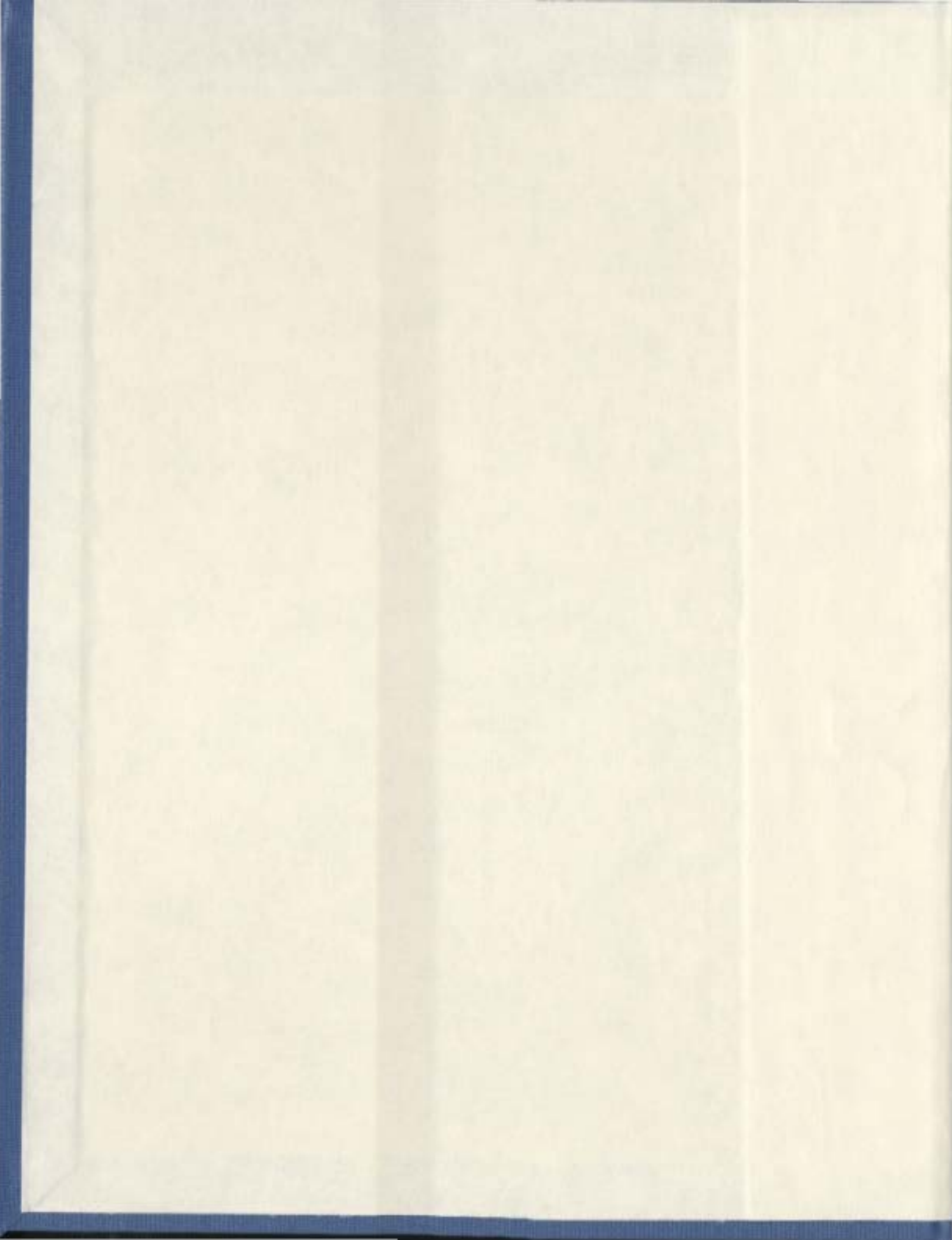COLLABORATION OR CONSULTATION?
THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF
SOCIAL POLICY IN RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND AND
LABRADOR FROM THE STRATEGIC SOCIAL PLAN
TO THE RURAL SECRETARIAT

