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Evolution of new regional development interventions in New Zealand: An analysis of the first year of the Provincial Growth Fund

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Abstract
Regional development has evolved in response to shifting local and global priorities. These shifts have transformed both the way we think about regions, their role and how that shapes the outcomes and benefits that might occur from engaging in regional development. Key debates centre around the ability (or desirability) of regional development interventions to unsettle path dependence and "lock-in" created by past approaches and to create opportunities for alternative development futures and to provide choices between sectoral-based investments to support economic activity in contrast to a more place-based approach to regional development. This paper overviews the dynamic nature of regional development to offer reasons for its recent resurgence by highlighting the key debates about the purpose and function of regions and what regional development can or should do. We then discuss the New Zealand context specifically and use the first year of Provincial Growth Fund investments to reflect on how the processes, objectives and goals reflect particular interpretations of the meaning and purpose of regional development. We conclude that a strong adherence to a growth imperative has the potential to reinforce path dependencies at the expense of alternative development pathways.

KEYWORDS
new regionalism, New Zealand, path dependence, regional development, uneven development

1 | INTRODUCTION

Regional development policy and practice has evolved over time in response to changes in the global context, prevailing economic ideology and the lessons derived from applied interventions, making it both a dynamic and an evolving field of interest (Pike, Rodriguez-Pose, & Tomaney, 2017). Globally, there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of "place" in regional development. This resurgence is evident both in the discourse and in the practice of regional development that now places greater emphasis on regionally specific assets rather than on top-down investments, and which stresses opportunities rather than need, and highlights collaboration and partnerships amongst levels of government operating at multiple scales (Barca, McCann, & Rodgriguez-Pose, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016, 2019). Place-based approaches to regional development are seen as particularly critical for addressing persistent inequalities to ensure all regions are able to reach their full economic potential. For regions whose economies have been historically reliant on resource extraction, have struggled to diversify and have strong path dependencies

(Fleming, Measham, & Paredes, 2015; Harvey, 2006; Ryser, Markey, Manson, & Halseth, 2014), regional place-based development are now seen as even more essential.

The purpose of this paper is examine the recent evolution of regional development in New Zealand (NZ), and to determine how the selected processes, objectives and goals reflect particular interpretations of the meaning and purpose of regional development. After presenting an overview of international and national literature relevant to this investigation, the economic status of NZ's regions will be overviewed before examining and assessing the nature of recent regional development interventions in that country and the degree to which they align with international literature on place-based development and new regionalism. It is important to note that the "regions," of which there are 14 in NZ (see Figure 1), are administrative entities established with relatively limited powers to oversee environmental, resource management and infrastructural issues (Nel, 2015). The regions were not defined in economic terms which has created current challenges in terms of trying to identify economic strategies for regions which are not necessarily economically homogenous. In governance terms, NZ is a simple unitary government where Central government is supported by two tiers (regional and local) government (Jackson, Nel, & Connelly, 2016). The regions are roughly based on former provinces that were abolished in 1876 and

