

From National Priority to Inclusive Regionality: Rethinking Economic Development in the 'Tkuma' Region

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This study argues that government centralization is reflected in the "Tkuma" (Revival) administration's strategic plan for developing the Gaza Envelope region. The plan illustrates a zero-sum dynamic between the central government and regional interests in economic development. As a result, regional interests are missing and not seen, as reflected in regional economic indicators. The first aspect of the case study is recognizing the region as the "Gaza Envelope" based on the criteria of the "national priority" resolution, defining it as an area within 7 km of the border fence with Gaza, while failing to acknowledge the region's borders based on commuting patterns and economic centers. The second aspect is the government's focus on investment in agriculture, which aligns with national priorities but misses the larger complex regional opportunities (and challenges). While there is no doubt about the importance of the aspects promoted in the plan, it lacks a focus on the impact on economic growth and overlooks economic sectors that engage a larger portion of the local population. The study offers initial directions of thought on the region's boundaries and economic structure.

Keywords: *Regional Development, Inclusive Development, Development Policy, Economic Regions, Governance, Spatial Policy, Decentralization*

The debate surrounding regionalism and spatial management has evolved significantly in recent years, marked by a shift from the Old Regionalism approach to New Regionalism (Pike et al., 2017). While Old Regionalism is characterized by a centralized approach in which the central government dictates policy and economic development at the regional level, New Regionalism emphasizes the decentralization of powers, cooperation between local authorities, and the empowerment of local or regional governments as key actors in local economic development. This shift reflects broader processes of globalization, democratization, and a growing recognition of the need for region-specific solutions (Daniels et al., 2019).

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A study examining the two largest government resolutions in the past decade regarding the development of the Negev and the Galilee—before the attacks of October 7, 2023—identified a central government approach in Israel defined as the “national priority approach to development.” This approach is characterized by a zero-sum game dynamic between national interests represented by the central government on the one hand and regional interests on the other (Abramson Brosh, 2022)¹. Key features of this approach include a lack of institutional recognition of regional divisions and unique regional identities, the absence of publicly accessible data at the regional level, and an economic logic that prioritizes nationalism and centralization over regionalism or localism.

The case study of this research focuses on the strategic plan of the “*Tkuma*” (*Revival*) Administration, established under the Prime Minister’s Office to oversee the rehabilitation of the Gaza Envelope following the October 7 attacks and the effects of the Iron Sword War. The research question explores how the national logic of the “*Tkuma*” Administration is reflected in its strategic plan and how it contrasts with an alternative analysis informed by the logic of New Regionalism. This article argues that similar to previous government resolutions 2262 and 546 (Prime Minister’s Office, 2013; 2017), the “*Tkuma*” Administration’s strategic plan illustrates the ongoing tension between national and local interests. Unlike previous studies that broadly analyzed government resolutions, this research specifically focuses on spatial and regional economic aspects. It demonstrates how the government and the “*Tkuma*” Administration initially aimed for rehabilitation and development without incorporating data that indicate the regional economic borders which differ from the region’s classification under the National Priority resolution (Prime Minister’s Office, 1992, 1993, 1994). It then shows how economic data is not reflected in a manner aligned with regional needs. This is evident in two main aspects: the first aspect is defining the region’s economic boundaries and economic centers, which affects the ability to support and enhance economic development and mobility. The second aspect is prioritization of the agricultural sector – the government’s investment focus on agriculture aligns with national priorities and addresses only limited local needs while failing to meet the other regional requirements, which might have a bigger potential to affect the economic development of the region residence (*Tkuma* Administration and Prime Minister’s Office, 2024). An alternative analysis of the data suggests that greater emphasis should be placed on economic sectors that might have potential to drive regional economic transformation, such as advanced manufacturing or healthcare. It should be noted that this article does not dispute the importance and necessity of strengthening the agricultural sector in the region but emphasizes the need to develop it alongside other sectors that can broadly contribute to the standard of living of the region’s residents. The study presents two competing economic logics: The first one is the “*Tkuma*” Administration’s approach, which is rooted in the Old Regionalism perspective. The second one is an alternative approach based on

New Regionalism, which prioritizes a regional perspective and a knowledge-driven framework.

Dealing with the consequences of the October 7, 2023 attack and the war that followed posed an unprecedented challenge to the State of Israel and the residents of the western Negev. The response was characterized by a massive evacuation of communities near the border, which created a temporary population crisis and raised questions about return and rebuilding (Lerer, 2023). The public space became an arena of adaptation and reorganization, where residents, businesses, and communities had to navigate a climate of ongoing uncertainty.

The Western Negev is a region in southwestern Israel, bordering the Gaza Strip to the west and the central Negev to the east, extending between Ashkelon in the north and Beersheba in the south. The region is characterized by rural kibbutz and moshav communities, alongside development towns and its strategic location as a security-sensitive border area. In terms of peripherality, the communities in the Gaza Envelope range from a rating of 5 in the northernmost region to a rating of 3 in the southern regions of the country (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022b)². Israel is divided into districts, but there is no regional government. Despite this division, since 2017, several voluntary “regional clusters” have been established, with their borders determined by the participating local councils. In Israel, “Regional Clusters” (or “Regional Cooperation Clusters”) are administrative frameworks designed to facilitate cooperation between neighboring local authorities. Managed by the heads of these authorities, the clusters aim to promote regional collaboration and improve public services. Part of the Gaza Envelope area falls under the Western Negev cluster. It should be noted that the boundaries of districts or regional clusters do not align with the economic boundaries of regions in Israel. This discrepancy is one of the factors contributing to the complexity and tension between national and regional perspectives, which will be explored in this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical discussion will help us answer the question: How is the national logic of the ‘Tkuma Administration’, as a body operating under the Prime Minister’s Office, expressed in its strategic plan, and how does this compare to an alternative analysis influenced by the logic of New Regionalism? To address this, we will define and compare three central approaches: The Old Regionalism Approach—focusing on traditional regional development; The National Priority Development Approach—based on a zero-sum game between the central government and regional interests; The New Regionalism Approach—offering an updated perspective on regional development. These approaches represent different economic logics in the context of regional development. We will begin by comparing the two main and well-known approaches (old and new regionalism), and then discuss them in relation to the zero-

sum approach, which aligns more closely with old regionalism but also presents several significant differences.

Van Dijk et al., (2019) analyze various theories of regional development, examine different policy tools, and ultimately present approaches to measuring the efficiency and fairness of regional policy. The following review categorizes regional policy approaches according to their methodology and timeline:

- In the 1930s, regional policies began to take shape based on economic (efficiency) and social (equality) considerations. The policy focused on reducing regional disparities in unemployment and per capita income.
- In the mid-20th century (after World War II), theories such as neoclassical theory emerged, predicting convergence between regions over time, with an emphasis on the mobility of factors of production and technology.
- In the 1960s and 1970s, policies were developed to encourage worker mobility (mainly in Europe), and efforts were made to relocate industries to underdeveloped regions. Prominent researchers of this period included Isard (1966), who developed mathematical models for regional planning within a centralized framework, and Friedmann (1967), who supported development strategies emphasizing national vision.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a shift from relocating industries to encouraging endogenous growth in weaker regions. New theories also emerged, such as Krugman's (1997) *New Economic Geography (NEG)*, which began to highlight the connection between centralized economic approaches and perspectives that view regions as entities with economic competitiveness potential. Additional theories developed during this time included social capital in economic development, as explored by Putnam (2000). The post-Fordist model was also studied, emphasizing the role of hidden knowledge.
- In the early 21st century, empirical studies focused on factors contributing to regional success, alongside attempts to measure the effects of regional policies using diverse approaches (micro, spatial, experimental, etc.). Florida et al. (2008) underscored the importance of the "creative class" for regional development, while Porter (1996) developed models of regional competitiveness, emphasizing industrial clusters.
- More recently, regional policy research has increasingly focused on its complexity, the need for adaptation to local characteristics, and the recognition that central dilemmas often lack clear solutions.