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Canada

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1998, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released the social

policy document, *"People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for*

Newfoundland and Labrador 1998." It was a comprehensive policy document that

symbolized a momentous shift in the province's approach to social policy and program

development and implementation. The Strategic Social Plan (SSP) was both innovative

and unique in the context of not only Newfoundland and Labrador but for the rest of

Canada as well. The Plan focused on a place-based approach to social policy, encouraged

the integration of social and economic development and emphasized prevention and early

intervention in addressing social issues. As well, it sought to bridge the gap between

government and community by addressing economic and social problems with stronger

collaborative relationships and partnerships. This social policy experiment lasted until

March 2005 when the Progressive Conservative administration's Rural Secretariat (RS)

formally replaced it with an announcement in conjuncture with the provincial budget.

This change provides an opportunity to study the SSP as a collaborative governance

model from its beginnings in the early 1990s until its demise in 2005. More importantly,

the SSP in large part had no formal evaluative mechanism. This research thus provides

the opportunity to explore various aspects of the SSP, its strengths and accomplishments,

weaknesses and shortfalls. In interviews conducted by the author and the Community

Services Council (CSC) with former regional planners who worked for SSP steering

committees, provide much of the material on the end of the SSP.

As well, the interviews will also explore the transition of the SSP to the Rural

Secretariat. The thesis will consider two vital questions: what factors influenced the shift

from the SSP to the RS and, more importantly, how does the Rural Secretariat build upon the experience of the SSP? Furthermore, it will explore the similarities and differences between the SSP and RS, its organization, its structure, and the actors involved. The thesis argues that the Rural Secretariat is undoing changes begun under the SSP that affected how government relates to civil society and that the RS may also be retarding movement toward more horizontal coordination within government.

Given that the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial government is on record saying that the SSP's vision and goals are in line with those of the Rural Secretariat, the following points arise. One, while the Newfoundland provincial government claims to be the heir to the SSP's experiment in place-based policy-development, the RS is not about social policy in the conventional sense. It has abandoned the SSP framework, which notably but unsuccessfully tried to bring the voluntary sector into the policy process, but also any mention of social policy. One reason may be that the incoming government of Premier Danny Williams had new priorities that did not include broad collaboration on social policy.

The thesis proceeds in three steps. The first, found in the introductory chapter, examines the academic literature regarding governance, a key conceptual component of the SSP. The second chapter presents the histories of the SSP and the RS. The final chapter compares the two programs, noting their similarities and differences and posing questions about the effects that might follow from the shift from the SSP to the RS.

Governance

Former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien commented in the mid 1990's that "after decades of thinking otherwise, we have to come to terms - squarely and honestly -

with the truth. That government does not have the wisdom or the resources to do everything."[1] Was the former prime minister pointing to a social crisis in the Canadian state? Or was he simply echoing what so many others had claimed before? For some time, voluntary organizations, community groups, social activists and social scientists have argued that the traditional 'government' model no longer describes the reality of policy making. Rather, designing and implementing effective social, economic, cultural or environmental policy demands proper collaboration between the public and private sectors.

There has been a remarkable evolution in relations between the state and the private sector since the 1970s and 1980s. New conceptual frameworks, methods and theories have entered not only the social science mainstream but influenced public policy development as well. Thus, 'governance' has begun to replace 'government' in a number of settings. For the purpose of this thesis, governance will be used interchangeably with public or collaborative governance. All three point to a process by which emphasis is placed "… on rules and qualities of systems, co-operation to enhance legitimacy and effectiveness and the attention for new processes and public-private arrangements."[2] Yet, collaborative governance differs from generic "governance" because it not only applies to rules and qualities of systems, but the also the ability to successfully integrate policy decisions and implementation among various stakeholders and not only from government, but from voluntary community-based organizations, community activists

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[1] Susan Phillips, "More Than Stakeholders: Reforming State-Voluntary Sector Relations," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 35(4), 2001, 183.
[2] Jan Kooiman, "Social-Political Governance," *Public Management: An International Journal of Research and Theory*, 1(1), 2003, 67.

and others.[3] Thus, while governance may symbolize the broad set of conventions and philosophies that tend to have a macro view of the relations between state and society, collaborative governance involves the micro level of interaction and influence between government and non-government actors. This will form the framework for addressing the shift from the Strategic Social Plan to the Rural Secretariat.