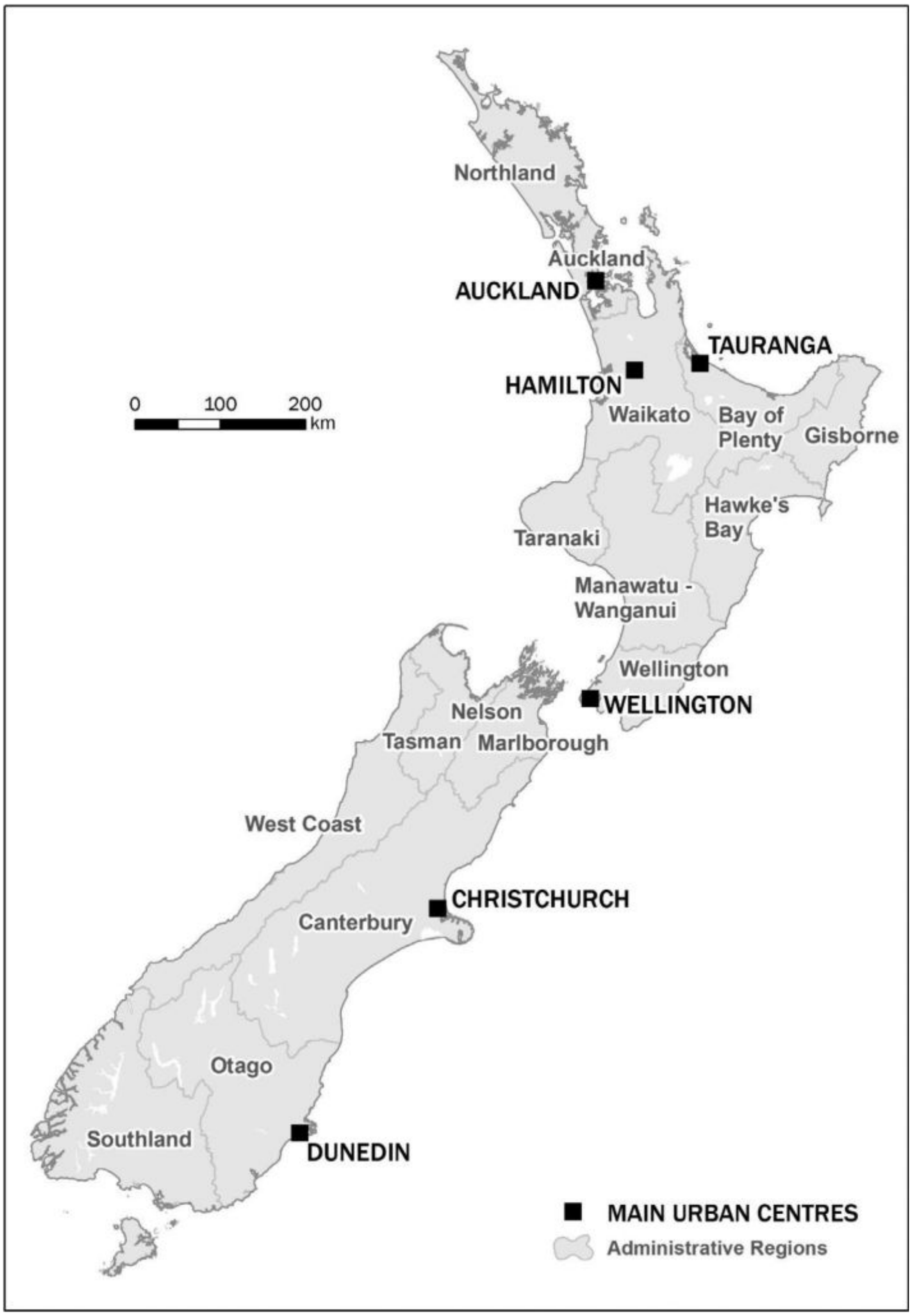

FIGURE 1 Map of New Zealand and regional council boundaries
Source: Chris Garden

in the present context the phrase "provincial" loosely refers to non-metropolitan areas.

2 | ROLE OF REGIONS AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There has been much debate about the use of the "region" as a platform for developing and implementing development strategies to serve both national and local interests. These debates generally have two dimensions (Hodge & Robinson, 2013). First, the regional dimension refers to arguments about the appropriate scope, boundaries and definition of regions in relation to other regions or other scales (Hudson, 2007). Key aspects here relate to the way in which and by whom regional boundaries are determined and how the creation of regional spaces based on jurisdictional boundaries, internal profiles or notions of difference are a reflection and outcome of multi-scalar processes (Peck, 2002). Therefore, regions are both the outcome of pre-existing economic activities and are an assemblage of identity, culture, experience and processes that create a heterogeneous space consisting of cross-cutting institutional agencies, partnerships and interests (Allen & Cochrane, 2007). The second dimension refers to debates about the purpose and process of development. Here, arguments are generally centred on what it is that regions are able to do. Paasi, Harrison, and Jones (2018) refer to the purpose of regional development in the colonial Empire building period, as identifying and defining environmental conditions and landscapes to guide investment or extraction decisions. Innis's staples theory was similarly based on the notion of a functional and sectorally defined region that served the purpose of facilitating the extraction of resources from distant places for use in home markets (Watkins, 1963). Such views reinforced perceptions of resource dependent regions as passive spaces, subject to lock-in and path dependence. In response to the notion of "territories-as-containers," where space is viewed merely as being appropriated for external purposes, Faludi (2013, p. 1309) argues that the variegated make-up of regional spaces requires more attention to be paid to the way regional development is shaped. Factors that are now seen as shaping regional development include competing meanings of internal and external economic relations, the politics of region making and re-making and the politics of regional development, all of which emphasise the role of regional actors in promoting, maintaining or altering regional outcomes. Issues of local economic development, community development, quality of life, social capital, capacity building and the tensions of diversification that shape regional development trajectories all reinforce the need to rethink relationships between continuity and change and the degree to which new path creation can be a deliberate choice (Halseth, Ryser, Markey, & Martin, 2014; Martin, 2010; Pike et al., 2017).

Justifications for particular interpretations of these two dimensions of regional development have shifted in parallel to how rural regional economies have been interpreted. In particular, debates about shifts from productivist, to post-productivist and to multifunctional regional economies (Argent, 2002, 2011; Wilson, 2001, 2009; Woods, 2007) illustrate the multiple ways that key actors, power relations, institutions and markets shape regional development challenges and responses. For example, in NZ, Lewis et al. (2013) demonstrate that acknowledging new assemblages of actors, resources, knowledge, markets and values has the potential to challenge dominant economic geographies and thus reshape regional development processes and outcomes. One of the outcomes of rethinking regional economies in such a manner, is that the emphasis on a single resource as a point of similarity within a region becomes fragmented and unsettled. As this occurs, opportunity is created to consider how in different regional contexts, people, values and cultures can provide a purpose for regional development and serve as a means of differentiation between regions.

3 | REDISCOVERY OF PLACE AND NEW REGIONALISM

Recent recognition of the complexity of regions, of regional development processes and of related political and spatial considerations has emphasised the importance of local knowledge, partnerships and local institution building, all of which has reinforced the importance of history and geography in shaping both the understanding of past regional development trajectories and in the charting of new ones (Bristow, 2010). The limitations of previous spatially blind regional interventions have, at best not addressed, and at worst perpetuated uneven geographical development (Harvey, 2006; Massey, 1991) by failing to account how particular geographies of place unevenly influences connectivity and access to services, capacity and markets, leading, in recent years to a recognition of the importance of "place". The differences between places and their place context, (for example, remote, peripheral, high value amenities or peri-urban) contribute to the range of regional assets that shape regional futures. As a result, an understanding of the different ways that place shapes both path dependence and economic futures in the context of regional development is required to replace previously dominant place neutral development efforts (Barca et al., 2012; McCann, 2016).

New regionalism emerged as part of the globalisation discourse in the late 20th century to account for how regions have embraced the economic logics of agglomeration and intra-regional cooperation and networking in place of competition as a means of justifying their existence. Similarly, from a political perspective, the neoliberal shift resulted in a reduced role for the nation state, and a reactionary resurgence in territorial identity and devolution, all of which created opportunities for renewed attention to place in regional development (Paasi et al., 2018). However, in the European context, early iterations of new regionalism as a means for understanding the way regions and places are constituted by, and are constitutive of social life, relations and identity were critiqued for not sufficiently accounting for the dynamic nature of regions and the multiple flows of ideas, concepts, networks and resources across regions and scales (Paasi, 2002). Yet, from a planning perspective, the call for new regionalism did open up space for thinking about regional development interventions in different ways and highlighted the potential role for a broader range of actors. These more holistic perspectives and emphasis on a sense of place has provided for a more normative and activist role for planners as they engage with a more diverse range of stakeholders across different institutions, networks and partnerships between different scales, rather than simply through top-down, state-led efforts at regional development (Wheeler, 2002).

