Power and influence tactics in the promotion of regional development: An empirical analysis of the work of Finnish regional development officers

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Abstract

Increased complexity and rapid pace of change demand more from people responsible for regional development at various levels of activity. This paper has its roots in a belief that the more complex situations are, the more regional development is dependent on the leadership and network management capacity of key individuals. Studying more deeply the roles that various individuals, and the coalitions formed by them, have in institutionalisation, deinstitutionalisation and reinstitutionalisation processes might provide us with additional analytical leverage in regional development studies. This paper focuses on diffuse networks of dispersed powers from a Finnish regional development officer’s point of view. Regional development officers are those people whose job it is to boost the economic development of their respective regions in Finland.

The research questions discussed here are: (a) What kind of power is exercised by Finnish regional development officers; and (b) how do regional development officers aim to gain influence for their efforts to promote regional development? The empirical research is based on data gathered (a) through 41 interviews with Finnish actors responsible for the promotion of economic development in city governments, technology centres, regional development agencies, and ministries and other national bodies, and (b) through internet survey of development officers at local, regional and national levels (531 respondents, response rate 51.8%). The survey was designed to solicit information about power and influence tactics in the context of regional development. The empirical analysis shows, for example, how interpretive power and network power are more important for regional development officers than institutional and resource power, and how indirect influence tactics surpass direct tactics.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade or two there has been an increasing interest towards institutions in the context of local and regional development. Following Jessop’s (2004, p. 23) thinking, this ‘turn’ culminates not only in the rather simplistic notion that institutions matter in regional development, but also in further scrutiny of their relevance and many manifestations. Of course, this broad agenda can be, and has been, approached from several angles (cf., Wood and Valler, 2004). The increasing interest in institutions, and especially in soft institutions (Gertler and Wolfe, 2004), directs our attention also towards self-reflexive individuals, or as Amin (2001, p. 1240) puts it, towards ‘the process of organizing/instituting as it unfolds, and on the influences and implications of such organizing/instituting’, and therefore, by studying more deeply the roles that various individuals, and coalitions formed by them, have in institutionalisation, deinstitutionalisation and reinstitutionalisation processes might provide us with additional analytical leverage.

In regional development, the question is about ‘a mixture of highly diffused and reflexive governance capability resulting in inter-institutional overlap and contact … and forms of leadership in which the main task is not to dominate but to guide, arbitrate and facilitate’ (Amin and Hausner, 1997, p. 17, quoted in Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones, 2004, p. 106). Philo and Parr (2000, p. 514) suggest that it might be worthwhile to investigate particular institutional geographies as ‘a spiderly network of dispersed intentions, knowledges, resources and powers’. All this leads, as Cumbers et al. note (2003), towards an acknowledgement that such issues as power and politics have remained in the shadows in studies of local and regional development. Consequently, the many delicate and complex but highly important issues related to power and influence emerge as important.

The issues raised above are not only academically interesting, but they also have a strong policy relevance. In many policy-making arenas, actors have taken pains to find ways in which to transform old institutions so as to make them fit better the emerging
economic order that is fairly commonly labelled as the knowledge-based economy (Cooke, 2002). The most difficult question in these efforts often is not what should be done, and why, but how to do it all – how a fragmented group of actors, resources, competences, ideas and visions can be pulled together, how people can be mobilised, how a new perception concerning the region and its future can be created for needed changes – who and/or what organisations are capable and respected enough to do it. This is particularly true in a more self-reliance-oriented regional development context that has a strong belief in endogenous development models.

The point of departure here is that the need to shape institutions, combined with increased complexity and the rapid pace of change, demands more from people responsible for regional development at various levels of activity. This paper has its basis in a belief that the more complex situations are, the more regional development is dependent on the leadership and network management capacity of key individuals. This is in line with Wood’s and Vallee’s (2004, p. 3) idea that regional competitiveness is grounded in the responsive capacity of regions. And as is argued here, responsive capacity requires competent people alongside effective systems and policies.

From these premises, this paper focuses on a diffuse network of dispersed intentions and powers from the point of view of a particular group, namely Finnish regional development officers (RDO). They are people whose job it is to boost the economic development of their respective regions in Finland. RDOs usually do not have either large resources or formal power to influence, and therefore studying the resources of power that these people have, the ways in which they bring influence to bear, provides us with clues concerning what people actually do in order to influence regional development. This knowledge is one of the steps in setting a wider agenda for future studies on leadership in regional development. Of course, other groups of importance might have been selected. Civic entrepreneurs, local and regional politicians, and entrepreneurs could all have been interesting targets of study. Regional development officers were selected because there is substantial demand on their part for insights into how to manage complex networks.