The broad conceptual framework of 'governance' is also incorporated into the concepts of New Public Management (NPM), social capital and citizen engagement, which have brought major changes to the nature of public-private sector relations. Yet the question must be asked why these concepts have come to hold such importance over the past three decades? How do these concepts help us understand the changing nature of the state and the profound changes to decision-making and public policy?

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, there has been a push away from traditional, verticalist, Weberian bureaucracy,[4] and a pull towards collaborative governance involving multi-sector partnerships. As a corollary, there has been a new approach to governing and a new view of the public service. This took the form of what is referred to as 'new public management', which advocates a more business-like approach to governing. More importantly, it emphasizes the necessity for collaborative forms of governance for effective delivery of services to clients. Proponents of NPM argue that governments should leave service delivery to voluntary organizations, which are better suited to the task. This would accomplish a number of objectives, including the

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[3] Kooiman, "Social-Political Governance,"67.
[4] Weberian bureaucracy is includes its impersonality, concentration of the means of administration, a leveling effect on social and economic differences and implementation of a system of authority that is practically indestructible.

decentralization of power, greater administrative efficiency, reduced budgetary cots, a smaller role for government and the use of outside expertise.[5]

New public management is central to the concept of governance, in large part because the notion of 'steering' is central to the analysis of public management and is also a synonym for governance.[6] R.A.W Rhodes, in his analysis of the growing trend toward governance and its relation to changes in the British system, notes that governance is a core tenet of the transformation in the public sector. We can now distinguish between policy decisions which incorporate 'steering' - the mechanism for making and implementing collective goals and 'rowing' - service delivery. Academics such as David Osborne and Tom Gaebler argue that the bureaucracy is a bankrupt tool for service delivery. Rather, the public sector transformation should continue to evolve from 'less government' (less rowing) but more 'governance' (more steering).[7]

We must note both the advantages and drawbacks of new public management tools. In the Canadian context, Alan Tupper has noted that critics of NPM have argued that government has merely offloaded responsibility for public services without first tackling the issue of third or voluntary sector capacity to address the task of service delivery.[8] It is argued that most voluntary organizations lack the resources and financial capacity to carry out that responsibility. As well, the emphasis on planning, evaluation and accountability frameworks in government has shifted to third sector partnerships in order to better carry out the delivery of public services. Yet these partnerships often do not have a clear framework of evaluation and accountability in order to guide them. This

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[5] Alan Tupper, "The Contested Terrain of Canadian Public Administration in Canada's Third Century," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 34(4), 2001, 142-143.
[6] R.A.W. Rhodes, "The New Governance: Governing without Government," *Political Studies*, 1996, 657.
[7] Ibid., 657.
[8] Tupper, "Contested Terrain of Canadian Public Administration," 143.

undoubtedly clouds the issue of whether government is actively seeking a more collaborative approach to governance or simply offloading state responsibilities to the private sector for program delivery. Tupper warns that the voluntary sector cannot take on the work it is expected to without a firm commitment of financial support from the government and private sector, and a partnership framework to guide the collaborative relationship while there has been a steady loss of the public sector's planning and priority capacity under NPM due to government cutbacks, layoffs and the hiring of contract employees.[9]

Along with new public management principles that changed the nature of the public sector by increasing the responsibilities of the private sector, there has also been a tremendous growth of public skepticism toward government and increasing pressure for greater citizen engagement in Canada, and in representative democracies throughout the world. Previous work by the Ekos Research Associates on citizen engagement, its *Rethinking Government Project* (1999), found that fewer than one in five Canadians believes that when governments make decisions, they make them in the 'public interest.'[10] That low level of trust not only applies to government but also extends to other institutions in Canada. There is a widely held belief, confirmed by empirical survey data, that citizens are excluded from power and decision-making. Thus, the 'citizen engagement' model becomes the potential means to involve citizens in the policy-making process. While only one in four Canadians thinks the average citizen has power, three in four think they *should* have power. Graves defines the Ekos research as suggesting that Canadians still want government involvement in all policy areas. However, they want to