More recent iterations of new regionalism reflect the diverse nature of regions, and rather than privileging any one reading of the region, focus on how different perspectives come together to shape regions and regional thinking. These approaches bring together both functional components of past iterations of the region with reference to key economic activities and comparative advantage, while also emphasising the potential of local places working together to shape regional futures based on the endogenous factors of local institutions, social capital and capacity (Markey, Halseth, & Manson, 2006). Thus, new regionalism emphasises not only the endogenous components of place making and region making but also the dynamic and fluid way that networked regions work across multiple scalar, territorial and spatial geographies (Markey, 2011; Zirul, Halseth, Markey, & Ryser, 2015). Such approaches provide opportunities for thinking about regional resilience and the sustainability policy interventions that are context specific and adaptable, yet informed by the situated assemblage of multiscalar social, economic and political relationships that shape regional futures (Vodden, Douglas, Markey, Minnes, & Reimer, 2019). In the section that follows, we shift the discussion towards the practice of regional development in NZ, which is then followed by an examination of the first year of the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) to reflect on the degree to which the approaches to regional development discussed above are incorporated into practice in NZ.

4 | REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NZ

The experience of regional development in NZ has been discussed in more detail elsewhere (see McNeill, 2019; Nel, 2015). However, a general overview is useful for understanding the present attempts to advance regional development through the PGF. From the period of colonisation to the present, rural and regional economies in NZ have been largely dependent on agriculture, mining and forestry. Like many resource dependent regions elsewhere, regional NZ has struggled to break out of traditional path dependencies, leaving the regions vulnerable to shifts in national and global demand. The neo-liberal restructuring of the 1980s resulted in both a withdrawal of state support from spatial development and an abandonment of the regions to sector-based development and market forces. It involved the removal of trade barriers, cuts to the social welfare system, state divestment from coal and forestry industries and the privatisation and rationalisation of state services such as rural schools, hospitals, post offices and transportation infrastructure which impacted rural regions significantly (Le Heron & Pawson, 1996). These reforms exposed the national economy and the regional sub-economies to the impacts of globalisation (Peet, 2012) as central and local governments were constrained in their ability and capacity to respond to economic challenges (Dalziel & Lattimore, 2004; Lattimore & Eaqub, 2011; Memon & Wilson, 2007). In particular, the elimination of pre-existing regional development policies, which had provided limited support for regions, further constrained the ability for development of local economic alternatives (Britton, Le Heron, & Pawson, 1992). The response of regions whose economies have been exposed to global market forces has been uneven. For many communities and regions, their future well-being depends on locally available assets and capacities (Britton et al., 1992; Haggerty, Campbell, & Morris, 2009; Nel, 2015). However, the anticipated benefits of allowing people and places to prosper through their own initiative as a result of restructuring and reduced constraints from government control has only exacerbated uneven development (Conradson & Pawson, 2009).

From the 1990s, regional development was increasingly left to market forces and the ability of regions to develop their local strengths and comparative advantage to drive growth in key economic sectors (Nel, 2015). Some regions responded by developing their own regional economic development agencies, supported by local councils (e.g., Venture Taranaki in 1997, Venture Southland in 2001), by regional councils (e.g., Northland Inc. in 2011), by local business (e.g., Priority One Tauranga in 2001) or by a trust established as a result of a one-off payment by Central government (e.g., Development West Coast in 2001). These organisations broadly attempt to coordinate, facilitate and promote regional business opportunities and job growth, to develop investment opportunities in their regions and are increasingly engaged in tourism promotion, but too date have only achieved mixed results (Nel, 2015).

5 | UNEVEN REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The unevenness of regional economic outcomes are reflected in the diverse gross domestic product (GDP) per capita figures from 2000 and 2016 (see Figure 2). There are two things to note. First, the regions dominated by major cities (Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury), or high-value resources (Taranaki's oil and gas, Southland's dairy farming) stand out from others. Second, the gap between the highest GDP and lowest has grown from 2000 to 2016, reflecting the significant welfare and inequality challenges that have emerged over time (Dalziel & Lattimore, 2004; Lattimore & Eaqub, 2011; Memon & Wilson, 2007).

Globally, while rural economies have become more diversified, primarily now relying more on tourism and post-productive activities, many regions (or parts of regions) continue to struggle to embrace the importance of local and regional proactivity in adopting economic and development alternatives (Carbonnier, 2011; Ryser et al., 2014). The same challenges hold true in NZ, where in the absence of any national spatial economic development plan, the regional economic disparities reflected in Figure 3 became magnified amidst claims of the emergence of "two" NZ's as economic activity and population growth has become increasingly concentrated in the major centres at the expense of everywhere else (Equab, 2014). The resulting public debate about what to do about the regions and their "zombie towns[1]," exist amid claims that "there is no leadership on regional development from our political class—across the spectrum" (Equab, 2016), and growing regional disparities, led Central government to re-engage with regional development from 2015.

6 | REDISCOVERY OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In response to the global financial crisis of 2008, Central government released the Business Growth Agenda (BGA) in 2012 as a spatially neutral response to drive economic growth and business performance. The focus for government was to support national economic development and promote regional comparative advantages to investors by engaging with the private sector to address issues related to infrastructure, natural resources, capital markets, skills development, innovation and export markets, which were seen as the ingredients which "businesses need to succeed and grow" (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [MBIE], 2017a. The BGA from 2012 (MBIE, 2017a) relied on the expansion of primary production from the regions and was to be led by the private sector with a focus on export markets and attracting foreign investment. The Regional Growth Programme was established in late 2014 to support the "lagging" regions, but subsequently rolled out to all regions (except Auckland), to encourage regions to self-identify growth strategies and action plans that would guide regional economic growth. The development of strategies and actions was supported with funding from Central government with $44m available over 4 years to support Regional Growth Programme initiatives. Additional funding was provided to