Consequently, the research questions discussed here are: (a) What kind of power is exercised by Finnish regional development officers; and (b) how do regional development officers aim to gain influence for their efforts to promote regional development? To answer these questions, attention is first targeted at embedded agency, and then the key concept of this endeavour, power, is framed. In Section 4, data and methodology is introduced, and Section 5 discusses the position of the Finnish regional development officers. Sections 6 and 7 report the main empirical observations and finally, in Section 8, wider conclusions are drawn from this exercise.

2. Embedded agency

Regions all over the world adapt to the changing global economy, and as already indicated in Section 1, transforming and reshaping institutions to better fit the changing circumstances are usually seen to be important in these endeavours. All of this also highlights institutional flexibility as an important factor in long-term economic development (Boschma, 2004). Indeed, currently it is commonly perceived that economic development is shaped by a variety of institutional routines and social conventions (North, 1994). Institutions are often seen as sources of stability and order (Scott, 2001, p. 181). As institutional theorists see it, behaviour is substantially shaped by taken-for-granted institutional prescriptions. According to Battilana (2006, p. 13), in neo-institutional studies it was for a long time implicitly assumed that individuals and organisations tend to comply with the institutional pressures to which they are subject.

However, as DiMaggio and Powell (1991) note, in the final analysis, institutions are products of human agency, and from this premise institutions can be approached as outcomes of complex social processes. Streeck and Thelen (2005, p. 16) point out that institutions are ‘continuously created and recreated by a great number of actors with divergent interests, varying normative commitments, different powers, and limited cognition’. As they also point out, institutions are shaped by both ‘rule makers’ and ‘rule takers’. The endeavours to shape the institutional base for regional development reflect the many strategies adopted locally by relevant groups of actors aiming to break out from the past path and create new ones. The many ambitions of collaborating and/or competing actors to shape institutions for regional development are a form of ‘embedded agency’. The champions of regional development are constrained by the very same institutions they aim to change (see more concerning embedded agency in, Seo and Creed, 2002; Baccausa, 2006; Leca and Naccache, 2006).

As we well know, institutions are notoriously difficult targets for conscious change efforts, and from this premise, one of the central challenges for regional development studies is to show how and why embedded actors become motivated and enabled to promote change, and to that end we also need to discover how various individuals and groups both exercise power and aim to influence. So, even though it is relatively often assumed that institutions select behaviour (March and Olsen, 1996, pp. 251–255), actors have some freedom to operate (Jessop, 2004, p. 40), and here the reflexive capacity and capabilities of regional development officers may shed light on institutional change processes too. Their freedom to operate is often assumed to be limited in a world dominated by politics, major economic players and formal policies. In practice, at least in Finland, regional development officers aim to influence institutional change through other actors (Sotarauta et al., 2007). Jessop (2004, p. 47) provides further guidelines for individual level analysis by arguing that, ‘strategic-relational analysis would examine reflexivity as well as recursivity. In other words, it would address agents’ capacity to engage in learning and reflect institutional context, institutional design, etc.’. Locally relevant actors can shape development paths by mobilising ‘flexible institutional strategies’ through an appropriate blend of structures, social capital and funding sources (MacLeod, 2004, p. 66).

As pointed out by Healey et al. (1995), and from a different perspective also by Sotarauta and Kantola (2007), the mobilisation of flexible institutional strategies can no longer be described as ‘top-down’ or ‘direct and control’ models. Flexible institutional strategies, however, are not easily mobilised. Strategy preferences are formed and reformed by balancing different interests and seeking third solutions. Often they emerge from dynamic processes and are thus also dependent on the logic of the situation and political judgement as to what is feasible and what is not, and therefore the question of the nature and forms of power in the context of regional development may also appear to be among the key questions in regional development studies. Flexible institutional strategies require collective action that crosses many institutional, sectoral and organisational borders. In Finland, regional development officers, with other relevant actors, are expected to mobilise these kinds of strategies, and hence the issues of influence and power are important in their work. Consequently, there is also a need to see leadership in a new light. Even if leadership is often seen as a formally constituted hierarchical power, in a world characterised by inter-institutional overlaps and distributed power, and many conflicting or mutually supporting aims and policies, leadership needs to be reconceptualised (concerning leadership in regional development, see Sotarauta, 2005; Benneworth, 2007).
3. Framing the concept of power

3.1. The basic tenets of power

The concept of power is among the key concepts in social sciences, with its several dimensions and definitions (cf., Wrong, 1997), and there is a rich array of ways in which to conceptualise and study it. Drawing on Wrong (1997, p. 2), power can be defined as ‘the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others’. Wrong (1997, pp. 3–10) points out that the intentionality and effectiveness of power needs to be scrutinised in order to fully understand the link between power and influence. Dahl’s (2005) well-known approach to power reflects this premise. He sees power as amounting to control of the behaviour of other actors. So, when an actor A is able to break the resistance of an actor B, i.e. to cause B to do something they would not otherwise do, A is able to make the target act as he/she wants in spite of the will of B (see also, Palahimiento and Wiberg, 2005).