This historical overview of Van Dijk et al. (2019) illustrates a gradual shift from centralized economic thinking to approaches that consider additional parameters as crucial influences on regional development.

Economic Development Within the Framework of New Regionalism

Daniels et al. (2019), presents an in-depth analysis of new regionalism, comparing it with old regionalism and addressing various critiques. According to the authors, new regionalism emerged in response to the dominance of old regionalism in the 1980s and 1990s and disappointment with traditional government policies. The strengths of new regionalism lie in its approach to development, which prioritizes regional needs and assets, considers the unique local context, and is led from the bottom up rather than dictated by national government agencies. Additionally, new regionalism views a region as a dynamic, socially and politically structured space rather than a fixed geographical unit. Unlike old regionalism, new regionalism embraces flexible and temporary boundaries that shift according to the issue or challenge at hand. It acknowledges that boundaries are fluid and adaptable rather than rigid and static. The article identifies five key themes of new regionalism: Multi-level collaborative governance; place-based development; integrated development approaches; rural-urban interdependence; and innovation and knowledge flows.

A defining feature of economic development through new regionalism is its emphasis on regional production systems and the specialization of specific regions in industrial niches to create competitive advantages. A well-known example of a regional development program is the United Kingdom's *Levelling Up* policy, aimed at reducing economic disparities between regions. However, some critiques of the program suggest that, despite its promises, it failed to encourage real economic decentralization and did not strengthen unique local industries (Fransham et al., 2023). This raises an important question: What distinguishes strengthening unique local industries in a way that aligns with new regionalism rather than old regionalism? According to Pike et al. (2017), new regionalism advocates a combination of infrastructure investment and market development, whereas old regionalism relies more on subsidies and targeted state assistance.

The *New Economic Geography* (NEG), an economic development approach associated with the new wave of regionalism (Pike et al., 2017), focuses on pure economic processes. However, like new regionalism, it considers space and location as crucial factors for economic growth, acknowledges the power of comparative advantages and regional cooperation, and examines the effects of globalization on regional structures. Similarly, Storper et al. (2015), analyze the differing economic trajectories of the San Francisco and Los Angeles metropolitan areas. They identify three key factors influencing a city's economic success: Economic specialization, focusing on areas where the region excels, investment in human capital, through education, training, skill development, and local policies and institutional culture, which play a crucial role in shaping economic outcomes. The book highlights how San Francisco successfully transitioned to a knowledge-based economy by leveraging social networks, research institutions, venture capital investments, and government-industry cooperation. In contrast, Los Angeles struggled to develop similar institutional mechanisms and remained reliant on traditional industries. Zhang

(2015) presents a structured approach to analyzing and managing urban economies, with several key stages: Understanding the city economy involves identifying its key characteristics, such as size, structure, and major industries, while analyzing economic performance indicators like GDP, employment, and productivity; Analyzing the economic base requires distinguishing between basic (export-oriented) and non-basic (local-serving) sectors, using location quotient (LQ) analysis to identify the driving industries; Evaluating growth and development drivers entails assessing the roles of human capital, infrastructure, and institutions, while also analyzing the impact of entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment on development; Lastly, understanding the spatial dimensions of economic development involves examining the geographic distribution of economic activities, studying industrial clusters, business districts, and spatial inequalities.

“National Priority” as an Israeli Development Paradigm

A study examining the characteristics of development policy in Israel’s peripheral areas identified an approach that lies between old and new regionalism but leans strongly toward centralization, a hallmark of older regional development concepts (Abramzon Brosh, 2022). This approach, termed *national priority development*, prioritizes national interests over local and regional ones.

Pike et al., (2017) characterized the old regional development paradigm as one that identifies the problem primarily as inequality in income and employment. In contrast, the new paradigm views the lack of competitiveness and failure to harness regional potential as key issues, with solutions focusing on temporarily strengthening weak regions and responding to crises. It is worth considering whether the national priority approach is a uniquely Israeli phenomenon due to the country’s government structure or if similar patterns exist in other countries. This approach is characterized by centralization, lack of recognition of regional strengths, and the prioritization of national needs at the expense of regional needs—rather than pursuing a parallel, simultaneous promotion of both.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the characteristics of the two regional development paradigms—old and new—as described by Pike et al. (2017) (In green), with the national priority approach positioned in the middle column (In blue), as developed by Abramzon Brosh (2022).

The peripheral development in Israel is characterized by responding with mechanisms such as factory subsidies and tax benefits (Navon and Frish, 2008; Swirski and Bernstein, 1993; Cohen, and Aharon Gutman, 2017). The selection of factories that are relocated to underdeveloped areas is not based on the unique strengths of the region but rather on the need to provide jobs in areas with high unemployment. The national priority approach represents a model that may also characterize other unitary states. It combines the need for employment in a territorial sense with an understanding that each region has its uniqueness. However, it views this uniqueness from the perspective of the central government.

Table 1: The old development paradigm, national priority in regional development and the new development paradigm

Parameters	Old Paradigm	National Priority in Regional Development	New Paradigm
Problem Definition	Regional disparities in income, infrastructure stock and employment	Understanding and using a language that integrates regional and national needs	Lack of regional competitiveness underused regional potential
Objectives	Equity through balanced regional development	No equality in resource allocation between regions	Competitiveness and equity
General policy framework	Compensating temporarily for local disadvantages of lagging regions, responding to shocks (e.g. industrial decline) (reactive to problems)	Programs for national or urban entities	Tapping under-utilized regional potential through regional programming (proactive for potential)
Theme coverage	Sectoral approach with a limited set of sectors	Services are determined based on organizations that receive projects	Intgrated and comprehensive development projects with wider policy area coverage
Spatial Orientation	Targeted at lagging regions	Selected disadvantaged regions	All-regions focus
Regional Definition	Administrative areas	Administrative regions	Functional areas
Timeframe	Short-term	Short-term	Long-term
Approach	One-size-fits-all approach	Combining two approaches due to political pressures rather than development needs	Context-specific approach (place-based approach)
Focus	Exogenous investments and transfers	Public investments	Endogenous local assets and knowledge
Tools	Subsidies and state aid (often to individual firms)	Investment in infrastructure, research and development, or systematic investment	Mixed investment for soft and hard capital (business, infrastructure, labor market, infrastructure)
Actors	Central government	National government but increasing local and regional government involvement in decision-making processes	Different levels of government, various stakeholders (public, private, NGOs)

Source: Old and new paradigms in the green columns from Pike et al. (2017) and the national priority approach in the blue column from Abramzon Brosh (2022)

The primary goal of the national priority approach is not to realize the full potential inherent in a region but rather to develop aspects whose contribution from a national perspective is indisputable. These plans are usually short-term (e.g., five-

year plans) and are structured according to the frameworks of government ministries. Ultimately, the national priority approach is managed by the central government rather than by different levels of government. While there is dialogue with local authorities, the decision-making power remains with the central government.