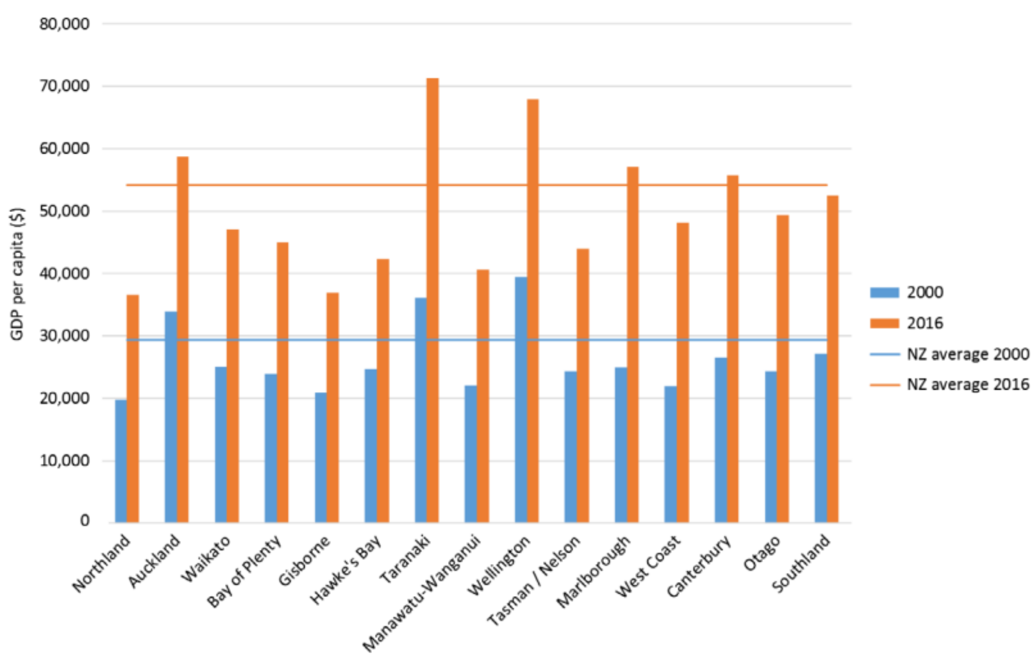

FIGURE 2 Regional differences in gross domestic product per capita: 2000–2016
Source: StatsNZ, 2017; Chris Garden

FIGURE 3 Relative size of New Zealand regional economies
Source: https://www.stats.govt.nz/infographics/new-zealands-regional-economies-2018 Creative Commons Licence

support the development of Action Plans in the regions and to support senior central government officials to work with governance groups that would guide implementation of Action Plans and work towards securing the necessary investments to enable objectives to be realised (Pragmatica, 2017) but implementation and roll out of the initiatives were to be through private sector led development. The governance groups in each region were made up of local government and/or regional government representatives, the private sector, Māori representatives and a senior central government bureaucrat who could advocate for their respective region from within Central government. The resulting Regional Strategies and Action Plans were intended to promote the unique business opportunities of the region and to align regional strategies with cross-cutting government support in terms of infrastructure and education investments (MBIE and Ministry for Primary Industries [MPI], 2017).

Across all regions, the Growth Strategies and Action Plans focused on enhancing existing sectors of the economy in primary industries (e.g., agriculture, horticulture, forestry, aquaculture, and mining) and in tourism development. It was expected that existing economic activities would grow through investments in infrastructure and training to improve productivity and add value to existing production. Initially, the MBIE and the MPI worked with the regions of Northland, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, Manawatū/Whanganui and the West Coast, as they were seen to be regions with a strong primary resource sector base but which were not achieving their full economic potential (Pragmatica, 2017). Table 1 presents an overview of the focus, cross-cutting investments, governance arrangements and expected outcomes of the growth strategies of these six initial regions. These regions were identified by government as deserving of initial support and investment, and Figure 2 illustrates the diversity of the relative size of their regional economies.

TABLE 1 Focus of regional growth strategies from "Surge" regions

Region	Date of growth study	Focus area	Cross-cutting opportunities	Governance	Estimated outcomes
Northland (Tai Tokerau Northland)	Feb 2015	• Tourism—Developing value by linking cultural and natural amenities in roundtrip tourist experience • Forestry—Engineered wood products; small-scale wood processing; high-value native forestry • Dairy—Productivity initiatives; land conversion to dairy; R&D for productivity and new value-added • Aquaculture—Land-based kingfish production; scale-up oyster and mussel production • Marine manufacturing—Boat building and repair through investment in a mobile lift • Horticulture—a strategic plan; Māori and industry partnerships for vertically integrated honey company.	• Education and skills • Road and transport • Digital connectivity • Water management and storage	• Northland Inc; iwi consortium; Te Puni Kokiri; MSD[a]; MBIE[b]; MPI[c]; M of Ed[d]; district and regional council;	• Tourism—>435 jobs in 5–7 years and ~$36.5m in visitor spending • Forestry—$465m and 500 jobs • Dairy—~$389m annually and additional 331 • Aquaculture—$28m and 370 jobs • Marine—$400m • Horticulture—$80–560m
Bay of Plenty (Bay of Connections)	May 2015	• Forestry—Aggregate Māori land; collaboration to expand export markets for processed wood; • Agriculture—Farm productivity; • Horticulture—Horticulture academy to train labour; expansion of kiwi onto Māori owned land; collaboration in avocado to grow and extend exports and improve productivity; expand Mānuka products; • Aquaculture—Sea-based mussel farm proposal and harbour redevelopment; trout farming based on geothermal advantage; • Tourism—Rotorua as global health destination; coordinated regional tourism strategy; sporting events and sport tourism • Manufacturing—Support niche industries in metals powder; Tauranga marine precinct;	• Water management • Geothermal energy • Transportation infrastructure • Digital technology • Education and skills • Improve public agency support for business sector (incl. One stop shop for region • Productivity of Māori land	• MBIE, MPI, NZTE[e], regional council and bay of connections; priority one, grow Rotorua, Toi EDA[f]; Enterprise Great Lake Taupo; mayors' council	• Forestry—$2.2b • Agriculture—$60m • Horticulture—$1.37b • Aquaculture—$34m and 400 jobs • Tourism—$60m and 1,090 jobs • Manufacturing—$1b