Lukes (1986, p. 1) challenges the intentionality of power, and asks whether power actually is the production of intended effects, as Dahl (2005) and Russel (1986) seem to indicate. As Lukes asks (1986, p. 1), ‘would it not be possible to exercise power without deliberately aiming to do so’. In addition to unintentional effects, persuasion, requests, and persuasive pieces of advice and/or convincing arguments ought to be included in the elaboration of power (Lukes 1986, p. 2; Wrong 1997). And, as famously noted by Foucault (1980) and Parsons (1986), the power of social systems and structures are also essential elements in studies of power. Foucault (1980) has maintained that, ‘power is everywhere … because it comes from everywhere’. He speaks about covert power that works through people rather than only on them. Foucault claims that belief systems gain power when groups of people accept a belief system and take it for granted. These belief systems define the lifef system and take it for granted. These belief systems define the power (Lukes 1986, pp. 227–229). Rationality is penetrated by power, and therefore, as Flyvbjerg maintains, rationalisation presented as rationality is often a principal strategy in the exercise of power. The front may be open to public scrutiny, but in the backstage, hidden from public view, power and rationalisation dominate, and there the forms of power raised in Lukes’ third dimension may be consciously constructed and utilised. This kind of rationalised, and socially and conveniently constructed front does not necessarily imply dishonesty. It is not unusual to find individuals, organisations, and whole societies actually believing their own rationalisations (Flyvbjerg, 1989, pp. 227–229).

In their classic study of power, social psychologists French and Raven (1959) categorised power into five different bases or resources that power holders may rely upon. They divided later expert power into two modes of power, i.e. informational and expert power. Although this categorisation is based on organisation level analysis conducted decades ago, in a different time and context, it still offers a useful frame of contemplation.

**Legitimate power**
- Power of an individual based on the relative position and duties of the holder of the position within an organisation.
- Formal authority delegated to the holder of the position.

**Referent Power**
- Power (or ability) of individuals to attract others and build loyalty.
- Based on the charisma and interpersonal skills of the power holder.

**Expert Power** (this type of power is further broken down later on as Information Power)
- Individual’s power deriving from the skills or expertise of the person and the organisation’s needs for those skills and expertise.
- Unlike the other powers, this type of power is usually highly specific, and is limited to the particular area in which the expert is trained and qualified.

**Information Power**
- People with this type of power are well-informed, up-to-date, and also have the ability to persuade others.
- The difference between expert power and information power is subtle. One difference may be that people with Expert Power...
are perceived through their image of expertise to show credibility (i.e. a qualified doctor in a doctor’s uniform), while one with information power does not have a strict need to ‘look the part of a professional’, but they must keep up to date with latest knowledge in their field, and have confidence in debating or in persuasion.

**Reward Power**

- This mode of power depends upon the ability of the power wielder to confer valued material rewards. It refers to the degree to which the individual can give others a reward of some kind.
- This power is obvious, but also ineffective if abused.

**Coercive Power**

- This form of power means the application of negative influences onto employees. It might refer to the ability to threaten or to withhold other rewards. It is the desire for valued rewards or the fear of having them withheld that ensures the obedience or the fear of those under power.
- It tends to be the most obvious, but least effective, form of power, as it builds resentment and resistance within the targets of coercive power (French and Raven, 1959; adapted from Wikipedia, 26 June 2008).

The above categorisation is a useful tool in the analyses of power, but, as Flyvbjerg (1989) has empirically demonstrated, power manifests itself in a relational and dynamic manner in time and space. His study of town planning practices and processes in Aalborg reveals the dense and dynamic net of omnipresent power relations. In his detailed analysis, Flyvbjerg shows how invisible mechanisms of the practical forms of power shape the course of events and social networks. In a Foucauldian manner, he claims that these power mechanisms are relatively independent of who holds power and who governs. Flyvbjerg’s (1989) ‘strategic-and-tactics approach’ challenges ‘who governs’ (Dahl, 2005) orientated studies that commonly see power as an entity, and hence it covers a wide spectrum of influence tactics in use over extended periods of time.

Flyvbjerg argues also that the relationship between power, knowledge and rationality ought to be seen in a more pragmatic light. Therefore, he maintains, attention should be directed more towards the rationality of power than power of rationality. His view is that power defines rationality; power concerns itself with defining reality rather than with discovering what reality ‘really’ is. This does not imply that power seeks out rationality and knowledge because rationality and knowledge are power. Rather, power defines what counts as rationality and knowledge, and thereby what counts as reality (Flyvbjerg, 1989, p. 227).