The purpose of this article is to compare and analyze Tkuma's strategic plan considering the differences between the old regionalism and new regionalism approaches, while also considering the national priority approach, which has been identified in previous studies as a dominant framework in Israel. The three theoretical approaches, as outlined in the theoretical section and particularly in the comparative table, will serve as the foundation for examining the differences in the presentation of findings and the discussion.

METHODS

In policy research, official documents serve as the foundation for discussions and initial reflections on policy goals, the process of policy formulation, the information used in policy creation, implementation monitoring, and the evaluation of indicators as officially defined by the establishment. Therefore, in collecting relevant information, the strategic plan of Tkuma Administration was reviewed and analyzed, as well as government documents (government resolutions, strategic plans, reports, etc.), and institutional data from the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Transportation's mobile survey were gathered and reviewed (Ministry of Transportation, 2022³). The research does not include the perspectives of decision-makers in the "Tkuma" Administration or mayors. Incorporating such interpretations could have contributed to framing the discourse among those responsible for the issue and added an important layer to the discussion. The methodological limitation of relying solely on official documents and data allows for a discussion grounded in data, goals, and indicators but lacks the direct input and interpretation of decision-makers.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study will be presented in two parts. The first part will examine the differences between how the central government measures the area it considers in need of rehabilitation and how this measurement compares to economic strength and commuting indicators. The second part will analyze the economic aspects, highlighting differences between the priorities and data presented in the strategic plan of the "Tkuma" Administration and those emerging from a newer regionalism-oriented measurement and analysis.

Space and Measurement of the Area

This part presents the differences between how the central government measures the area it considers in need of rehabilitation and how this measurement compares to economic strength and commuting indicators.

The “Tkuma” Administration’s Definition Based on National Priority Criteria

A national priority resolution (Prime Minister’s Office, 2023) aims to designate localities and areas where residents are entitled to special benefits. The resolution allows for specific policies to be implemented in these areas according to predefined criteria. The relevant criterion for this study is: *“Localities near the border – Localities whose homes, all or some of them, are within a range of threat as determined by the security establishment—within a range of up to 9 km from the Lebanese or Syrian borders and up to 7 km from other borders or the perimeter fence around the Gaza Strip.”*

Government resolution 980, titled *“Establishment of an Administration for the Rehabilitation and Development of the ‘Revival’ Region and its Population,”* defines the *“Tkuma Region”* as follows: *“For the purposes of this resolution, the ‘Revival’ Region includes the Greater Sderot area and the localities in the Eshkol, Hof Ashkelon, Sdot Negev, and Sha’ar HaNegev regional councils, whose homes, all or some of them, are within a range of up to 7 km from the perimeter fence around the Gaza Strip, as defined in Government resolution No. 462 of April 20, 2023, and the related resolutions mentioned therein (hereinafter, ‘Localities of the Tkuma Region’). Wherever this resolution references ‘the settlements of the Reconstruction Area,’ it includes not only those settlements but also additional areas within the boundaries of the aforementioned regional councils that fall within a 7 km radius of the perimeter fence. The Reconstruction Area authorities for this resolutions are: Sderot and the Eshkol, Hof Ashkelon, Sdot Negev, and Sha’ar HaNegev regional councils (hereinafter, ‘Reconstruction Area authorities’).”* (Prime Minister’s Office website).

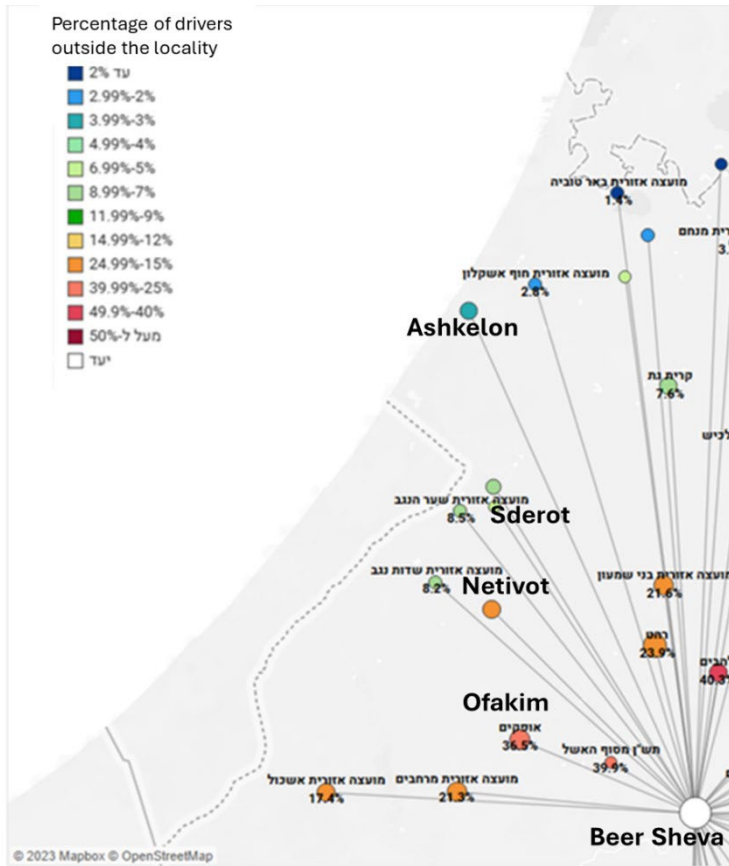
Based on this definition, the government considers the *Gaza Envelope settlements*, including Sderot and parts of the Eshkol, Hof Ashkelon, Sdot Negev, and Sha’ar HaNegev regional councils- to be within the rehabilitation zone. This definition aligns with the criteria set in the National Priority Resolution.

Definition Based on Commuting Patterns and Economic Centers

Commuting and Regional Boundaries

According to a Ministry of Transportation cellular mobility survey⁴ (2018-2019), demonstrated in Figure 1, Ofakim is part of the Be’er Sheva metropolitan area. From the Eshkol Regional Council, 17.4% of trips are to Be’er Sheva, while from Netivot, 19.7% are to Be’er Sheva. These figures indicate the regional commuting boundary—if more than 20% of trips were directed toward Be’er Sheva, the localities would be considered part of its metropolitan area.

