of the society *qua* capitalist because it is involved in a relationship of 'structural complicity' with that society." Solari, Boeninger, Franco and Palma (1980) underscore three functions associated with the State's role in planning: the State is the party responsible for the legal act of planning, an actor

vis-à-vis civilian society, and, finally, a political integration and support mechanism.

The above quotations raise a significant issue: *domination* would appear to be an intrinsic feature of the very concept of the State, one of the purposes for which it is used being to direct the economic system towards the attainment of specific objectives that are expressed as a given function of social preference (in economic terms) or as a given political project (in sociological terms), e.g., the maximization of the growth rate or the achievement of a certain pattern as regards the distribution of wealth.

In view of the importance attributed to it, the concept of domination needs to be accurately described. This task was taken on by O'Donnell, who formulated the following definition:

"I understand domination (or power) as being the existing and potential capacity to impose one's will upon others on a regular basis, even —but not necessarily— in the face of resistance. Domination is relational: it is a type of relationship between social subjects. It is by definition asymmetrical, since it is an unequal relationship. This asymmetry arises out of the differential control over certain resources, owing to which it is usually possible to influence what the dominated party does and does not do to a sufficient extent to ensure that this party's behaviour will be in keeping with the express, tacit or presumed will of the dominant actor. It would serve no purpose to take an exhaustive inventory of these resources, but it would be useful to identify a few which are very important sources of support for such domination. The first is the control of means of physical coercion which are either self-mobilizing or can be mobilized by a third party. Another is control over economic resources. A third is control over information resources in the broad sense, including scientific and technological know-how. Finally, there is ideological control; this is the means by which the dominated party comes to see the asymmetrical relationship in which he is a part as being just and natural and, as a result, neither understands nor questions this relationship as being one of domination" (O'Donnell, 1984).

In order to employ the idea of domination within the context of the region, in other words, in order to arrive at a genuine understanding of

what is meant when speaking of linkages of domination/dependence in "central/peripheral" models *à la Friedmann*, it is necessary to introduce some of the basic concepts of the general theory of systems.

A system is an arrangement of animate or inanimate entities or objects which receive certain flows of inputs and which are limited to acting in a predetermined manner upon these inputs so as to produce certain outputs, the object being to maximize a given input/output function.¹³

It is also necessary to bear in mind that the essence of systems analysis lies in the fact that what is best for the whole is not necessarily best for each component of the system.

Put another way, this means that in order for the system to run optimally, the subsystems may have to function sub-optimally.

Returning to the concept of the State, but this time using an approach taken from the field of political positivism rather than from an ideological standpoint, the State may be understood as an *association of individuals*, i.e., as a society created by men and endowed with certain known characteristics (obligatory membership, territoriality, the *legitimate use of force*) by these individuals so that this society or particular grouping known as the State may perform certain social tasks which the individuals themselves —or the associations that act as their intermediaries— either cannot carry out (giving rise to a subsidiary State) or do not wish to undertake (giving rise to a supplementary and, of course, centralized State). One of the tasks delegated to this association of individuals will be —in either of the two cases described— to *optimize the functioning of the social system in terms of a number of collectively accepted results*, e.g., maximizing the growth rate of production or achieving a given distribution of income. Strictly speaking, then, the term "social system" denotes a number of different systems, one of which is the regional system.

It may thus be stated that one of the tasks assigned to the State is to maximize, in keeping with the prevailing styles of development, the growth rate of the social product from the stand-

¹³This is the definition of a system proposed long ago by R.B. Kreshner. It is used, for example, in Stanley (1966).

point of the group of regions forming a regional system, whose boundaries, as it were, coincide with those of the whole. If the State is to perform such an assignment, it will have to proceed in such a fashion that one or more subsystems (regions) may have to function sub-optimally. It is at this point that the idea of domination comes into play because the State can remain true to its own nature and purpose only by making use of this capacity.