Power is a potential to influence, it is a latent resource that needs to be freed and utilised by means of other processes. Influence is here defined as a process in which the actor drawing on his/her latent resources by interaction skills and other social skills makes other actors see things, people, functions, etc., differently from before and as a result do something that they would not otherwise do. In any case, regional development officers need power to influence, but the question is, what kind of power?

**4. Data and methodology**

The target group of this study, regional development officers, is a heterogeneous group of people who work for local and regional development at (a) the local level, i.e. in the Finnish local government (municipalities are active in developing themselves, either alone or in co-operation with neighbouring municipalities), technology centres, Centre of Expertise Programmes, and other locally organised development programmes; (b) at the regional level, i.e. in the Regional Councils (joint municipal regional development authorities), Employment and Economic Development Centres (state development agencies at the regional level), and (c) at the national level, i.e. in the Ministry of the Interior1 (responsible for regional development at the national level), the national steering group of the Centre of Expertise Programme, and the Finnish Science Park Association.

The study comprised four main phases. The first phase was a literature review of leadership and power in regional development. In the second phase, 41 regional development officers were interviewed. The average duration of the interviews was 70 min, the longest interview lasting 3 h and the shortest one 40 min. Seven of the interviewees represented national level RDOs, and the remainder were from local or regional development agencies. The interviewees were from different regions of Finland, and they were directors or development managers in the above mentioned development agencies. In the interviews, a theme interviewing technique (cf., Hirsjärvi and Hurme 1995) was applied, and the themes were: (a) duties and functions an interviewee is responsible for, and division of labour in a given organisation, (b) strategic action, i.e. where does the vision and objectives guiding the work come from; (c) resources and the position of the given organisation and the interviewee in wider policy networks; (d) personal networks and collaboration patterns; (e) knowledge and learning, i.e. what are the most important sources of information and knowledge, as well as the key learning forums; (f) a discussion about the previous weeks schedule of the interviewee, what did he/she do, why, with whom and for what purpose. In all the above mentioned themes the aim was to find answers to such questions as: who influences whom and how in the name of regional development; what the person in question actually does to influence other actors and how he/she sees the other actors influencing her/him.

In the third phase of the study, an Internet survey was carried out. The survey was designed based on the insights gathered during the first two phases in order to solicit information about power and influence tactics in the context of regional development. In addition, competences needed in the development work and various bottlenecks in the daily work of the regional development officers were probed, but they are not discussed here. The data was grouped and the main resources of power and ways to influence other actors were identified with a combination of confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis. Finally, the results of the survey were cross-analysed with the interview data (see more detail in Sotarauta et al. (2007) (Table 1).

**5. The position of regional development officers in Finland**

In Finland, the Regional Development Act of 1994 attempted explicitly to create a system that first of all suits the EU’s regional policy framework, but that also increases the influence of local and regional level actors, improves the concentration of various regional development funds by programming, and increases co-operation between key-actors. Therefore, since the early 1990s there has been a move away from understanding regional development policy-making as a straightforward decision-making and planning process proceeding from policy design to decision-making, and finally to implementation, towards comprehending policy as a multi-agent, multiobjective, multivision and pluralistic process, in which the actual policy is shaped continuously in close co-operation with various parties. The coevolutionary nature of policy-making is not limited to horizontal relationships, but rather it reaches also into the vertical dimension of policy-making. Sotarauta and

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1 In 2008 the national responsibility for regional development was moved to the newly established Ministry of Employment and Economy.
Kautonen (2007) demonstrate how local developments and policies in Finland have earlier fed into larger developmental patterns, making it possible to talk about the co-evolution of national and local developments rather than simply about top-down or bottom-up policies.

In the new mode of governance, new partners are constantly sought, coalitions formed and dissolved at all levels of action, and hence such questions as what is to be done, and how, are constantly negotiated and communicated in various forums. In the 2000s, this kind of approach has become fairly well institutionalised within the Finnish regional development practices. Its every day practice is constantly sought after, and it seems to be evident that even though the new more interactive development approach has made the Finnish regional development policy system more active and dynamic than it was in the 1980s, the new modes of action have also raised many new challenges. All in all, in Finland, both by definition and in practice, the institutional promotion of regional development is based on shared power between various state authorities and between central and local government, and thus in practice there is a wide network of actors that are dependent on each other. For these reasons, power and influence emerge as crucial objects of study.

The complexities caused both by globalising economies and new modes of governance call for well-developed regional response capacity. Consequently, regional development officers, the only professionals of a comprehensive development approach in their regions, have been required to learn new capabilities, and especially new ways to earn such social positions in wider networks that might enable them to influence regional development with, by, and through other actors. The RDOs of today need to understand the logic of complex, constantly evolving systems involving a diverse range of actors in an endless series of social networks.