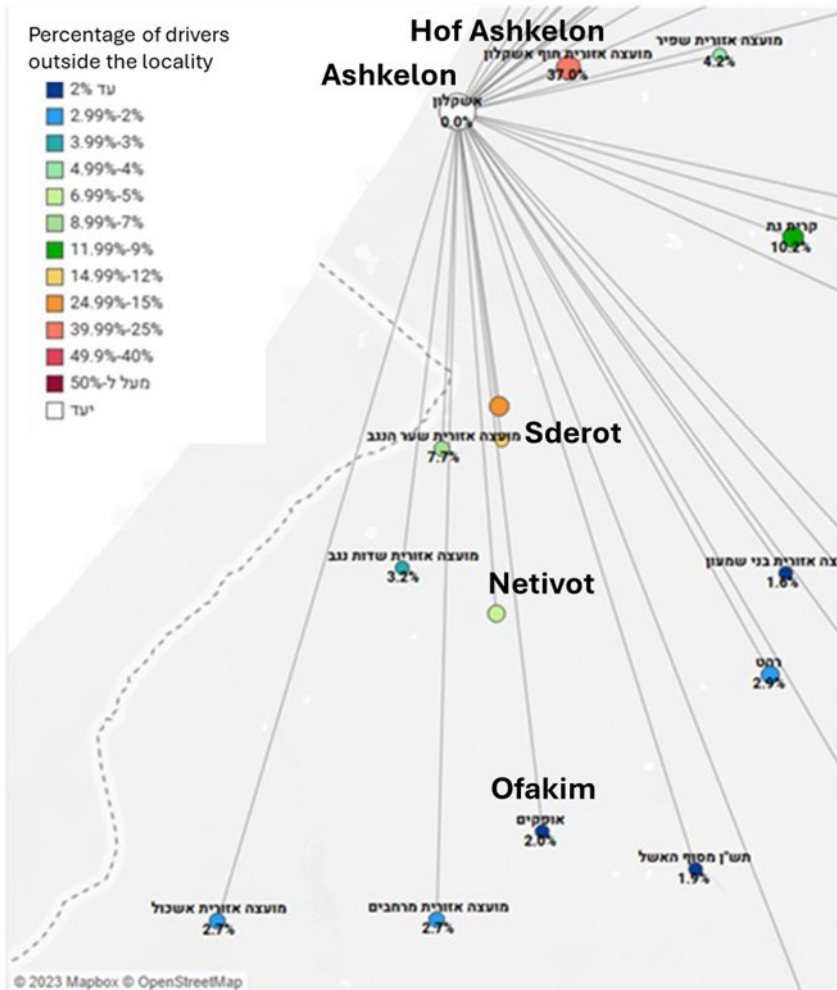
Figure 1: Percentage of Trips to Beer Sheva in the Morning Hours (6:00-10:00) by Locality, 2018-2019⁵



Source: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research processing of the Ministry of Transport’s cellular survey data. DataGov. (2022)

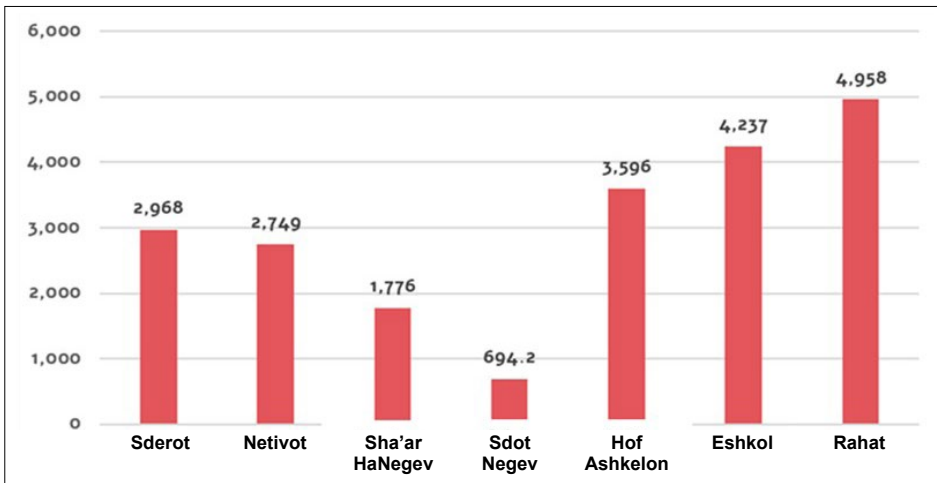
Ashkelon serves as a significant economic anchor for the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council, with 37% of trips directed there. The economic strength of the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council is largely shaped by commuting dynamics between the regional council and Ashkelon. Ashkelon also functions as a larger commuting hub for Sderot (15.4%) than Be’er Sheva does for Sderot (7.9%) (Figure 2). However, while Ashkelon is an important economic center, it lacks the accessibility needed to structure the region’s economy around it.

Figure 2: Percentage of Trips to Ashkelon in the Morning Hours (6:00-10:00) by Locality⁶



Source: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research processing of the Ministry of Transport's cellular survey data. DataGov. (2022)

Figure 3: Number of travels to selected authorities in the morning hours 6:00-10:00, by locality, 2018, 2019



Source: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research processing of the Ministry of Transport's cellular survey data. DataGov. (2022)

When measuring internal interactions within the *Western Negev cluster*—which defines the region's boundaries differently and extends beyond the "Tkuma" Administration's definitions—the three main commuting hubs are the Eshkol Regional Council, Netivot, and Sderot. Commuting patterns show (Figure 3):

- Netivot (2,749 arrivals) and Sderot (2,968 arrivals) primarily attract commuters from within the Gaza Envelope.
- The Eshkol Regional Council has a strong commuting inflow from other municipalities⁷. Unlike Netivot and Sderot, which serve as clear economic centers, the Eshkol Regional Council covers a vast area, meaning commuters access various points rather than a single economic hub.

According to an OECD (2012) study using a one-dimensional population size definition, the Gaza Envelope qualifies as a *small urban area* (fewer than 200,000 residents). If additional surrounding settlements were included—despite not being under the direct jurisdiction of the Tkuma Administration—the region could meet the criteria for a *medium-sized urban area*.

Commuting and demographic trends suggest that, in future planning, strengthening economic centers in the surrounding area could support the development of secondary economic centers within the outer ring of the Be'er Sheva metropolis. Current measurements by the Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that Be'er Sheva serves as the single metropolitan core of the Negev. The remaining settlements form a surrounding ring, some with the potential to become secondary centers, though none can yet be classified as a metropolitan core in southern Israel.

By intersecting commuting data, economic center potential, and demographic trends, future urban planning could position Netivot and Sderot as secondary centers within Be'er Sheva's outer metropolitan ring.

Mapping Regional Economic Strength through Non-Residential Property Taxes

An analysis of local authorities' 2021 tax data indicates that, among the settlements classified as part of the revitalization initiative, *Sderot is the only recognized economic center* (within the limits of available data, as urban and regional GDP figures are missing). However, at a broader regional level, Netivot emerges as an even larger economic center⁸.

From a comparative perspective (Table 2) it turns out that Netivot and Sderot are secondary economic centers, with notable economic power based on non-residential property taxes, particularly in offices, services, and commerce. Ashkelon and Be'er Sheva are significantly stronger economic centers. Rahat has a growing industrial zone accompanied by office spaces, which contributes to its economic development. The authorities highlighted in orange are those classified as part of the Gaza Envelope under the Tkuma Administration. The other settlements are not included within the administration's jurisdiction. The economic hub of Be'er Sheva is shown for comparison, while the remaining settlements can be categorized under the broader definition of the Western Negev.

Table 2: Property Tax Assessed Floor Area (in thousands of sq. m.)