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Region	Date of growth study	Focus area	Cross-cutting opportunities	Governance	Estimated outcomes
Gisborne/ Tairāwhiti (Activate Tairāwhiti)	Feb 2017	• Primary sector—Value added production • Wood processing—Process raw logs locally through new timber mills and recommissioning old processing plants • Water for horticulture—Adjusting water allocations; engineering aquifer recharge; expanding irrigation to support horticulture intensification • Apiculture—Position Tairāwhiti as global mānuka honey producing region; support scaling up and greater investment in extraction, processing and branding; expand # of hives • Place promotion—Strategy to promote lifestyle opportunities and tourism potential • Tourism—Develop Māori potential in tourism by Māori; ecotourism; cycle tourism; cruise ships; heritage tourism	• Transportation and digital infrastructure • Building business capacity, innovation and capital investment • Business friendly	• Activate Tairāwhiti; Gisborne District Council; Gisborne chamber of commerce; business; iwi; Eastland Institute of Technology	• Wood processing—$250m and 780 jobs • Aquifer recharge—$160m and 1,100 jobs • Apiculture—$40m and 40 jobs • Marketing $6.5m and 40 jobs
Hawkes Bay	April 2014	• Forestry and processing—Value added potential through local processing plant • Livestock and meat products—Value added through supply chain R&D and innovation; irrigation; new niche products to generate more value from carcass • Horticulture—Improve branding and investments in new wineries • Oil and gas—Potential to transform the economy • Tourism—Untapped potential through marketing and region's distinct advantage; further leverage natural and cultural amenities	• Education and skills; attracting skilled migrants • Managing water use • Promotion and marketing • Transportation infrastructure • Business support • Disparities b/w Napier/ Hastings and Gisborne (pop growth, tourism, RD, skills, etc.)	• Mayors of Gisborne, Napier, Wairoa, Hastings; Hawkes Bay Regional Council; MBIE, MOT[g]; iwi	• Oil and gas—b/w 200 and 2,440 jobs;

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Region	Date of growth study	Focus area	Cross-cutting opportunities	Governance	Estimated outcomes
Manawatū—Whanganui	July 2015	• Tourism—Mountain biking development; marketing/ promotion of outdoor, nature, cultural tourism packages • Sheep and beef farming and processing—Improving farm productivity and increasing value-added processing • Land use intensification—Using irrigation to support a shift to dairy or horticulture • Mānuka honey—Expand mānuka conversion; R&D; regional coordination • Horticulture—Shift to export markets for vegetables; grower coordination; logistics; market development • Poultry—Develop export markets; associated grain production • Aged care—Market lifestyle for older people; regional coordination for property development; rural residential facilities • Food innovation—Food HQ as regional outsourcing; develop food HQ as contact Centre for food innovation for region	• Distribution and transportation infrastructure • Productivity of Māori land • Business support	• Horizons Regional Council; mayors; iwi; business	• Tourism—$63m and 71 jobs • Meat—$26m • Land intensification—$120m and 660 jobs • Mānuka honey—$120m • Horticulture—$20m and 160 jobs • Poultry—1,200 jobs • Aged care—$32m and 66 jobs • Food innovation—1,000 jobs
West Coast	Sept 2016	• Tourism—Capture greater value from tourism through improved marketing and promotion, improved tourism product development and infrastructure and amenities; monetizing use of DOC land • Mining and processing—Identify areas in conservation estate where mining is permitted; one-stop shop for mining permits and streamlined approvals; incorporating coal mining as a permitted activity in district plans	• Transport and road infrastructure investments • Access to natural resources through regional spatial plan to provide certainty to investors over resource use • Extend broadband and mobile coverage • Energy development on WC (hydro and waste to energy) • Skills and talent development through an applied research Centre	• West Coast Regional Council; DOC[h]; Westland Milk; New Zealand Coal and Carbon; Ngāti Waewae; T Croft ltd, Minerals West Coast; Makaawhio; Westpower; Williams Group	• Tourism—$114m • Broadband—$30m • Waste energy—1,000 jobs in construction, 65 jobs permanent • EPIC—5 new businesses and 12 jobs

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Region	Date of growth study	Focus area	Cross-cutting opportunities	Governance	Estimated outcomes
		• Creative and ICT—Small investments to extend EPIC's services and presence in the region; develop ICT competence of youth and business • Forestry and wood processing—Incentivise expansion of native timber forestry and processing; allow harvesting of windblown timber • Horticulture, food and beverage—Incremental growth through social enterprise; development of new niches; promoting horticulture as a business opportunity; WC brand for horticulture aligned to tourism brand. • Education—International education; inbound and outbound study tours; practical experience courses • Fishing and aquaculture—Develop a sustainable whitebait fishery	to support R&D in mining • Economic development governance that brings together efforts of regional and district council and development West Coast • Māori engagement to support and encourage investment on the WC		

[a]Ministry for Social Development.
[b]Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment.
[c]Ministry for Primary Industries.
[d]Ministry of Education.
[e]New Zealand Trade and Enterprise.
[f]Economic Development Agency for Eastern Bay of Plenty.
[g]Ministry of Transport.
[h]Department of Conservation.

As evidenced from Table 1, the Regional Growth Strategies are clearly indicative of a sectoral focus to drive regional economic development in already existing areas of economic activity, with clear overlap and potential for regions to be competing with each other to secure external investment to drive business growth. There is little attention paid to local context or place, or engagement with stakeholders outside of dominant economic sectors. Regional development is defined purely in terms of prospects for economic growth, with the assumption that growth opportunities will lead to improved outcomes for communities. For example, the West Coast strategy is predominantly based on expanding existing (or past) industries in forestry, mining, horticulture and tourism based on improved access to resources or associated investments in marketing and branding. Such a focus reflects the interests of the regional governance group, that consists of the Regional Council (but not the three District Councils), the dairy, mining and energy industries, iwi and construction firms (West Coast Economic Development Action Plan, 2017). The governance group was criticised by local mayors for decisions made by an "unelected group…[that] has kept elected representatives out of the loop" (Carroll, 2018, online).