The interview data, for its part, strengthened the view that regional development policy in Finland is nowadays based on a network-like mode of action in which several interest groups take part and in which there are many kinds of policy networks crossing the organisational, regional and institutional boundaries. Our interviewees talked extensively about complex networks; they stressed the need to create them, to understand them, and to function in them. In the interviews it became evident, as also Kickert et al. (1997) point out, that there is no ‘third party’ controlling the network, but rather there is a process controlling itself, being full not only of enthusiasm and efforts to find new solutions but also confusion due to incoherence and conservatism.

Earlier case studies on policy networks and network management from such Finnish regions as North Ostrobotnia (Jurmu, 2007), South Ostrobothnia (Linnamaa and Sotarauta, 2000; Linnamaa, 2004), Pajät-Häme (Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen, 2007) and Tampere region (Sotarauta et al., 2003) show how regional development officers would like to have, one way or another, better directed and co-ordinated networks for regional development. They also show that RDOs in these regions are relatively incapable of expressing themselves clearly on how networks ought to be managed and led. They have a hard time positioning themselves in a new situation, but all in all, they would often like to change organisational institutions and to change major non-organisational institutions such as conventions, mind-sets, interaction patterns, etc., that create lock-ins. Drawing on our interview data, it can be concluded that networked promotion of regional development is shaped by the following circumstances:

- the core coalition of a region, its composition, and the social and economic backgrounds of its members;
- the nature and functionality of wider strategic policy networks in a region, and the character of relationships between its members;
- the roles that leading persons and the coalition formed by them are playing in the wider policy networks, and especially their relationship to national and international decision- and policy making; and
- the resources and competences that network members bring to the network.

The interviews also aimed to expose the daily activities of individuals engaged in regional development. Most of the interviewees divided their personal operational environment into four independent but overlapping categories: (a) one’s own organisation, (b) the regional policy system, (c) formal policy networks, and (d) informal networks. The organisation that pays the salary and to which one is accountable is of course important to any development officer and a self-evident determinant in how people behave and aim to influence the course of events. The national and European development systems were seen as an institutional framework that both enables and constrains regional and local efforts. Interestingly, if an organisation was seen as a home base and the system as one of the main playing fields and a source of resources, networks were seen as channels for new ideas, information, resources, insights, and effective implementation.

All the development spheres briefly raised above are important in the daily work of RDOs. It is worth noticing, however, that the rules, norms and codes of behaviour tend to be different in the different operational environments identified above, and our interviewees constantly stressed the importance of the abilities to combine informal to formal, and vice versa. From the individual point of view, the Finnish promotion of regional development appears as a more or less connected series of processes and networks that often are fairly indistinct, and are difficult to read and make sense of.

In the words of an RDO from a regional council:

There is a formal and informal world [in promotion of regional development] . . . it is a continuous process of communication, what’s up in your organisation, and what they are planning over there, what issues are emerging, and things like that . . . and then we have the formal side of the coin. We have several official groups in which we discuss all this through. We have politicians; it is important to discuss what they want, what their will is. And the officially binding decisions are made, official strategies . . . But, but, if we had only these official meetings, nothing would happen, they don’t create co-operation, or proper philosophical discussions about what this is all about. A huge amount of background work is required to create something new, nobody gets credit for that, it takes a lot of time from everybody involved. People can’t even see this kind of hidden work but without it no official decisions would be made.
Also, the significance of knowing first and foremost people and only second the organisations they represent was emphasised. To pull new ideas through a network, one needs to identify and locate the right people for it. One development director of a major Finnish city described the situation by noting:

In all these [organisations involved in regional development efforts] there are such persons who want to do more, who are willing to reach beyond their own work and to discuss, develop, think how to change this region. They are willing to take the responsibility, to be involved . . . So, it is not possible to say that certain kinds of organisations are more important than the others [in official promotion of regional development] but that certain people are the key.

Regional development officers strategise and organise, and hence they aim to mobilise the resources and competences external and internal to the region to promote some issues that are believed to be important to the region. In this work their position derives from their seniority, the status of the agency that they are working for and their expert status, and all this determines the network status of an individual RDO. The proposition is that network status is among the core conditions for the effective use of power.

6. Influence tactics used by regional development officers

In this section the survey data is employed to identify tactics that regional development officers use in their efforts to influence other actors.