Municipality	Offices, Services, and Commerce	Industry	Warehouses	Banks & Insurance Companies	Hotels	Agricultural Land	Agricultural Building
Ofakim	75	129	11	1			
Ashdod	1,741	466	781	11	41	2,776	10
Ashkelon	701	879	142	8	90	677	
Be'er Sheva	2,137		890	21	37	-	3
Netivot	166	151	50	1		1,637	-
Rahat	142	4	37	1		52	2
Sderot	133	273	-	2	-	-	3
Eshkol	45	120	31		4	301,431	1,007
Hof Ashkelon	89	57	9		-	91,515	1,687
Sdot Negev	46	93	28	1	2	95,105	333
Sha'ar HaNegev	19	304	3	0	1	110	623

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2021)

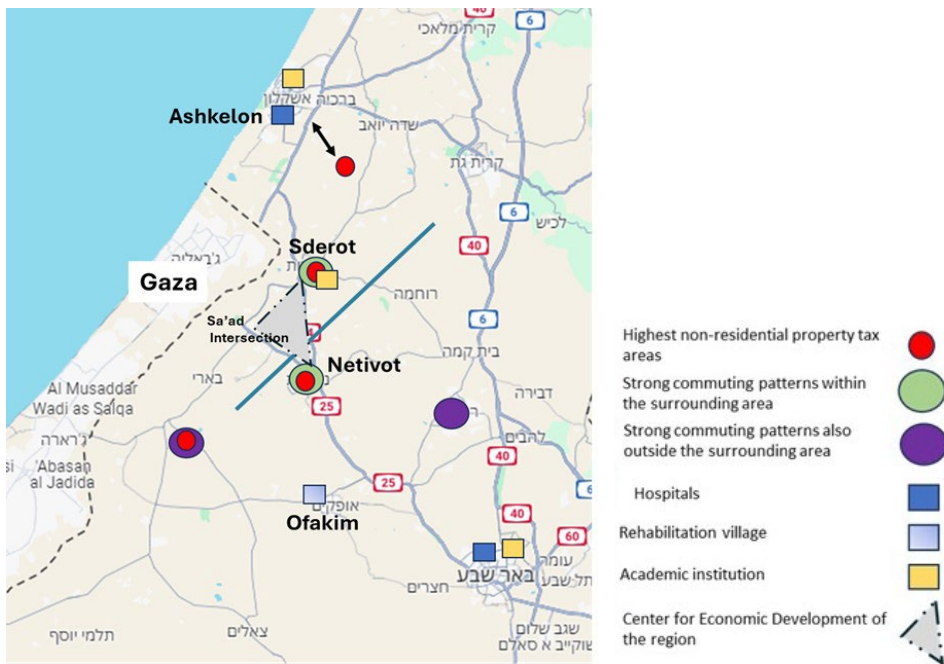
Combining Commuting with Economic Centers

Analyzing commuting trends alongside economic strength, as measured by property taxes on offices, services, and commerce, reveals two ways to view the region. First, the Western Negev settlements can be examined in relation to the two most significant economic hubs adjacent to them. Second, they can be assessed based on their internal dynamics.

From the first perspective, the Western Negev region, as defined by the Western Negev Cluster, is essentially divided between two commuting trends: one oriented towards Ashkelon and the other towards Be'er Sheva. The boundary between these two trends, represented by the turquoise stripe on the map (Figure 4), lies between Netivot, which belongs to the Be'er Sheva metropolitan area, and Sderot, which gravitates towards Ashkelon.

The second perspective focuses on local economic centers and trends. It highlights Sderot and Netivot as the region's economic hubs. The area between these two cities and the Sa'ad Junction has growth potential, provided the region is properly planned.

Figure 4: A space divided into two regions or an area with independent economic identity and dynamics, independent development



Source: The background image is from Google Maps

Economic Development: National Interests vs. New Regionalism

This part presents the economic aspects, highlighting differences between the priorities and data presented in the strategic plan of the “Tkuma” Administration and those emerging from a newer regionalism-oriented measurement and analysis.

Economic Development of the Gaza-Envelope Region Based on the “Tkuma” Administration’s Strategy

The Strategic Plan for the Rehabilitation, Renewal, and Development of the Tkuma Region and Its Population 2024-2028” (2024) outlines the Tkuma Administration’s approach to regional economic development. The objectives of the Tkuma Administration (Prime Minister’s Office, 2023) are:

- Rehabilitate and strengthen the social, economic, and physical fabric of affected local authorities, communities, and residents, with a focus on mental, social, and material aspects.
- Rebuild and develop the ‘Tkuma’ region and its affected localities, including infrastructure rehabilitation and service improvements, while leveraging investments for regional growth.
- Enhance trust, resilience, and a sense of personal and community security within the region.
- Assist authorized government officials in rehabilitating economic and agricultural activities, fostering growth.
- Provide a centralized response for local authorities on all the above matters, ensuring full transparency.

Overview of Regional Economic Development Sections - the document provides insights into the region’s economy, outlining the following:

- The area exhibits socio-economic stability with some growth, reflected in improving socio-economic index rating for local authorities.
- Residents and business owners benefit from significant tax reductions: a 20% income tax benefit, a 45% reduction in residential property taxes, and a 39% reduction in business property taxes.
- Employment levels were slightly above average, with the region characterized by full employment. However, per capita income remains slightly below the national average.
- Industrial and employment zones have relatively low occupancy, with only 20% at full capacity.
- Socio-economic disparities exist, particularly between rural areas and the city of Sderot. The councils between Sha’ar HaNegev and Hof Ashkelon have a higher socio-economic status compared to other local authorities.
- Agriculture remains dominant, covering 85% of the region’s land. In addition, the region remains a key food producer for Israel. However, only

5% of residents are directly employed in agriculture. The area has a limited number of economic, tourism, and social attractions. Most visitors are one-day tourists attending events such as the “Darom Adom” festival or visiting “Eshkol” Park.

Further sections of the document address “regional development” within the framework of housing, infrastructure, and economic growth. The budget allocation covers infrastructure upgrades, water and sewage improvements, and streamlining planning and construction processes.

Under the “*Economy, Business, and Employment*” section, the strategy includes:

- Employment: Professional development, job placement, and workforce upgrades.
- Small businesses: Strengthening employer and employee resilience, fostering business expansion, and promoting new ventures.
- Trade and industry: Capital investments to boost labor productivity and business profitability, alongside technological advancements.
- Regional economic development: Enhancing resident services, positioning the region as an economic center, and ensuring long-term financial stability.
- The following are the goals outlined in the section on agriculture: New and Young People Program in the region, increasing the number of farms by approximately 120 new farms; establishing designated agricultural areas in the region, positioning the Agro-tech sector as a regional growth engine and strengthening the region’s comparative advantage; implementing agricultural technologies and research in the region; developing new and existing Agro-tech projects in the region; creating international collaborations in the Agro-tech sector; maintaining the approximately 450 existing farms in the region; building infrastructure for advanced agriculture, both at the individual farm level and across the region; enhancing regional marketing and branding capabilities; increasing the supply of wastewater for agricultural use; promoting the protection of open spaces; strengthening the community’s connection to nature, and supporting environmental conservation; expanding improved agricultural areas; and removing statutory barriers to agricultural development in the region.
- The section on small and medium-sized businesses primarily focuses on business rehabilitation.
- Under the heading “Regional Economic Development”, the document emphasizes renewable energy development.
- The same section includes a proposal for the “Establishment of an Applied R&D and Innovation Center”, described as “a center for the promotion, development, and strengthening of the scientific-technological-commercial ecosystem in the region, focusing on Agro-Tech, hydrogen and renewable energies, water, and climate”. This initiative aims to leverage the region’s

comparative advantages to achieve excellence and international leadership while fostering economic development in the ‘Tkuma’ region, generating jobs, and serving as an engine for regional economic growth. Agro-tech and renewable energy are highlighted as core areas for research and development.

