

Marginal returns? Institutional dynamics, peripherality, and place-based development in Canada's and Australia's natural resource-dependent regions

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In the context of the rapid expansion of the natural gas economy around the globe, and the equally dramatic neoliberalisation of governmental activity over the past four decades, we examine the impact of the LNG/CSG boom of the 2010s on institutional relationships within the rural communities and economies of the Peace River region of British Columbia, Canada, and the Surat Basin, Queensland, Australia. Conceptually influenced by staples theory and evolutionary economic geography, and drawing on intensive fieldwork conducted by the authors in both case study regions, we chart the socio-spatially uneven distribution of benefits, harms and responsibilities associated with LNG/CSG expansion in both regions, focusing on the extent to which formal and informal government and governance institutions were able to overcome conditions of lock-in and inertia and capitalize on, and locally embed the benefits of, the boom. We find that while the sheer magnitude and pace of the boom initially caught formal and informal institutions off guard, over time some regional and local institutions generated multiscalar and horizontal relationships that enabled them to adapt and capture important and long-term economic benefits. Other regions, however, for a range of reasons, predominantly felt the negative consequences of LNG/CSG development, and felt largely abandoned by regional and central government institutions. Overall, our chapter reflects on the vital role of institutional relations and dynamics in shaping the evolving uneven geography of resource development.

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