Regional development officers stress the indirect methods of influencing. Most of the respondents (94.5%) regarded constructing an atmosphere of trust as an important way to influence other actors, and hence also regional development. If trust was highly influencing, most of the respondents (94.5%) regarded constructing an atmosphere of trust as an important way to influence other actors, and hence also regional development. If trust was highly stressing the importance of organising development work more efficiently. Taken together, all the influence tactics regarded as important are, in one way or another, indirect in nature. Strategy work, influencing communication and removing its obstacles, acting as a role model, etc., these were emphasised by most of the respondents. What is interesting is that various institutional and direct ways to influence were not seen as important as more indirect tactics. According to the survey, regional development officers do not rely much on delegating their own responsibilities to the other actors: provocation, invoking the regional development acts and/or development programmes, or the sense of responsibility of the key decision makers were not seen generally as important means of influence (for more information, see Table 2).

In institutional promotion of regional development, Lukes’ (1986) two first views of power are usually emphasised; the policy institutions value powers to act and decide, as well as the design of new institutions and strategies. The interview and survey data indicate, however, that from the RDO point of view inducing is a more important tactic than straightforward formulation of strategies not to mention coercion. RDOs see regional development as a subtle process, essential to which is the renewal of behavioural models, attitudes, and beliefs. Their view, based on their own experience, is rather Foucaultian in nature and stresses clearly Lukes’ third view. RDOs use many different kinds of influence tactics, but first and foremost they rely on communication, interaction and social skills.

Table 2 provides us with a detailed view of the influence tactics that RDOs regard as important in their work. To gain a more focused view on these influence tactics, the data was grouped and four new sum variables were created. These are: construction of context for co-operation, direct activation of actors, indirect activation of actors, and strategy work. They were first of all identified with content analysis of the interview data, and were verified with a combination of confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis (see more detail in Sotarauta et al., 2007). The new sum variables to measure influence tactics and core variables included in the new variables were constructed as follows:

*Construction of context for co-operation*

- Arbitrating conflicts that complicate development work.
- Removing communication obstacles between actors.

| Table 2 | Answers to the question: ‘In promotion of regional development, it is necessary, one way or another, to be able to mobilise the resources and competences of several organisations into the same direction. Assess, based on your own experiences, what measures are important in the efforts to influence other actors in the name of regional development (%)’.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5. Very important</th>
<th>3. Fairly important</th>
<th>1. Not important at all</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructing an atmosphere of trust (n = 531)</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising development work so that the roles of individual actors are clear (n = 529)</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding functional relationships with influential persons (n = 528)</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting as a role model for other actors (n = 531)</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channelling development funds controlled by one’s own devel. agency (n = 529)</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a vision to guide development activities of several actors (n = 531)</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Removing communication obstacles between actors (n = 528)</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>21.0</td>
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<td>Affecting general atmosphere via media (n = 527)</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presenting alternative views on futures, and promotion of regional development, thus influencing other actors (n = 528)</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>23.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raising differing viewpoints and bottlenecks into the development oriented discourse (n = 528)</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing with other actors before renewing one’s own strategy (n = 526)</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Providing other actors with new opportunities (n = 528)</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>26.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing other actors with expert help (n = 529)</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>32.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arbitrating conflicts that complicate development work (n = 529)</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organising collective strategy-making processes (n = 527)</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging other actors in public speeches and/or written pieces (n = 527)</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the level of expertise by organising education (n = 530)</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising open communication sessions (n = 527)</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activating new actors to participate in the official development work (n = 530)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing other actors by production of new information (n = 526)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoking the sense or responsibility of the key-actors (n = 527)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoking legislation and/or official development programmes (n = 526)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting other actors out of their comfort zone by provocation (n = 527)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegating one’s own responsibility to other actors (n = 521)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
– Organising development work so that the roles of individual actors are clear.

**Direct activation of actors**
– Invoking legislation and/or official development programmes.
– Invoking the sense of responsibility of the key actors.

**Indirect activation of actors**
– Encouraging other actors in public speeches and written pieces.
– Presenting alternative views on futures, and promotion of regional development, thus influencing other actors.
– Influencing other actors by production of new information.
– Affecting the general atmosphere via the media.

**Strategy work**
– Creating a vision to guide development activities of several actors.
– Organising collective strategy making processes.

These new sum variables\(^2\) clearly show how regional development officers appreciate indirect influence tactics more than direct ones. The average of construction of context for co-operation is 81.0, and strategy work is 78.1. Indirect activation of actors remains at a somewhat lower level, the average being 76.5. The average of direct activation of actors is as low as 53.4 (see Fig. 1).

What was striking was the fact that it was not possible to find statistically significant differences between influence tactics and regions, organisation types, seniority and position in one’s own organisation. Regional development officers were surprisingly unanimous on how to influence.