- A section dedicated to the tourism sector as a major sector alongside agriculture. The defined goals include promoting tourism in the region as an engine of economic growth, supporting small businesses, and showcasing the region’s rehabilitation and development to the public.

Economic Development According to the Principles of New Regionalism

In the municipalities under the administration’s development responsibility, there are 85,012 residents (excluding those from regional councils outside the 7 km line). When considering the additional municipalities in the entire region, accounting for commuting trends and the boundaries of the Western Negev cluster—the total population numbers approximately 420,952 residents as follows (National Insurance, 2023):

Table 3: Municipality, Population and Salary per Employee

Municipality	Population (2023)	Average Monthly Salary per Employee (2021) (National Average – 12,925 ₪)
Sderot	34,412 (19,299 of working age)	11,023 ₪
Sha’ar HaNegev	8,100 (4,668 of working age)	14,337 ₪
Sdot Negev	10,600 (5,583 of working age)	12,572 ₪
Eshkol	14,100 (7,451 of working age)	12,868 ₪
Hof Ashkelon	17,800 (9,508 of working age)	14,405 ₪
Netivot	51,713 (26,296 of working age)	9,640 ₪
Ofakim	38,347 (19,673 of working age)	10,173 ₪
Rahat	76,119 (37,551 of working age)	8,101 ₪
Ashkelon	155,861 (81,654 of working age)	11,212 ₪
Merhavim	13,900 (7,258 of working age)	12,913 ₪

Source: National Insurance (2023)

The average wage, detailed in the third column, highlights a disparity in earning capacity. Regional councils are at or above the national average, while some localities fall slightly below the average, and others significantly below it. While the average wage provides insight into earning capacity at the locality level, household income, which includes all salaries within a family, is a more comprehensive indicator of residents’ economic inclusion (in the sense of an inclusive economy). When setting goals to improve earning capacity, household income offers a clearer picture of the standard of living and the extent to which residents benefit from the economic

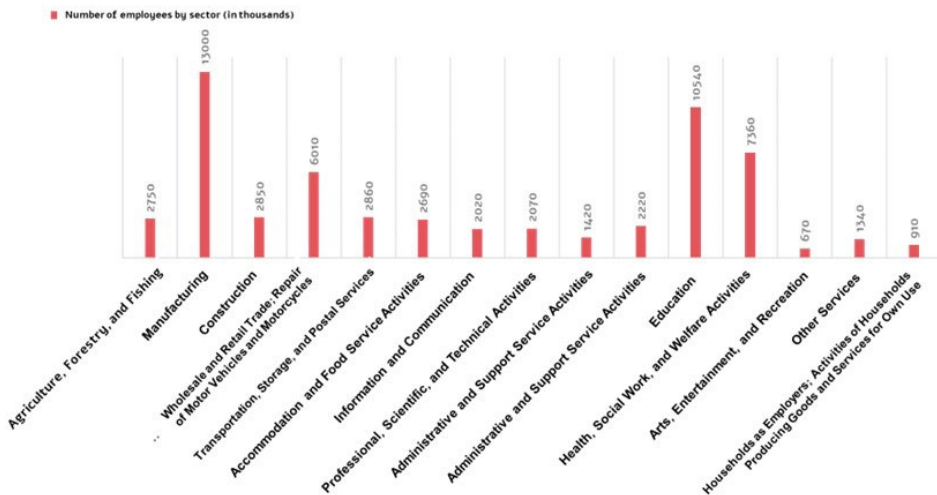
growth of their city, region, and the country as a whole. The Central Bureau of Statistics does not publish household income data for small towns, but this is the inclusive recommended measure for assessing development at the resident household level.

Employment by Sector (in Thousands) and Gross Local Income

The Central Bureau of Statistics Labor Force Survey (2022a)⁹, processed by the cluster of authorities—Eshkol Regional Council, Sdot Negev Regional Council, Hof Ashkelon Regional Council, Netivot, Ofakim, Rahat, Sderot, and Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council¹⁰—shows that employees working in these areas, regardless of their place of residence, are concentrated in the following major employment sectors: industry, education, health, welfare, and relief services and wholesale and retail trade, as well as vehicle repair. Other sectors contribute to the region’s employment infrastructure and overall economic activity, though they are not dominant. Additionally, some sectors are not mentioned since they have fewer than 500 employees. Three employment levels have been identified: 0-3,000 employees, 6,000-11,000 employees, and 13,000 employees (representing only the manufacturing sector).

Sectors experiencing strong national growth, such as financial services and general insurance, are part of the region’s employment landscape. However, the information and communications sector, despite its strong economic growth nationwide, is not present in significant volumes in this region. Figure 5 presents the number of employees who work in selected authorities, regardless of whether they live in those authorities or not:

Figure 5 : Employment by Sector (in Thousands)



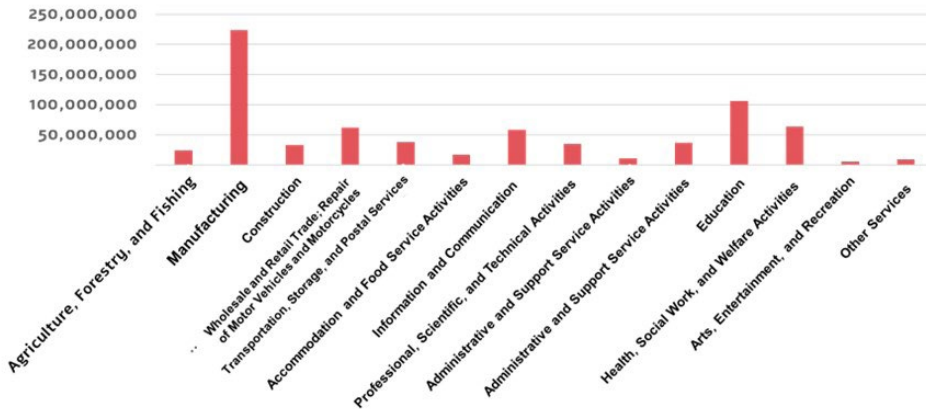
Source: The Central Bureau of Statistics (2022a)

It is reasonable to assume that agriculture is a significant income source for residents of the regional councils, particularly for the Eshkol Regional Council. However, it is not the primary employment sector for the region’s residents. It would be useful to examine how many companies support agriculture versus how many support industry. Regarding knowledge and human capital engaged in agriculture, Figure 5 indicates that the agricultural sector employs a very low percentage of the region’s residents.