A Treasury report in 2016 (NZ Treasury, 2016) identified that regional variation in living standards and economic performance across and within regions would raise the potential for government intervention, particularly where there is evidence of spatial market or government failures. While

Central government investment was minimal prior to 2017, the Regional Growth Strategies did put the regions firmly back on the political agenda.

With the election of a new coalition government in late 2017, regional development received an added focus and boost in funding through the PGF which is discussed below. In the government briefing document for the new incoming Minister for Regional Economic Development, the explicit sectoral approach to lift economic performance was preferred, although it was recognised that it did impede cross-sectoral initiatives and attempts to diversify economies. It was noted that the historical approach to improving regional economic performance has "largely been agnostic about location and geography" (MBIE, 2017b, p. 11). Continuing with a sectoral focus suggests that it was regarded as the best means to "increase the number of jobs, income and investment in the regions" (MBIE, 2017b, p. 12), although it was also recognised that it could be improved by applying a regional lens to better unlock a region's potential.

7 | PROVINCIAL GROWTH FUND

The new coalition government that took office in late 2017 marked a pronounced shift in resources, if not in approach to regional development in NZ. The Provincial Growth Fund is a \$3 billion investment into regional economic development over 3 years to "support productive, sustainable and inclusive growth" and to "lift the productivity potential in the regions" (MBIE, 2019). The fund is designed to support initiatives prioritised by regions through the previously established Regional Growth Strategies and Action Plans alongside Central government defined projects to address social and infrastructural deficits at a regional level (MBIE, 2019). In the first year of the PGF, approximately \$984 million of funding was announced. The discussion that follows is based on announced funding in 2018, the first year of the PGF, an information was sourced from the Provincial Growth Fund website (www.growregions.govt.nz) and project documentation (https://www.growregions.govt.nz/about-us/data-stats-information/project-documentation/). While the announced funding and amounts are accurate on a project basis, the relative percentages related to themes and categories should be treated as indicative, as projects often cross multiple categories.

PGF investments fall into three different classes that consist of a mixture of projects identified as priorities by regional governance groups and funding that meets the needs of Central government. First, there are investments into Regional Projects and Capability, which are smaller economic development projects, feasibility studies and capacity building investments, accounting for 6.7% of announced funding thus far. Examples include feasibility studies for the development of the Napier National Aquarium (\$350 thousand) in Hawkes Bay and feasibility studies for upgrades to the harbour in Greymouth and Westport (\$125 thousand) on the West Coast (Grow Regions, 2019).

The second category is sector investment, which are larger-scale, high priority projects that have a high value economic opportunity associated with a commercial component. These investments account for 38% of investments thus far. Examples include a Mānuka tree planting training programme (\$1.9 million) in Northland and a mussel farming and production facility (\$19 million) in Bay of Plenty (Grow Regions, 2019).

The final category is for infrastructure that supports social and economic connectivity (e.g., transportation and communications), accounting for 55% of investments thus far. Examples include a Kiwi Rail freight hub (\$40 million) in Manawatu-Whanganui and road intersection improvement (\$9 million) in Northland (Grow Regions, 2019).

In addition to these three categories of PGF investments, there are wider government initiatives funded through PGF allocations. These include: the One Billion Trees (1BT) Fund that aims to create jobs in the regions, mitigate climate change and optimise land use (\$480 million has been allocated across multiple regions); He Pounamu Rangatahi (HPR) is a pilot initiative focused on tackling youth employment in the provinces (\$13 million); and the Sector Workforce Engagement Programme, which is a cross-government initiative to increase the skills of employees in the regions (accounted for in other announced funding allocations; MBIE, 2019).

Funds can be applied for from all regions, although the three largest cities are excluded. In addition the six lowest performing regions economically are prioritised in project assessment and are referred to as the "surge regions". Table 2 below details the amount of funds allocated to each region in 2018, the percentage of the national total that went to each region and the per capita allocation.

Based on an analysis of the first year of the PGF, funding has generally matched priorities identified in the Action Plans that emerged from the Regional Growth Programme. We have in general, categorised the announced PGF as either: (a) enablers and infrastructure support or as (b) sector and industry development to align with categories from the Growth Programme and Action Plans. Enablers and infrastructural support includes projects that support the connectivity goals of each region, the "drivers" of industry and/or the required support to either further or establish new industry (e.g., digital connectivity, advanced skills and capability building, transport investments and improvements to administrative processes). Sector and Industry Development include the specific sector and industry investments within the regions to either explore new options or improve existing

TABLE 2 PGF announced funding 2018 by region, from the highest to least allocation (surge regions are bold)

Region	Amount allocated	Total allocated (%)	Funding per capita (based NZ stats 2018 estimates)
Tairāwhiti	$165,105,709	25.46	$3,362.64
West Coast	$138,265,000	21.32	$4,241.26
Other	$125,747,000	19.39	n/a
Horizons (M-W)	$60,763,600	9.37	$239.34
Bay of Plenty	$60,053,524	9.26	$196.46
Northland	$50,665,000	7.81	$282.87
Taranaki	$23,165,000	3.57	$193.69
Southland	$14,159,976	2.18	$142.86
Hawke's Bay	$5,900,000	0.91	$35.56
Waikato	$2,621,850	0.40	$5.59
Otago	$1,080,000	0.17	$4.71
Nelson	$837,200	0.13	$16.13
Canterbury	$200,000	0.03	$0.32
Total	$648,563,859		
1BT allocations	$84,800,000		
1BT available fund	$238,000,000		
HPR fund	$13,260,000		
PGF total[a]	$984,623,859	As of January 22, 2019	

Abbreviation: PGF, Provincial Growth Fund.
[a]Totals and details of projects are derived from MBIE's list of announced projects as of January 22, 2019. Details of all funding announcements can be found here: https://www.growregions.govt.nz/about-us/funded-project-announcements/.

industry (e.g., tourism, forestry, primary industries and manufacturing). In the following section, we illustrate the scope and type of projects that have been allocated funding from the PGF in 2018.