### 7. Power possessed by regional development officers

Drawing both from the survey and interview data, this Section focuses on the resources of power. The survey data shows that the Finnish regional development officers consider information and networks as their most important resources of power (see Table 3). Networks were stressed both as resources of new information and as an important support factor in pulling various ideas and initiatives through decision-making processes. Among the next most important resources of power was such expert information that enables RDOs not only to convince decision makers of the importance of required changes, but also of the personal role of the RDOs themselves in the development process. The most important resources of power support the above view that influence is indirect in nature. Such direct resources of power as an official institutional position, a power to change institutions governing the development activities, or an official position in designing regional development strategies and/or development programmes, were not seen as particularly important. Here it is important to keep in mind that those RDOs who responded to the survey are not those who always have power to act and decide, and therefore their approach is to influence legitimate power holders of the entire regional development system, local government, the corporate world, and/or academia.

Table 3 provides us with a view of the resources of power that RDOs regard as important in their efforts to influence the actors for regional development. As with influence tactics, a more focused view on the resources of power was aimed at by grouping the data and creating four new sum variables. These are interpretive power, network power, institutional power, and resource power. They were identified in the same way as in the case of influence tactics. The new sum variables measuring resources of power and the variables included in the new variables are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Official position that provides me with power to demand that other actors act differently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Official position that provides me with power to change institutions guiding development work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Official position that provides me with authority to organise official strategy processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Official position that provides me with authority to change the ways the development work is organised.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretive power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Such expert knowledge that enables me to convince the key persons of changes needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– New concepts, models and thinking patterns that make other actors see things differently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) The new sum variables were created by calculating the average of the basic variables and then multiplying it by 20 ((v\(_1 + v_2 + v_n)/n) \times 20$. 

Fig. 1. Generic influence tactics used by regional development officers and their relative importance.
Table 3
Answers to the question: ‘Assess what factors are important in your own work when you try to influence other actors in the name of regional development’ (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5. Very important</th>
<th>3. Fairly important</th>
<th>1. Not important at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Such personal networks that provide me with new information (n = 530)</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such personal networks that enable me to pull initiatives through (n = 528)</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such expert knowledge that enables me to convince the key persons of changes needed (N = 525)</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect of the other actors towards my expertise (n = 529)</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough time and money to achieve objectives set for me (n = 529)</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good relationships with representatives of the media (n = 528)</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power to decide how regional development funds are used (n = 529)</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority to reward other actors for work done for the region (n = 529)</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official position that provides me with authority to change the ways the development work is organised (n = 525)</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official position that provides me with authority to organise official strategy processes (n = 527)</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official position that provides me with power to change institutions guiding development work (n = 526)</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official position that provides me with power to demand that other actors act differently (n = 530)</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most important forms of power that RDOs need are interpretive power and network power. The median of both of these forms of power is 80.0, and most of the respondents considered these as the most important forms of power in their own work. Interpretive power was regarded as slightly more important than network power. The average of sum variable measuring interpretive power was 82.4, while in the case of network power it was 77.7. The average of resource power was 66.7, and institutional power remained as low as 58.0. RDOs are fairly unanimous in that possibilities to affect other actors’ thinking and networking exceed resources and institutions in importance (Fig. 2). As was the case with influence tactics, it was not possible to find statistically significant differences between resources of power and regions, organisation types, seniority and position in one’s own organisation.

This categorisation of powers differs somewhat from the categorisation of French and Raven (1959). Institutional power is a combination of legitimate power and reward power, but not coercive power. The interviewees unanimously shared the view that coercion only leads to exclusion from all the important networks. Interpretive power is closely linked to information power, but highlights the importance of creating new mindsets and ways of seeing various issues. Expert power and referent power are not separately raised here, but they were extensively discussed in the interviews. They are scarce resources among RDOs, and the interviewees saw that referent and expertise power are the outcomes of the four sets of power raised here. French and Raven (1959) did not mention network power, but in the early 21st century it emerges as highly important and can be interpreted as one dimension in a wider debate on social capital.

The combination of interpretive and network power seems to be a way in which to mould the preferences of the other actors. Promotion of regional development is a struggle between visions, development ideas and interests. Therefore, those actors who are able to draw the attention of other actors and frame their thinking are indeed influential. In the interviews, regional development officers talked intensively about mindsets, thinking patterns, perceptions, information, knowledge creation and other issues that are related to interpretive power. They saw that, if regional development and its institutions are to be transformed, they themselves need to be able to affect (a) the ways in which other people see the world (what it is like), (b) how knowledge is acquired and justified, and (c) what values dominate the development work (see also, Niiniluoto, 1989). Interestingly, the ambition of many of the interviewed RDOs is to change the deep structure of social and economic activity so as to create a better fit with the changing economic environment.