To assess the impact of employment sectors on the region in terms of job quality and salary levels, the following metric is calculated: Gross Local Income¹¹ = *Number of employees in each sector × Average monthly salary per employee in that sector* (Source: The Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022a; August 2023 salary data¹²) (Figure 6).

However, two major limitations prevent this calculation from accurately reflecting the added value generated by local producers: The average salary in the same sector differs across regions, making direct comparisons difficult. The added value in the Be’er Sheva metropolitan area may be high, but employee salaries do not necessarily reflect this added value¹³.

Figure 6: “Gross local income,” measured in millions of NIS (refers to the average monthly wage per employee position multiplied by the number of employees in the region within the sector)



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2022a)

Since the average salary by sector is more representative of the “Dan” Metropolitan region¹⁴ population than that of the periphery, it is reasonable to assume that salaries in the periphery are even lower. Nonetheless, the Gross Local Income bar graph indicates the income generated for residents and the broader region through employment.

A missing data point in analyzing the region's economic landscape is GDP by economic sector. This would clarify each sector's contribution to regional growth and the region's GDP contribution to national growth.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The October 7 disaster led to the establishment of the 'Tkuma Administration', which operates administratively under the Prime Minister's Office. The administration's goal, as outlined in the government's resolution, "Establishment of an Administration for the Rehabilitation and Development of the 'Reconstruction' Region and Its Population" (Prime Minister's Office, 2023), is:

"To establish a dedicated administration that will bear responsibility and have the necessary powers to manage and carry out activities to rehabilitate and strengthen the 'Tkuma' Region and its population in a rapid, safe, and optimal manner in the immediate, medium, and long term (hereinafter referred to as the Administration). The head of the administration will be subordinate to the Prime Minister. The Administration will be established for five years".

One of the administration's objectives addresses economic development: "*assisting authorized government entities in rehabilitating economic and agricultural activity in localities and the 'Reconstruction' Region, and leveraging it for growth*".

This article argues that the strategic plan created by the 'Tkuma Administration' and the current government illustrates a zero-sum game dynamic between national and regional interests for local and regional development. The structural deficiencies in the relationship between local authorities and the central government create distortions in how the region is measured and analyzed. As a result, regional interests, as derived from the region's data, are not identified in the analysis of regional opportunities.

The starting point of the 'Tkuma Administration', in general, is rehabilitation as part of the stages of development following a disaster. Therefore, a distinction must be made between actions intended to rehabilitate, meaning to restore reality to its previous state or to a starting position identical to the situation before the disaster—and actions intended to develop going forward, with a long-term perspective. In any case, in the official document distributed by the Prime Minister's Office and the 'Tkuma Administration', "The Strategic Plan for the Rehabilitation, Renewal, and Development of the 'Reconstruction' Region and Its Population 2024-2028" ('Tkuma Administration' and Prime Minister's Office, 2024), two clear gaps are evident between the vision for regional development according to currently accepted approaches and the intervention being described by the 'Tkuma Administration':

1. The first gap is the failure to recognize the region's economic boundaries and the policy created by the borders criteria of a national priority resolution.

2. The second gap is the lack of an analysis of the economy's structure by sector and the impact of all levels of the regional economy on the region's development.

The Impact of the Centralized Structure on Defining the Boundaries of the Western Negev Region

Within the criteria of the national priority resolution for localities and regions, there is no definition of what constitutes a region from a social and economic perspective. National government responsibility is derived from the location of localities along the border. However, the border does not delineate regional interaction, meaning government support is directed without consideration for regional conditions and characteristics. In contrast, defining the region based on economic centers and commuting trends informs policy planners about the location of the region's economic hubs, which ones need to be strengthened, and which commuting trends should be supported in terms of infrastructure, public transportation, and more. In a reality where local authorities require business property taxes to maintain financial resilience, this interest may skew the needs and growth potential of the region. Therefore, dividing the region into two parts, as done by the 'Tkuma Administration', also impairs the ability to foster cooperation among authorities around the recognition of each settlement's unique identity—whether it is an economic hub or not. This recognition could serve as a potential basis for financial cooperation. From a functional perspective, the region is not just the area within 7 km of the border. An analysis of the entire region's interactions helps us understand regional trends, challenges, and how investments can be made in its development. In addition to functional definitions, the region's borders and characteristics can also be measured through economic activity, identity affiliation, and more. Moreover, the socio-economic gaps discussed in the document only compare Sderot and the regional councils, while excluding key regional players like Netivot and Ofakim.

Reflection of Centralized Economic Logic in the Strategic Plan

The Tkuma Administration was established in the wake of a massacre, not as part of a standard development plan during routine times. Although this study did not examine the process of creating the strategic plan, but rather the way the plan is presented in the official document, it is important to take into consideration, that the administration invests significant resources in dialogue with the residents' leadership from the outset. Nevertheless, the logic of a centralized economy is reflected in the plan in several ways:

- The employment strategy lacks a clear link between dominant economic sectors and the local workforce. The approach prioritizes the Gaza envelope settlements based on national priority classifications rather than considering

the Western Negev as a whole. Two striking observations are: the first one is the sector with the highest number of employees in the region is traditional industry. Therefore, investing in upgrading traditional industry to advanced industry has high potential to impact the per-household income of the region's residents. The second one is the dominance of the healthcare sector in regional employment—an outlier compared to national trends—yet the strategy does not include a targeted plan to leverage healthcare as a key driver of regional economic growth. Under the heading “Regional Economic Development,” the document emphasizes renewable energy development but lacks an accompanying analysis addressing the fundamental question: which economic sectors should be prioritized for development in the Western Negev region? While the focus on renewable energy and the installation of electricity storage facilities is crucial—especially considering the events of October 7—no data or explanation supports its relevance as a central driver of regional economic growth.

- The same section includes a proposal for the “Establishment of an Applied R&D and Innovation Center,” described as “*a center for the promotion, development, and strengthening of the scientific-technological-commercial ecosystem in the Tkuma region, focusing on Agro-Tech, hydrogen and renewable energies, water, and climate.*” This initiative aims to leverage the region's comparative advantages to achieve excellence and international leadership while fostering economic development in the Tkuma region, generating jobs, and serving as an engine for regional economic growth. Agro-tech and renewable energy are highlighted as core areas for research and development, while traditional industries are mentioned elsewhere but without a clear connection to these primary sub-sectors. The document does not provide a rationale for prioritizing these industries for regional development. It is reasonable to assume that agro-tech was selected because it aligns with national government priorities, but it misses other optional tech sectors.
- In the section addressing the tourism industry as a central sector, economic goals were defined, including positioning tourism as an engine of economic growth and promoting small businesses. However, no data is provided to quantify its potential impact on economic development or growth.

In conclusion, the strategic plan of the Tkuma Administration begins by defining the importance of the agricultural sector for the entire country. This argument is undisputed in this study. Agriculture is crucial for food security in the State of Israel. However, the goals outlined in the section on agriculture focused on developing the sector due to its national importance, regardless of its impact on the region. The zero-sum game dynamic is reflected in the fact that the strategic plan focuses almost exclusively on the agricultural sector as a central sector (alongside the tourism sector, which was not studied within this research) and fails to explain the impact of

investments in this sector on the financial strength of local authorities and household income levels. The plan also does not address other economic sectors from which a significant percentage of workers in the region earn their living, such as traditional industry and the health sector. It is worth examining whether these sectors possess a competitive advantage and significant potential to raise income levels in the Western Negev region and whether the growth of these sectors contributes to both regional and local GDP.