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[9] Tupper, "Contested Terrain of Canadian Public Administration," 143.
[10] Frank L. Graves, "Collaborative Government: Looking for a Canadian Way?" *IPAC* eds. Susan Delacourt and Donald G. Linehan (6), 1999, 12-13.

see a shift from what Graves sees as paternalism, to partnerships that stress clear

accountability for targets and results, fiscal prudence and most importantly, citizen

inclusion in the selection of goals and means that reflect public values. Who then, in the

eyes of Canadian citizens, has the potential to fill the decision-making gap?[11]

There are those who argue that any form of governance must begin with the

admission that society's problems cannot be fixed by governments alone. There is a

greater necessity to involve non-profit actors, which are distinct from both the state and

the market. J.M. Brinkerhoff and D.W. Brinkerhoff note the connections between the

state and non-profits embodied in the current level of interest in governance rather than

government. They point out that:

> Governance does not merely include the actions of government, but extends
> beyond government to address the role of citizens, both individually and
> organized in various forms of association, and the way groups and communities
> within society organize to make and implement decisions on matters of general
> concern.[12]

They recognize that there has been a shift in the dominant paradigm of

governance arrangements, evidenced by social policy re-engineering in the United States

and the partnership approach and vision of new public management in the United

Kingdom and New Zealand. This paradigm shift places the emphasis on a governance

model based on market forces that pushes a lean and efficient government, whose main

role is to support private and voluntary organizations in delivering services with minimal

interference. In essence, they are arguing for a process of government decentralization.

Brinkherhoff and Brinkerhoff also point to one of the tenets of governance

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[11] Graves, "Collaborative Government: Looking for a Canadian Way?" 17.
[12] Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff and Derrick W. Brinkerhoff, "Government-Nonprofit Relations in Comparative Perspective: Evolution, Themes and New Directions," *Public Administration and Development* 22(3), 2002, 5.

implementation being to make the policy process more effective for voluntary organizations and maximizing the delivery of services. Thus, collaborative governance has the ability to significantly increase cross-sectoral relationships, creating horizontal relationships among all actors, public, private and voluntary.[13] What results is a more hands-off government that involves increased decentralization to non-government actors. For our purposes, we can ask whether or not this occurred with the SSP.

To fully examine how government and non-state actors have begun to come together to make the transition from 'government' to 'governance', we must explore the varying interpretations that surround the governance agenda and highlight several factors that can lead to a successful form of collaborative governance. This, of course, will be the subject of this work's case studies of the SSP and the RS.

Whether private or public, governance has been defined simply as "the general exercise of authority" in which authority points to systems of accountability and control.[14] However, while there is agreement on the definition of corporate governance,[15] others note that the definitions on public governance tend to be much more varied because the literature developed when the position of the state was weakened. If government is to be the mechanism for making and carrying out collective goals, the process for reaching those goals is the essence of the governance debate.[16]

In *Governance: A Garbage Can Perspective*, B. Guy Peters explores the changing set of assumptions surrounding the governance debate. Peters argues that "governance is

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[13] Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, "Government-Non-profit Relations in Comparative Perspective," 5.
[14] Carolyn J. Hill, Laurence E. Lynn Jr., Isabella Proeller and Kuno Schedler, "Introduction to a Symposium on Public Governance, *The Policy Studies Journal* 33(2) 2005, 203.
[15] Corporate governance has been understood to refer to "ways in which suppliers of finance to corporations assure themselves of getting a return on their investment (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997, 737)
[16] Hill et al., "Symposium on Public Governance" 204.

not a constant, but rather tends to change as needs and values change.'[17] As well, the process of governing is based upon a continuing set of adaptations, which are both political and administrative in nature and are influenced by the changing nature of developing and implementing collective goals. Peters questions the assumptions upon which 'traditional' approaches are based; for example, the centrality of the nation state and centrality of authoritative public actors in governance. However, no generally accepted replacements for the above assumptions have yet emerged.

