

# Governance at the Heart of Regional Development?

## An Exploratory Investigation of Rural Regional Governance Initiatives in Newfoundland and Ireland

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### 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-productivism and competitiveness, the current literature increasingly advocates place-based rather than sectoral approaches to policy and planning. 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 theoretical 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 presentation outlines the two initiatives and concludes both are 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 used to describe 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 (Hooghe & Marks, 2002; Newman et al., 2004; Rosenau, 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 rule; or the new method by which society is governed" (Rhodes, 1996, p. 652-3). Key components of Rhodes' description are the movement towards new ways of governing, use of new processes, and change of ordered rule. The shift from government to governance is a debate still taking place, however, there is a growing consensus and recognition of the shift towards governance, as illustrated through policy and programming initiatives of federal and provincial governments (cf. Goodwin & Painter, 1996; Jessop, 1998; Rhodes, 1996).

In a seminal contribution to this field of study Stoker (1998) sheds lights on the value of governance studies. Rather than focusing on building new normative theories of governance Stoker (1998) argues the function of the governance perspective "rests in its capacity to provide a framework for understanding changing processes of governing" (p. 18). This framework facilitates an examination of local experiences. Through conceptual frameworks attempts can be made to establish paradigm shifts (Judge et al., 1995; Stoker, 1998). Stoker (1998) proposed five propositions of governance that illustrate the breadth of characteristics that have been utilized throughout the literature on governance. The five propositions are:

1. governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government,
2. governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues,
3. governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relations between institutions involved in collective action,
4. governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors, and
5. governance recognizes the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority. It sees government as able to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide.

Each of these five complementary propositions embeds critical issues. These critical issues associated with governance, as labeled by Stoker (1998), range from the blurring of responsibilities, to determining accountability, and to understanding failure. The five propositions provide key areas for investigation and a platform for investigating and assessing governance initiatives in rural areas.

### Collaborative Governance

Heeding 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.

The collaborative governance framework emerged as a response to failures of implementation of policies and programs at the community level (Armstrong & Stratford, 2004; Fung & Wright 2001; Henton 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 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.

### Governance in Rural Newfoundland and Ireland

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 governance that advance regional sustainability" (Government of NL, 2009). The Northern Peninsula region was selected for study because of the breadth of regional partnerships and experience with collaboration, including Northern Peninsula Regional Service Board, St. Anthony Basin Resources Inc, and Nordic Economic Development Corporation (Rural Secretariat, 2010).

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

- to provide advice to government decision-makers to ensure better investment of government funds within the region.
- to create a forum for community leaders, economic development agencies, and community service organizations to discuss challenges and opportunities within the region. From these discussions the Pilot Initiative can identify regional development initiatives and priorities for the communities of the Northern Peninsula.
- to provide advice to provincial government departments on 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.



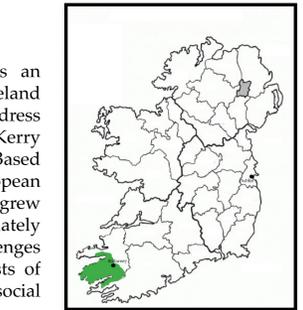
Area of region	10,450 km <sup>2</sup>
No of Communities	55
Population (2006)	13,140 (decrease of 12% from 2001)
Largest economic sectors	Services/sales (25%), fishery (23%), forestry (17%)
Unemployment rate	36.5%

#### 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 local partnerships in the early 1990s to address social exclusion and declines in rural economies. The South Kerry Development Partnership was created in 1991 to manage the Area-Based Response to Long-Term Unemployment initiative and the European Union's LEADER programme (Walsh et al., 1998). The Partnership grew from a local understanding of the need to establish and adequately resource an area-based development company to address the challenges and opportunities in the region. The board of the SKDP consists of representatives from community and voluntary sector, national social partners, local government, and government agencies.

The current focus of the SKDP is three fold.

- To promote economic development, employment, and enterprise initiatives through programs to support new business start-ups, tourism development, and employment supports to un/under-employed residents.
- 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 encouraging the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
- 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).



Area of region	2,444 km <sup>2</sup>
No of Communities	29
Population (2006)	47,192
Largest economic sectors	Agriculture, tourism

### Governance 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.

Criteria of Collaborative Governance	Northern Peninsula, Newfoundland	South Kerry, Ireland
Collaborative governance forum is initiated by public agencies or institutions	Initiated by Government of Newfoundland and Labrador through 2009 Speech from the Throne. Region had a history of community-lead collaborative development initiatives.	Region had a history of community-lead collaborative development initiatives. Initiated through local partnerships initiative by the Government of Ireland.
Participants in the governance forum include non-government actors	Participants range from elected municipal officers, to economic development boards, to tourism operators, and government agencies.	Participants represent a broad spectrum of the region, including representatives from community and voluntary sector, national social partners, local councils, and government.
Participants engage directly in the decision making process, not just consulted	Participants engaged a consensus-oriented process for decision-making.	Stakeholders, through board representation, engage in decision-making.
The governance forum is formally organized and meets collectively	The Pilot Initiative has a formal membership list and meets semi-regularly.	The initiative is formally incorporated and meets regularly.
The governance forum aims to make decisions by consensus	Yes	Yes
The focus of collaboration is on public policy or public management	One of the initiative's focuses is on advocating regional priorities to provincial government departments.	SKDP focuses on delivering initiatives that contribute to public policy and advocating regional priorities.

Given the table above, 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, previous academic studies, and characteristics of collaborative governance. Further research is underway to understand each initiative, particularly in understanding the role of individuals and organizations 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 to date it is clear governance plays a key role in helping the heart of regional development to function; it is an important 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://ruralregionalgovernance.wordpress.com>.

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