Comparison Between the Regional Logic of the Tkuma Administration and the Logic of New Regionalism

To answer the question of how the national logic of the ‘Tkuma Administration’, as a body under the Prime Minister’s Office, is expressed in the strategic plan, and how it compares to an alternative analysis that leans towards the logic of new regionalism, the following table (Table 5) distinguishes between the national logic of regional development and the logic of new regionalism. It is worth noting that the Tkuma Administration’s approach, as expressed in the strategic plan, is a blend of old regionalism and a zero-sum game approach.

Table 5: The national logic of regional development and the logic of new regionalism

	Development Strategy According to the Reconstruction Administration in the Strategic Plan for 2024-2028	Alternative New Regionalism-Inclined Thinking
Problem Recognition	Rehabilitation of settlements and support for businesses located in the Gaza Envelope (7 km from the border). Rehabilitation and growth of the agricultural sector.	Rehabilitation, Economic Development, Growth and Income. Strengthening competitiveness in the Western Negev region and realizing the full regional potential.
Policy Framework	Rehabilitation and support for employment, businesses (small and medium), commerce, capital investments to increase productivity, and improving services for residents.	Regional Cooperation to promote economic sectors that will support economic development and growth, which will translate into resources for the region.
Region Definition	According to the national priority resolution criteria – 7 km from the border.	Measurement based on commuting patterns and identification of economic hubs.
Timeline	Short-term – 4 years.	Long term. Preferably 20 years ahead.
Approach	Individual needs are local; the selection of economic sectors for development is based on national thinking.	A regional economy is an interaction between government, local revenues, income per household, authorities, commuting, and more. Individual needs are local, and the selection of economic sectors for development may be influenced by national thinking, alongside regional needs and potential.

CONCLUSION

This research presents how the national logic of the Tkuma Administration is reflected in its strategic plan and how it contrasts with an alternative analysis informed by the logic of New Regionalism. The centralized structure in the State of Israel and the rigid boundaries between local authorities create a situation which makes it difficult for a discourse that transfers decision-making and regional analysis into local hands and point of view.

This study offers an alternative analysis of the region's boundaries and economic structure, based on data on commuting trends, employment patterns, and a basic characterization of the region's economic sectors. It suggests that prioritizing agriculture as the region's main economic sector overlooks broader, more complex opportunities and challenges. In the Tkuma strategy plan, there is no explanation of how this approach will enhance the financial resilience of local authorities or household income levels in the short or long term. This is what differentiates a national approach focused on national goals, while the regional and local ones have the potential to be more residence-inclusive. The study presents the conflict between two economic logics: a centralized economic logic and a more decentralized economic logic. The zero-sum game approach is more aligned with the centralized, older regional approach. The differences between national and regional approaches are expressed in a few manners: 1) the different points of view emerge from the analysis of regional data, 2) the different regional borders between administrative definitions and regional economic boundaries, and 3) the contrast between national content that leads to a strategic plan focusing on the short term (4–5 years) and a multi-year approach to economic development.

The study presents the conflict between centralized economic logic and a more decentralized, regionally driven economic logic. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in its ability to integrate various approaches within the field of regional development—spanning economics, geography, and society—and highlight the tension between traditional and modern development strategies across different contexts. It particularly focuses on the economic geography of peripheral and border regions, exploring these areas within the complex reality of disaster. The study's contribution also stems from its analysis of diverse economic logics and their effects on regional development. By applying the framework of New Regionalism, it champions a more people-centered, inclusive approach tailored to the unique needs of a region, considering factors like future growth, employment patterns, and sectors that influence wage levels and household income. The article critically examines government policy in Israel, shedding light on the ongoing tension between national and regional interests, especially through the lens of the “zero-sum development” model. This model demonstrates how a national approach does not always align with the economic needs of specific regions. Overall, the article proposes a fresh perspective on regional development by identifying the limitations of current government policies and creating space for a more in-depth exploration of new regional approaches.

NOTES

- 1 The theory was developed as part of my doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Meirav Aharon Gutman and Prof. Itai Beerui.
- 2 The information on the peripherality index in Israel is based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), which periodically publishes various indices to assess the peripherality of localities and local authorities. The index combines two main components: geographical distance, measured as the distance between the locality and significant centers of activity (e.g., Tel Aviv or Jerusalem) using travel time calculations or air routes; and socio-economic accessibility, based on the connectivity of the locality to the surrounding network, considering factors such as access to employment, public services, and public transportation. The CBS divides localities into peripheral levels from 1 (the most peripheral) to 10 (the most central). Localities ranked in level 3 are considered peripheral to a significant extent, but not the most extreme. These are typically localities that are far from the centre but are still partially connected to the network of central localities (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022c).
- 3 Processed by the data team at the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research.
- 4 Method of analyzing people's movement patterns using mobile phone data.
- 5 This visualization was created by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research and shows the commuting patterns to Be'er Sheva in the morning hours.
- 6 This visualization was created by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research and shows the commuting patterns to Ashkelon in the morning hours.
- 7 It is necessary to explain the high number of entries to the Eshkol and Hof Ashkelon (Rahat is part of the Western Negev Eshkol but is not located within 10 km) - the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council has 2,578 entries from Ashkelon. The pattern indicates a relatively reciprocal system. In contrast, the Eshkol Regional Council has 799 entries from Rahat, 709 entries from Ofakim, 573 entries from Netivot, 734 entries from the Ramat Negev Regional Council, and more, but the Eshkol Regional Council is spread over a very large area, and therefore it is impossible to locate whether there are specific centers of attraction and how many there are in the Eshkol.
- 8 Rahat is a unique case in that it has non-residential property tax areas of the same size as Netivot and Sderot, but it is not considered an economic hub for most residents of the area. This issue deserves a separate study.
- 9 Processing was conducted by Neta Hadad, a researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Studies.
- 10 Selection of localities was based on the boundaries of the Western Negev cluster.
- 11 The index was developed by Yair Assaf Shapira, head of the data team at the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research.
- 12 Salaried jobs and the average wage per salaried position, by economic sector, Statistical Yearbook of the Central Bureau of Statistics, August 2023.

- 13 Another challenge that must be addressed in the calculation is the income of the kibbutzim, which is divided among the residents. Classic calculations do not account for the intricacies of the kibbutzim economy. To produce a more accurate report, a solution must be found for this issue.
- 14 The Dan Metropolitan Area is a monocentric metropolis with secondary centers. The primary economic hub is the city of Tel Aviv, while the secondary centers include Rehovot, Rishon LeZion, Petah Tikva, Holon, Netanya, and Ramat Gan (Abramzon Brosh, Erlich and others, In preparation).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A significant portion of the data in this study was collected and processed by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research data researchers team. Many thanks to Netta Haddad for processing the relevant data from the CBS labor force survey, in the CBS research room, to Omer Yaniv for processing the data of the cellular commuting survey, and to Yair Asaf Shapira for creating the Gross Local Income index. Thanks to Asher Gefen for his valuable advice regarding the characteristics of high-tech.

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