Introduction

What is at the heart of regional development in rural communities? Rural, remote, and coastal communities throughout Canada and internationally are presented with the opportunities and challenges of initiating and maintaining sustainable development, often in the face of declining resources and traditional economies. In response to the dynamics outlined by forces such as post-productivist competitiveness and the current literature on development and governance, some rural communities are seeking new forms of governance to address challenges and opportunities associated with changing social, economic, and environmental dynamics. Within governance studies, collaborative governance has emerged as a potential framework for enhancing the understanding of rural regional initiatives.

As part of a doctoral dissertation, this poster explores the concept of governance as it relates to regional development of rural communities. The discussion highlights the theoretical evolutions of governance focusing on collaborative governance as a framework for understanding governance in rural and regional development. Based on the understanding of collaborative governance two initiatives, the Northern Peninsula Regional Collaboration Pilot Initiative in Newfoundland and the South Kerry Development Partnership in Ireland, are examined as potential case studies of collaborative governance. This poster outlines the two initiatives and concludes with appropriate case studies of collaborative governance. An enhanced understanding of collaborative governance in these two settings will assist in assessing governance’s relationship to regional development.

Governance

Governance has been described to use a wide range of processes and activities. Governance emerged principally from the criticism of large central governments’ inability to accommodate the preferences of diverse communities or regions (Koppe & Marks, 2002; Newman et al., 2006; Rosenn, 1997). Jessop (1995) describes the arrangement of academic governance literature as being eclectic and disjointed. At the center of this ‘disjointed’ effort is the lack of a clear definition of governance. The eclectic academic approach has been compounded by the multiple uses of governance by government, corporations, non-profit organizations, and the popular media. Rhodes (1996) provides a frequently quoted definition of governance: “a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing, or a changed condition of ordered reflection on the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered self-reflectiveness” (p. 662). The collaborative governance provides a solid framework to understand regional initiatives in rural areas and a platform for comparison across jurisdictions.

The collaborative governance framework emerged as a response to failures of implementation of policies and the poverty level (Armstrong & Stratford, 2004; Feng & Wright 2001; Houston et al., 2006; Newman et al., 2004). Ansell and Gash (2007) define collaborative governance as an “arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage programs or assets” (p. 2). Six criteria for collaborative governance are identified by Ansell and Gash (2007):

1. the collaborative governance forum is initiated by public agencies or institutions,
2. participants in the governance forum include non-government actors,
3. participants engage directly in the decision making process, not just consulted,
4. the governance forum is formally organized and meets collectively,
5. the governance forum aims to make decisions by consensus, and
6. the focus of the collaboration is on public policy or public management.

According to Ansell and Gash, governance processes need to include all six criteria to be categorized as collaborative governance. This criteria list is not a recipe for success, but rather a list of core components.

Collaborative Governance

Collaborative Governance

Hailing to Stoker’s call for the use of frameworks to describe changes in governance Ansell and Gash (2007) developed the collaborative governance framework, incorporating Stoker’s five foundational governance propositions. The critical issues inherent in Stoker’s (1998) governance propositions can be addressed through this framework. According to Ansell and Gash (2007), this framework provides the “basis for further empirical testing and theory elaboration” (p. 562). The collaborative governance provides a solid framework to understand regional initiatives in rural areas and a platform for comparison across jurisdictions.

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Governance at the Heart of Regional Development

To build an enhanced understanding of whether governance is at the heart of regional development two illustrations of rural regional development are examined. Each case study is examined from the perspective of meeting the six criteria of collaborative governance set forth by Ansell and Gash.

Northern Peninsula Regional Collaboration Pilot Initiative

In 2009, the Newfoundland and Labrador Speech from the Throne committed the province to exploring a new model of regional collaboration with communities. The speech outlined the government’s desire “to work with community and regional leaders to explore new collaborative forms of government that advance regional sustainability” (Government of NL, 2009). The Northern Peninsula Pilot Initiative is tasked with three principal objectives for study because of the need for both research of the regional partnerships and experience with collaboration, including Northern Peninsula Hall Resource Board, St. Anthony Basin Resources Inc, and Nordic Economic Development Corporation (Ryan Gibson, 2006).

The Northern Peninsula Pilot Initiative is tasked with three principal responsibilities:

1. to provide advice to government decision-makers to ensure better investment of government funds within the region;
2. to create a forum for community leaders, economic development agencies, and community service organizations to discuss challenges and opportunities within the region; and
3. to provide advice to provincial government about how best to develop and support innovative regional collaboration across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (Case, 2009).

The Pilot Initiative is led by a provincial ministerial committee consisting of representatives from five departments together with a local advisory committee consisting of representatives from local government and development agencies.

South Kerry Development Partnership

The South Kerry Development Partnership (SKDP) represents an established rural regional governance forum in a rural Ireland. Ireland established a series of rural regional partnerships toward the end of the 1990s to address social exclusion and declines in rural economies. The South Kerry Development Partnership was created in 1991 to manage the Area-Based Development Programme which resource an area-based development company to address the challenges and opportunities of rural communities. The partnership is advised by representatives from community and voluntary sector, national social partners, local government, and local government agencies.

The current focus of the SKDP is threefold:

1. to promote economic development, employment, and enterprise initiatives through programs to support new business start-ups, tourism development, and employment support to under-employed residents;
2. to engage in activities to empower local communities, enhance quality of life, and promote social inclusion. This is achieved through supports to community infrastructure, community services, and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
3. to support regional education and training initiatives, such as capacity building, supports for youth deemed at risk, mental health supports, and focus on child well being (SKDP, 2010).

Goverance at the Heart of Regional Development

Through primary and secondary research both regions are seen to possess the six key criteria of collaborative governance. The table outlines a brief assessment of the six criteria for each region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria of Collaboration</th>
<th>Collaborative Governance Forum</th>
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<th>Governance at the Heart of Regional Development</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The collaboration forum is initiated by public agencies or institutions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Participants in the collaboration forum include non-government actors</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Given the above table, it appears both illustrations represent collaborative governance according to the Ansell and Gash framework. The two regions are ideal for further comparison based on their similarities, particularly the collaborative governance framework. Further research is underway to understand each initiative, particularly in understanding the role of individuals and communities in influencing the governance process, the role of geographical boundaries, and the relationship between forms of governance and government.

Based on the results of this research it is clear governance plays a key role in helping the heart of regional development to be its successful part of the cardiovascular system, to extend this analogy, in the complex process of regional development. Over the next year this research will further explore the role of collaborative governance in regional development drawing from these two case study examples. A working paper based on this poster, including references, is available at http://nraregionalanalysis.wordpress.com.

Acknowledgements

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