Guy Peters's governance perspective notes some of the factors mentioned above, such as the decline of confidence in government and the increased involvement of private sector actors. He also goes on to highlight the fact that as the governance literature has developed, it has produced multiple meanings. One is the state-centric approach where the state (government) is still the most important actor and it steers society. Even in a less extreme version of the state-centric approach, government still remains an important actor but involved in partnerships and other mechanisms to engage citizens. (One may ask if this fits the SSP and RS? This is a question that will be addressed in detail in later chapters)

Secondly, there is the 'governance without government' approach. R.A. W. Rhodes argues that this view holds that society is capable of governing itself through self-organizing networks and attempts by government to interfere are unsuccessful.[18]

The moderate version of governance is a combination of the two forms above. Societal actors are recognized for their increasing role in governance but government has had increased involvement in normally private sector activities and organizations.

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[17] B. Guy Peters, "Governance: A Garbage Can Perspective," *Political Science Series*, Institute for Advanced Studies, 2002, 1.
[18] Ibid., 3.

Steering involves the interaction between private and public sectors and mediation between top-down and bottom-up approaches of steering. Peters highlights the Dutch school of governance that defines governance as shifting service provision to the private sector-profit or non-profit organizations.

Other interpretations suggest further disagreement on what constitutes governance. In exploring the changing patterns of governance in Britain, Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes argue that there is no single definition of "governance". Rather, there are differing constructions of several traditions. There is no logical or necessary path that determines the form governance takes. Rather, it is based on the diverse actions and practices inspired by certain beliefs and traditions. Thus, governance has arisen out of the product of diverse action and political struggle, epitomized by the redrawing of the boundary between the state and voluntary sector following decades of centralization in the 1960s and 1970s. Following decades of state intervention and the erosion of local government institutions, there has been a growing pattern of trying to find a sufficient role for civil society. Bevir and Rhodes conclude that while forging a holistic governance model may have a simple and eloquent appeal, governments ought to distrust it. Patterns of governance occur in a complex world, where there are no simple solutions, no simple hierarchies of institutions or networks. There is no telling where the pattern of governance will end up.[19]

Despite the varying definitions of what constitutes governance, there are key differences between government and governance. Government is centered around control, while governance involves collaboration and coordination across various sectors.

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[19] Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes, "Changing Patterns of Governance in Britain," *Public Administration* 81(1), 2003, 59-60.

Government emphasizes hierarchy but governance necessitates horizontality. Government has the ability to deliver uniform programs to a broad segment of the population whereas governance recognizes diversity and flexibility. The legitimacy of government flows from authority, but for governance it comes from its credibility with its partners. Finally, government success depends on program delivery, while governance depends on relationship building. In order for government to recognize the divide between the above characteristics and that of the third sector, it must also address the problem of consultation. Susan Phillips notes that the existing mechanism of government consultation is "lopsided." Government determines who is invited to the table and the opportunity for proper dialogue and feedback is minimal at best.[20]

Canada has taken a significant turn from government to governance. With the emphasis on NPM and improved collaborative relationships, there is a growing paradox that, "government is out, governance is in." Susan Phillips defines governance as

> Collaboration with voluntary, private or other public sector actors in the planning, design and achievement of government objectives in a manner that shares policy formation, risk and operational planning, and that may replace programme delivery by state employees with those of third parties.[21]

In the conclusion to "So Is There a Canadian Way?" Susan Delacourt and Donald Linehan also explore the rising interest in collaborative governance throughout all levels of government in Canada. They conclude that collaborative partnerships (governance) are actually neither a good nor a bad thing. They should not be pursued as an end in themselves nor rejected as a threat to the traditional modes of government. First, they point to the 1990s as a period upon which governments across Canada had to undertake

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[20] Phillips, "Reforming State-Voluntary Sector Relations," 183.
[21] Ibid., 182.