The true meaning and implications of the domination/dependence relationship have not escaped the attention of some specialists. For example, C. Gore remarked that:

"Moreover, as soon as co-ordination mechanisms for planning the allocation of resources at the regional level are established, the conflicts between the achievement of national and regional objectives will begin to become evident. The government may contend that its policies have been designed for the 'common good' of all those living in the national territory, but no matter how this idea is defined, the attainment of the 'common good' on the national scale will run counter to its achievement at the regional level and vice versa.¹⁴ A policy which theoretically serves the 'common good' of the inhabitants of the national territory will not serve the 'common good' of the people in some regions of that territory ..." (Gore, 1984).

Thus, the State *limits* the possibilities of material expansion in some regions, or, in other words, it *dominates the regions in quantitative terms*, preventing them from maximizing their production. In other somewhat more subtle cases, the State may *dominate regions in qualitative terms* in the sense that, although the State encourages the region to maximize its production, it channels this production in a direction or manner in keeping, not with the region's needs, but with those of the nation and/or other regions.

Indeed, the territorial expansion of a capitalist system whose style is oriented towards the

maximization of production reflects an internal logic which directs the system towards the penetration of new spheres that are not part of the areas in which accumulation has traditionally taken place. It then imposes, on a reduced scale, a *style* upon these spheres which is in every way similar to that prevailing at the national level and sets up a relationship of domination that plays an essential role in ensuring the reproduction of the pattern of accumulation.¹⁵

The State's necessary domination of certain regions does not mean that it must take direct action as such or even action through its temporary political structure, i.e., the government. The more capitalized regions, whose interests coincide almost entirely with the "overall interests" of the society as represented by the State, act as vehicles for this domination. What significant difference can there be between the "interests" of the country and the "interests" of the central region (the traditional site of accumulation) if the latter accounts, for example, for 70% or 80% of the country's manufacturing output within the framework of a style in which industry is the leading sector?¹⁶

This phenomenon of domination which arises out of the *systemic* nature of the regional grouping, also occurs on a descending scale between the lower rungs of the national "ladder". Thus, for example, the central southern region *dominates* the north-eastern region in Brazil; and if the north-eastern region is, in its turn, considered as a system of various federated states, it may be seen that it is probably the case that Bahia *dominates* Ceará and that, within Ceará, the municipality of Fortaleza *dominates* the other municipalities, and so forth.

For all regions, it is essential to "discover" the identity of the agent dominating them and the type of subordination to which they are subject. For some regions, eliminating this relationship of domination signifies paving the way for them to convert their growth into development,

¹⁴This is clearly illustrated by the experiences of a number of countries. For example, during the 1950s in Argentina the Federal Investment Council (CFI) was founded as a result of a political agreement among the provinces. The Republic as such is not a member of this institution, whose purpose is to represent and defend the interests of the provinces as a group, as distinct from those of the Nation (author's note).

¹⁵Many authors — including Harvey (1982), Boisier (1982) and de Mattos (1983) — have discussed the rationale of the territorial expansion of a capitalist system from various ideological viewpoints.

¹⁶For example, the state of Sergipe in north-eastern Brazil is "dependent upon and dominated by": a) the Brazilian State; b) the state of São Paulo; or c) by each and both or, to put it another way, by São Paulo *on behalf* of the national State.

whereas for others, overcoming this domination is a prerequisite for the realization of their growth potential. In both cases, while some aspects may vary, this is probably the most important function of a planned regional development effort. And this task will also constitute a basic component of the *regional political project*.

But is it possible to eliminate a relationship of domination/dependence between, for example, region A (dominant) and region B (dependent) if it is the outcome of the dual logic of territorial expansion and systemic optimization?

Let us first consider *quantitative domination*, i.e., that which takes the form of the imposition of a lower *level and rate* of production than what the region is capable of achieving. It must be assumed that this modality of domination operates by means of the interregional process of resource allocation,¹⁷ whereby a smaller flow of resources is channelled to these regions than what the regional economies could absorb without generating inflationary pressures; in addition, this modality also functions by means of the possible negative impact of overall and sectoral economic policies. It would be feasible to alter the interregional pattern of resource allocation by significantly improving the *region's bargaining position* based on its capacity for social organization at this level. The latter factor is closely related to the possibilities of developing a regional political project (Boisier, 1982).