8 | ENABLERS AND INFRASTRUCTURAL SUPPORT

Bringing together improved infrastructure in terms of digital connectivity and transportation infrastructure with advanced skills and capacity building are a common focus for regional development interventions (Gillespie, Richardson, & Cornford, 2001). Improved infrastructure and digital connectivity reduce the gap between urban and rural regions and provide greater mobility for goods, services and knowledge, which are often seen to be barriers for regional development. Salemink, Strijker, and Bosworth (2017) identify the dual problem of the existence of infrastructure and the skills and capacity to take advantage of improved infrastructure as being critical for rural and regional development and suggest that greater attention needs to be placed on developing customised policies and investments that are responsive to the specifics of places and communities to achieve development outcomes. However, addressing the digital divide and investments in improving ICT connectivity are not a quick fix. Issues around access, capacity and skills to take advantage of improved connectivity in a physical and digital sense are uneven and require greater investments beyond infrastructure if rural and regional transformations are to occur (Anderson, Wallace, & Townsend, 2016; Malecki, 2003).

8.1 | Digital connectivity (nation-wide)

As part of the nation-wide initiative to roll out digital technology, many regions highlighted the importance of digital connectivity for regional development. Over $150m has been invested as part of rolling out high-tech fibre internet connection across NZ for the second phase of the Rural Broadband Initiative (2018–2022), with around $40–45m of this coming from the PGF (Crown Infrastructure Partners, 2018). According to Regional Action Plans, increased digital connectivity will enhance business and tourism opportunities by offering infrastructural resilience and allow for streamlining of processes and greater reach for skills and professional development training. Regions like the West Coast and Southland have also seen additional investment into increasing mobile coverage and more advanced fibre coverage across the Milford highway (Grow Regions, 2019). Projects in this category are examples of cross regional investments that are driven from Central government to address digital infrastructure deficits that serves as the foundation for economic development in rural areas.

8.2 | Advanced skills and capability building (nation-wide)

A common theme amongst the regional action plans is a lack of skilled staff to fill vacant positions, especially within industries like forestry, manufacturing and horticulture. By building capabilities and teaching new/advanced skills, especially for Māori, the PGF aims to increase both the resilience of industry and employability in the regions. Within the PGF, $13m has been allocated for He Poutama Rangitahi (HPR) for youth employment across 19 initiatives, with much of this focused in Eastern Bay of Plenty and Hawke's Bay. The Sector Workforce Engagement Programme aims to increase the skill set of employees more broadly by working across government departments and is embedded within other PGF funded projects. This aligns with the goals and objectives of the PGF of increasing Māori participation/development and enhancing economic resilience/job opportunities (Grow Regions, 2019). HPR funding is additional to PGF funding for projects in instances where there is a clear opportunity to support young people and employers to develop youth employment pathways (Grow Regions, 2019).

8.3 | Transport (prominent in: Northland, Waikato, Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, Manawatū-Whanganui, West Coast, Canterbury, Southland)

NZ is a country still heavily reliant on trucks and roads for transportation of goods through key channels of the country (e.g., Waikato being a hub due to its location between Auckland, Tauranga, and Wellington). In an effort to reduce emissions from transport, the PGF has focused on rail and the viability of new rail endeavours has been explored as a more environmentally friendly transportation investment. Transportation investments are focused on new transportation infrastructure (like rail in Northland, Southland, and Manawatū-Whanganui) or to increase their capacity to distribute (like new distribution centres in Waikato and Manawatū-Whanganui) based on new or improved road networks. Despite this attempt to shift transportation from road to rail, a $137m grant to Gisborne/Tairāwhiti stands out amongst most other grants/allocations as the largest—this is to significantly improve roading in the region, in part to provide greater transportation for forestry (Grow Regions, 2019).

8.4 | Improved administrative services (prominent in: Waikato, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Manawatū-Whanganui, West Coast)

While this is one of the only themes without a strict economic or commercial output, a common theme amongst regional action plans was a noted lack of capacity within councils to engage in regional development. For example, Waikato was noted to have competing tourism strategies across district and regional councils due to different understandings of strengths and opportunities. The PGF has contributed funding to support greater coherence for regional development by either employing people (e.g., the "General Manager for Transitional Economy" in Taranaki) or assistance in creating strategies for the future e.g., assisting Nelson/Tasman/Marlborough and Otago to create economic action plans (Grow Regions, 2019).

9 | SECTOR AND INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Alongside investments in enablers and infrastructure, the PGF investments have also supported specific economic sectors and industries in various regions. These investments are intended to either explore new economic opportunities or to catalyse further grow in existing sectors or industries. These approaches reflect a tension between supporting the comparative advantage of regions, where the specialisation in the specific assets and resources of a region are used to drive economic activity and developing and improving the competitiveness of regions in new areas to sustain competitive advantage (Kitson, Martin, & Tyler, 2004). By placing attention on the range of resources, skills networks, cultural and social facilities partnerships and institutional arrangements, the focus is on the process of regional development rather than on the products or resources that regions have to offer as the outcome of regional development (Markey et al., 2006).

9.1 | Tourism and culture (nation-wide)

The most common focus for economic development was enhancing tourism or the "visitor industry". Every Regional Action Plan noted the potential for tourism/cultural outputs to enhance prosperity and, for this, many initiatives and projects have been supported by the PGF. For example, funds have been allocated towards cultural centres (e.g., the $10m Hundertwasser Arts Centre in Whangarei or the $5m for renovations of the Taranaki Cathedral), redevelopment of existing tourism areas (e.g., the $19m towards Rotorua Lakefront or the $25m towards Dolomite Point in Punakaiki) and feasibility studies/business cases for future tourism prospects e.g., a Marine Centre in Kaikoura, Tararua's Tourism and Trails strategy, the "Gisborne Tourism Product Development" to help establish a clear strategy (Grow Regions, 2019).

9.2 | Forestry and 1BT fund (prominent in: Northland, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, Manawatū-Whanganui)

One of the few cross-region initiatives is the 1BT fund. Forestry is a key focus of the PGF and Northland, Bay of Plenty and Gisborne/Tairāwhiti have seen a large share of the funding as they are identified as the regions most suitable for forestry expansion. The 1BT Fund is a continuation on from the Afforestation Grants Scheme announced at the opening of the PGF, and $480m across 3 years is distributed to land owners and partnership projects, Crown Forestry joint ventures and hill country erosion programmes (Grow Regions, 2019).