major fiscal restructuring and come to terms with their deficits. They refer to an Alberta example where Albertan political scientist Jack Davis noted that the new ways of thinking in that province were due to a shared priority between government and citizens to "get the fiscal house in order." Secondly, they observed that global economic interdependence is a way of life. Delacourt and Linehan point out that private and public interests, actions and responsibilities are the primary activities of governance and administration.[22] Thirdly, the delivery of government services has focused on *citizen-centered service delivery*. Delacourt and Linehan make explicit reference to the Newfoundland and Labrador Strategic Social Plan as an example of this new, holistic approach of the governments focus on communities and citizens. Lastly, there has been a change in political culture. Citizens are not merely clients of government and governments are simply not just business or service providers. While the client-provider relationship is central to NPM, in order to make collaboration work effectively, both government and its citizens must find a balance in the management of government's fiscal capacity and the need to be more open to public participation and greater openness.[23]

Delacourt and Linehan also argue that government has responded by focusing on a partnership model of governance. Government actively seeks citizen engagement in the private and third sector organizations, citizen and communities in either formal arrangements such as the SSP or the Rural Secretariat in three areas:

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[22] Susan Delacourt and Donald G. Linehan, "So Is There a Canadian Way?" *IPAC* eds. Susan Delacourt and Donald G. Linehan, (6), 1999, 112.
[23] Ibid., 112.

1) *Focus on Results* – Governments shift to use business planning and performance

evaluation.[24] It ensures that public services are delivered as efficiently and

effectively as possible, programs are responsive to client or citizen needs and

that feedback is provided to management and staff on the equality and

effectiveness of programs and services.

2) *Managing Horizontally* – The reference here is to government departments as

"stovepipes," vertically-integrated organizations with little horizontal reach.

Interdependence increases communication and coordination across jurisdictions.

Development of horizontal approaches to planning, managing and delivering

programs. Single window service attempts by getting government depts. to

cooperate and integrate related services.

3) *Partnerships* – There are varying degrees of partnership from intergovernmental,

interdepartmental, public-private or public-third sector. Collaborative partnerships

aim for working together rather than traditional public-private partnerships (PPP)

that involve contracting out services.[25]

Finally, the authors point to the importance of a *public service culture*. For the

most part, the public service is a hierarchical, secretive and conservative body that seeks

to avoid mistakes. They argue that the public service "abhors error." For effective

collaboration to occur it will not only include a mutual trust between the public service

and citizen stakeholders (communities, private sector, voluntary sector) but also a

learning adjustment that includes experiment and readjustment. Collaboration is by

nature not static but a dynamic experiment that ebbs and flows. It requires openness,

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[24] For my purposes, the use of evidence-based decision-making via the Community Accounts.
[25] Delacourt and Linehan, "So Is There a Canadian Way?" 115-116

discussion, debate and consultation, experimentation and initiative. There must be an

acknowledgment of error but also an ability to solve those errors.[26]

The importance of partnerships in a collaborative governance framework is also

associated with participatory democracy. It arguably can provide community actors and

leaders with wider public policymaking authority that embodies a more democratic and

sustainable alternative to political economy development.[27] At the level of social

organization, society composed of self-reliant communities where co-operation rather

than competition can build consensus to community values and goals. The discourse of

participatory democracy is juxtaposed with the values of inclusivity where partnerships

imply equal standing and power among all those involved. There are then implications

that public governance should imply transparency and a process whereby the primary

beneficiaries of partnerships, local citizens, would have strong influence in shaping the

public policy discourse.[28]

Susan Delacourt and Donald Lenihan note that while collaborative partnerships

have been discussed as an innovative management tool, they actually possess the ability

to change governance relationships between

- Central agencies within governments and regular government
  departments;
- Different levels of government; and
- Citizens and their government(s).[29]

For those partnerships to be truly collaborative, the actors must directly confront

fundamental changes in the organizational culture and traditional values of the public

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[26] Delacourt and Linehan, "So Is There a Canadian Way?" 115-116
[27] Chris Skelcher, Navdeep Mathur and Mike Smith, "The Public Governance of Collaborative Spaces: Discourse, Design and Democracy," *Public Administration* 83(3), 2005, 579.
[28] Ibid., 580.
[29] Delacourt and Linehan, "Collaborative Government," 1.