Qualitative domination, i.e., wherein regional expansion is determined in accordance with the needs of the dominant region, is seen in the case of those regions into which the system is in the process of being introduced; as noted earlier, a style similar to the dominant overall style is imposed upon these regions.¹⁸ In such a situation, eliminating linkages marked by domination/dependence may represent a much more complex challenge. In part, this is because there is the danger that their domination may also take on an *ideological* dimension in the sense used by O'Donnell, in which case no social forces having political power will question it. And in part, it is also because these regions totally identify with (and are incorporated into) the dominant forces of the national/regional dyad. The success of these regions is the success of the system and of its particular style, and vice-versa.

The mounting of a *concerted effort* by the region and the State with a view to identifying and executing projects in areas (of production or research) which fulfill shared needs may, in such instances, be a good means of *reducing the proportion* of local activities designed to serve the interests of the dominant region and thus making its growth more *endogenous*. This is both a condition for and a feature of the *development* of the region.¹⁹ As has already been said, concerted efforts of this type are only possible when the regions in question have been *politically and socially constructed* as such.

IV

The building of regional societies: a utopian form of social engineering?

In taking up the challenge of constructing regional societies, there is always a danger that the actors concerned will give in to the temptation of resorting to centralization, domination and authoritarianism, which, in the final analysis, are external to the region. Of course, a region

that follows this path will never—as has become quite clear—cease to be subject to social manipu-

¹⁷Assuming that there are no concurrent structural constraints such as, for example, a shortage of natural resources or a population of too small a size.

¹⁸These are, therefore, regions which are assigned a top priority *in actuality*, and their mode of production will be based on industrialization and urbanization. These are the cases of regional development which are usually considered to be "successful". They are, in other words, the new centres of accumulation.

¹⁹Here too, France's *plan-contrats* are a good example of agreements concerning the joint execution of activities and the joint promotion of scientific and technological research.

lation. The people —the object, subject and beneficiary of development— will remain an entelechy.

Under these circumstances, one is dealing with a project of utopian social engineering (to use the expression coined by K. Popper), thus called because it depletes itself while leading nowhere and remaining isolated from the social forces that could make it viable. According to Popper, all social utopias, when transformed into a political project (i.e., that involve the control of power), exhibit a strong tendency towards authoritarianism.

The building of a regional society can only be accomplished with and by the regional community, even if this community is, in the beginning, incipient and ill-defined. Outside aid, which is normally needed at the outset as an inductive mechanism, should be halted as soon as possible.

At this point it is necessary to return to a question that was posed earlier: What agents can or should act as initial "inductors" in the process of mobilizing the regional community? Setting aside the possibility that internal or external events might occur which, in some cases, could start off this process,²⁰ the answer seems to lie in the potential role of non-governmental organizations.

Some of these organizations function primarily at very basic social levels,²¹ whereas others operate at super-structural and formal levels; still others carry out activities at both levels (the Church in particular). These organizations play at least two significant roles in the "construction" of regional societies: firstly, their very presence helps to inspissate the social fabric, which is of intrinsic value; and, secondly, in certain instances they serve as "induction centres" for this effort. As such, they have the considerable advantage of being well received and accepted by the population, and particularly by its most marginal segments. They are therefore considerably better suited to serving as a link

with the population than are public-sector agencies, which are at best usually suspected of paternalism and clientage. Regional universities (when they exist) and the Church were identified earlier in this article as two possible inductive agents.

The topic of the potential role of non-governmental organizations in regional development has become a subject of inquiry in its own right, and its analysis therefore goes beyond the scope of this article.²² In any event, the point should be made that the articulation and mobilization of the regional community go hand in hand with the delineation of the regional political project. This is the backdrop against which the regional community is projected, i.e., the source of the pre-established objectives which serve as its guidelines.

The regional political project should be based on an ideology and a strategy both of and for regional development. In broad outline, such a strategy has as part of its ultimate objective the selective closing²³ of the region, and it relies on a procedure of negotiated planning,²⁴ which is, by definition, a participatory and concerted planning modality. As regards the well-known paradigms of regional development, the strategy —and consequently the political project— borrows elements from each, based as it is on the articulation of the two subjects or actors discussed above: the State and the region.