Overall, regional development officers are working to create a new context and interpretation for the economic development of their respective regions, and hence they work ‘to build a new plot for a development play’, as one of the interviewees put it, and therefore they support the importance of Lukes’ third dimension and Foucaultian ideas of power being everywhere. When one has learnt a new vocabulary and way of seeing things, it is easy to communicate everywhere and to interact with people, our way of doing and our way of talking being a bit different, it is easy to draw attention’ [Development manager in a town government].

For these purposes, regional development officers need to recognise dominant discourses and especially the dominant interpretations guiding the promotion of regional development, and to launch a new dialogue that might lead to a new hegemonic discourse on needed changes and measures in the region. Leading by interpretation is crucial, because actors need shared mental models to make sense of the ambiguous world and complex networks (Henry and Pinch, 2000, p. 136). Therefore, RDOs aim to seek differences and similarities in actors’ interpretations, acting in or-
order to synthesise different interpretations and goals derived from
them. They also aim to change and/or unify actors’ interpretations
of the region, its institutions, policy networks, etc. (see also, Klijn
and Teisman, 1997). In practice, RDOs are convening actors for dia-
logue, they mediate information and also create new knowledge;
they interpret, for example, academic thinking and talk to firms,
and vice versa. All this both requires interpretive power and builds
it. Interpretive power is fairly invisible by nature. It does not refer
to efforts to seek consensus, but to an effort to create common
ground for shared thinking and joint efforts to transform the insti-
tutions for future. Power to frame issues discussed, to lead sense-
making processes and hence to influence what issues are on the
agenda and what are not, and consequently also who are involved
in the interactive communication loop brings a significant amount
of power to an actor who can actually do all this. As one of the
interviewees, a development director in a city government, put
it: ‘If you really want to influence, you must talk and talk, at least
for two years. It takes two years to pull a new idea through this
community, and people then start realising what the situation is
and what should be done and they want to participate’.

To summarise, it is possible to argue that regional development
officers may achieve a strong position in policy networks if they
can create a new vocabulary and a new way of seeing the region
and its core activities, and if they can influence the prevailing per-
ceptions. All this is also important in the use of network power that
was strongly highlighted in the interviews as well. The interviewed
RDOs stressed particularly the significance of informal and per-
sonal contact networks as resources of new information and cred-
ibility. One of the interviewees crystallised the importance of one
of the key dimensions of networks by arguing ‘when one knows
the national-level decision makers personally, it brings you author-
ity and prestige in your own region’.

Neither interpretive power nor network power appears over-
night, gaining them is a long process. It requires personal interac-
tion with key people locally, regionally, nationally, and often also
internationally, and it also requires conscious building of trust.
Genuine trust and reciprocity is the core factor in long-term collab-
21) argue further that if only the preconditions for trust are in
place, the actors need no prior knowledge of each other for co-
operation. RDOs aim to create these conditions, and to connect
people with substantive knowledge and expertise important for
the region, and this is the way in which they believe they can boost
regional development.

8. Discussion and conclusion

The Finnish regional development officers are not able to rely as
much as is often believed on the authority brought to them either
by their own formal position, status or financial resources. This
study reveals the indirect nature of influence when it is studied
at the individual level. The main influence tactics are indirect in
nature, indirect activation of actors and strategy work being the
main tactics. It is not the authority of the organisation that regional
development officers are working for that induces compliance, but
instead quite often it is the content and style of the communication
that counts, and this is independently evaluated and accepted by
the other actors. Their expert power is rather based on dialogue
and interaction skill as much as on their expertise in substantial
matters, and therefore their power is ‘power to’ by nature and to
much lesser extent ‘power over’. The former stresses collective
and integrative action by being based on enabling, while the latter
refers to instrumental abilities to gain influence at the expense of
the others (Allen, 2003, pp. 51–52).

The study reported in this article shows, first of all that regional
development officers are not in a position to break the resistance
of other actors or use coercive influence tactics, and therefore they
are required to induce, or rather ‘seduce’, other actors towards
something new, towards unknown territories and to be involved
in collective development efforts. This may be due to the ways in
which regional development officers are embedded in the whole
set of institutions shaping regional development activity. They do
not, on the one hand, have adequate resources to make a difference
directly, nor on the other hand the motivation to risk their own po-

tition in the organisation, development system and official policy
networks. This is connected to the second general observation that
regional development officers do not have power to limit the alter-
atives of other actors, or even reasons to do so. Their mission is to
multiply the opportunities and alternatives for other actors, and
thus boost regional development overall; therefore they rather aim at creating the context for collective action than aim directly

![Fig. 2. Generic forms of power and their importance in the work of regional development officers.](image-url)
to direct the course of actions and events. In addition, RDOs work to make new opportunities so alluring that other actors ... for RDOs to focus on the act of making things happen, not just the ways in which they happen.

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References