9.3 | Other primary industries (prominent in: Northland, Bay of Plenty, East Coast, Manawatū-Whanganui, West Coast)

Strengthening other industries outside of agriculture has become an important strategy for economic diversification for several parts of the country. Many of the examples in the first year are feasibility studies into the viability of new industries: Mānuka and Kanuka oil production in Northland; aquaculture developments in Whakatohea (Bay of Plenty); apiculture in Tairāwhiti; horticulture in Manawatū-Whanganui; and the Southland-based nationwide feasibility study of sheep and goat farming (Grow Regions, 2019).

9.4 | Manufacturing (prominent in: Waikato, Taranaki, Manawatū-Whanganui, West Coast)

Much like the primary industry foci within some regions, other regions have focused on other production outputs. Most of the PGF initiatives focusing on manufacturing are either supporting existing industry or looking towards the future to achieve environmental goals. The most significant example of this is Taranaki—with the end of new oil and gas exploration heavily affecting the region, the Regional Action Plan and the PGF has focused on developing alternatives such as hydrogen production/clean energy to alleviate some of the expected economic losses from these energy transitions. Food production and processing is a key focus of Manawatū-Whanganui alongside the increase in horticultural outputs and feasibility studies into a food innovation hub in Hawke's Bay (Grow Regions, 2019).

10 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While it is far too early to assess the impacts and outcomes of the Provincial Growth Fund, the re-emergence of regional development on the political and policy agenda over the last 5 years does provide an opportunity to reflect on how the processes, objectives and goals reflect particular interpretations of the meaning and purpose of regional development in the country.

While investment in the regions is certainly needed, allocations of funding to date reflect a preference for investment in a handful of pre-existing key economic sectors. While the funding is likely to enhance economic performance of these industries, particularly with infrastructure support, regional development in NZ does demonstrate a degree of path dependence and lock-in. The approach clearly represents a continued adherence to sectoral development and the substantial funding for regions has the power to shape regional development strategies and objectives in pursuit of central government funding, leaving only limited opportunities for alternatives. The continued adherence to sectoral driven development and path dependence has the potential to displace alternative visions of the future of regional development in specific regions. The continued reliance on Regional Growth Strategies and Action Plans, developed by industry leaders to identify future priorities, has the potential to constrain place-based development options that might emerge based on regional collaboration, renewed sense of place and engagement of a broader range of community stakeholders in shaping regional futures and to improve local well-being. In this regard, NZ's approach to regional development is out of step with moves towards place based development and new regionalism internationally (Zirul et al., 2015). The risk does exist that the pursuit of PGF funding guided by sectoral interests will erode endogenous approaches, capacity and resources for knowledge production, creativity and entrepreneurship that are critical for new and evolving economic trajectories (Turok et al., 2017).

There is potential to bring together concepts of new regionalism and new localism, and recognition of the potential of them both working in parallel as a means of advancing the next stages of regional development in NZ. As Wheeler (2002) suggests, implementation is more likely to come about through incremental increases in social capital, institutions, frameworks, and ad hoc partnerships between different scales rather than through top-down funding initiatives. The absence of a clear regional strategy, beyond growing the regional economy, suggests that there is space to pay more attention to place-based components of regional development, quality of life issues for existing residents and to focus on regional wellbeing. In parallel, new localism offers potential to address local development challenges through inward focused actions (Clarke, 2013). It prioritises local action to retain and improve services and enhance quality of life, drawing on local management, representation and community to drive endogenous development, where local resources, labour, political culture and governance are able to define the place of the local in relation to global economies (Nel, Connelly, & Stevenson, 2019).

While the PGF has made notable investments in infrastructure and services across regions, which should lead to a more connected and integrated regional experience, the OECD Rural 3.0 (2016) framework goes further by stressing the need for investments in partnership development across places and more concerted investment in capacity building to support context specific and bottom-up development.

While the new Minister for Regional Development argued that "the reason you intervene is…because of the last

30 years of the growth of capitalism… basically left these places neglected" (Scoop, 2017), the initial roll out of the PGF does not seem to indicate a clear policy about the meaning of regions and the role of regional residents in the national economy. The persistent uneven regional development in NZ requires more than just funding. It also requires a re-thinking of the meaning of regions and their place in the national fabric. How might the re-discovery of regions by central government reshape regions as places to address the underlying structural imbalances that has led to widening gaps in quality of life within and across regions? To what degree should governance be rescaled to respond?

The "learning regions" concept might be useful to help overcome and avoid political lock-ins in old industrial areas as it can allow policy actors to be strongly, but flexibly linked with each other while being open to both intraregional and interregional learning processes. Policy-makers in learning regions are involved in learning from institutional errors made in the past to avoid path dependent development (Hassink, 2005). The concept of learning regions that embraces new actors and new approaches may be particularly useful in the NZ context through efforts to address past marginalisation of Māori in regional development efforts.

Finally, the growth imperative of regional development in NZ should be considered. All Growth Strategies, Action Plans and PGF funding are based on the objective of supporting economic growth. However, as Leick and Lang (2018) state in the European context, economic and demographic growth is no longer a certainty, which requires a rethinking of economic development prospects. There are multiple reasons for growth, stagnation, decline and peripheralisation, and there is a clear need to think of a future beyond growth. This entails more than symptomatic responses to decline, and requires developing approaches to planning and strategy that are not embedded in growth-oriented paradigms. Doing so, places greater emphasis on non-core areas as entities themselves, rather than in comparison and contrast with growing cores. In particular, a focus on social economies, place development and redistribution need to become more high-profile considerations in regional development strategies.

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ENDNOTE

[1] The use of "zombie towns" to describe places that appear to have little economic life, yet still maintain their existence was the focus of a series of media stories in 2014 that began to ask questions about what should be done about NZ's struggling small towns.

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