The mobilization of the community and the parallel task of specifying the content of the political project are matters which can perhaps be better understood if we first answer a key question, namely: What can the agents of development do to further the development of their own region? In order to answer this question, a clear explanation of regional development in general is needed (in other words, an explicit theory is required). If this explanation is both a non-abstract and socially articulated one, then it will provide a clear idea of the role of each of the main actors, including political leaders, entre-

²⁰For example, natural disasters that promote solidarity or political or economic events which provoke a collective defensive reaction.

²¹The neoliberal economic policies that have been tried out in Latin America since the 1970s have led to the formation of a great variety of "grass-roots" non-governmental organizations, many of which play a part in the survival strategies of the poorest and most marginalized sectors of the population.

²²Issue No. 29 (December 1983) of the *Revista latinoamericana de estudios urbano-regionales* (EURE), which is published by the Urban Studies Institute of the Catholic University of Chile, is devoted in its entirety to the role of non-governmental organizations in regional development.

²³This is a well-known postulate developed by Stühr (1981).

²⁴This idea was presented in Boisier (1979).

preneurs and social leaders, whose activities and responsibilities should form part of institutional and collective tasks of the region.

At this point the reader might well ask whether the accomplishment of all the steps described up until now would guarantee that the process of building a regional society would be completed. The answer is a resounding "no". There is no certainty whatsoever that the implementation of a given series of actions will result in the desired "construction of a regional society". In fact, answering the above question with an unequivocal "yes" would place the whole issue back in the sphere of "utopian social engineering" or in that of a naive sort of voluntarism. While there is no recipe for attaining the objective of having constructed a regional society within a given timespan, it is nonetheless essential to have at least some outline of the task that lies ahead. Only after we have an approximate picture of the type of society and region that we desire can we begin to decide which are the best courses of action and means for reaching that objective and to devise a practical plan of action. As if the internal (in regional terms) difficulties involved in the process of social construction were few, yet another stumbling block is represented by the ambiguity of the external framework at an international level, in addition to the ideological difficulties which would, of course, become practical political difficulties.

The ambiguity of the external framework stems from the two quite different types of impacts which the most significant technological trends are having on regional processes. These trends are in evidence at the international level, but they clearly have repercussions at the local level (e.g., the changes being seen in industrial technology and in the information sciences). These subjects have been touched upon by the author in another article (Boisier, 1987). The above-mentioned ideological problems relate to the difficulty which, as a rule, Marxists have in viewing social movements (in this case, regional ones) and strategies based on a concerted effort as means of promoting social change. According to Castells, "...by definition, the concept of a

social movement as an agent of social change is entirely unthinkable in Marxist theory. There are social struggles and mass organizations that rebel in defense of their interests, but there are no such thing as conscious, collective actors capable of liberating themselves" (Castells, 1983, p. 400). The fact of the matter is that, in many regions, the political actions of some of the potential agents of development are guided, by Marxist theory, and it may therefore be assumed that at least the most perceptive among them will not accept the consolidation of a regional political project which, by definition, runs counter to their beliefs.

If man is to resume his position at the hub of the development process, he will have to accept the fact that the construction of a regional society is going to be a process which involves going back and forth between *micro-scale* tasks and objectives (of action, production, mobilization, etc.) and *macro-scale* endeavours and goals associated with ideological confrontation and the internalization of technological change. If the regional territory is to be placed at the service of man, it will be equally necessary to undertake tasks of social and political construction on both scales.

It is for this reason that the above process is based both on the microcosmic view of regionalism exemplified by Gabriela Mistral when she said: "In geography, as in love, he who does not love meticulously, virtue by virtue and feature by feature, the reckless one, who is usually vain as well, who swallows up miles with his gaze, neither knows nor savours the details, nor sees nor understands, nor loves either", and on the macrocosmic invitation extended by Pablo Neruda to construct a new world: "Rise up to be born with me, brother."*

*The quotations of Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda were taken, respectively, from "Regionalismo", a portion of a lecture given in Spain which was characterized as a brief description of Chile and which is included in *Poesía y prosa de Gabriela Mistral* (selection and notes by Floridor Pérez), Santiago, Chile: Editorial Pehuén, 1984; and from "Alturas de Macchu Picchu", *Canto General*, Santiago, Chile, Aguilar, 1980.

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