sector. Delacourt and Linehan address three key areas where changes are needed. One, in representative democracies, governments have been by and large unwilling to share decision-making authority with voluntary sector organizations; which has been the case in both Newfoundland and Canada more generally. Collaborative partnerships require a willingness of both government and private sector partners to accept change. Secondly, governments are skeptical about the long-term implications of collaborative partnerships. Governments do not like uncertainty, as it leads to mistakes. If governments truly want to partner with the private sector, they must acknowledge that uncertainty exists and that mistakes will be made. They must develop a capacity for what the authors refer to as a learning culture. Finally, collaborative partnerships, such as Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan, require long-term planning. Typically, governments avoid thinking beyond their own electoral mandates. In general, case studies have shown that collaborative partnerships lead to more integrated relationships and a more collaborative culture, which results in more effective delivery of programs and services.[30]

One of the major problems that inhibit successful collaborative partnerships is that of departmental management; that is, government departments have tended to act as "unconnected stovepipes." Other literature calls government departments "silos", representing the traditional view of departmental decision-making and policy development as unable to view linkages between government departments and among government, corporations and the voluntary sector.[31] However, as partnership develops, issues increasingly cut across departments and jurisdictions. New "horizontal" management approaches are being developed for in planning, managing and delivering

[30] Delacourt and Lenihan, "Collaborative Government," 2-5.
[31] Tupper, "Contested Terrain of Canadian Public Administration," 144.

services and programs. Therefore, "single-window service" is an attempt to overcome the stovepipes or silos by incorporating different levels of government and departments to coordinate and integrate common services.[32]

The Center for Collaborative Government (CCG) is a public interest research organization that promotes effective management of the interdependence between government departments, levels of government or government and the private or third sectors. In a series of articles based on collaborative governance entitled *Policy, Politics and Governance*, Donald Linehan, Director of the CCG and Tony Valeri, a former Member of Parliament, explore the various themes of collaborative governance as it relates to the third sector. With the Government of Canada's new approach to fiscal management and accountability, policy coordination is an area where the effects are being felt. Various government departments share many common goals and the need is present for better coordination of policy across sectors. Linehan and Valeri's discussion also underlies that extent to which non-profit organizations are delivering programs and how federal policy-makers see the need for closer collaboration with other players if the federal government is to achieve its own goals.[33]

Linehan and Valeri find that one of the most promising approaches for collaboration is at the community level. Local governments and NGOs are often in a better situation to identify how and where a particular issue needs to be addressed. Communities have "corporate knowledge and memory" to tackle critical issues in ways that the federal government can support. Secondly, governments find it difficult to implement controversial policies with a "top-down" approach, yet community-based

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[32] Delacourt and Linehan, "So Is There a Canadian Way?" 114.

[33] Donald Linehan and Tony Valeri, "Horizontal Government: The Next Step," *Centre for Collaborative Government: Policy, Politics and Governance* vol. 2 (February 2003), 1.

approaches can legitimize difficult choices by involving the citizens most directly

affected. Thirdly, strategies to achieve many goals require that citizens be involved in the

process and implementation. It encourages them to take personal responsibility for their

choices and puts them in a position to change their own practices to achieve a successful

outcome. And finally, the new economy depends on the production and creative use of

knowledge in innovation and learning. Community approaches help put experience to

work, uphold the importance of diversity and provide opportunities for individuals and

organizations to strengthen the skills of interdependence and collaboration.

Eric Levitan and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy have been important

advocates of building partnership between community and government. They address

both the opportunities and pitfalls of partnerships. Levitan concentrates on the key

questions that need to be considered. How do we define partnerships? How do

partnerships contribute to building a stronger community? And why are partnerships

particularly important at this moment in time? The optimistic view would be that

partnerships derive from a desire among citizens for greater participation in the public

policy process and their own affairs (citizen engagement) as well as the desire to be more

connected to others in their communities (social capital).[34]

Levitan also conceptualizes social capital as "the relationships, networks and

norms that facilitate collective action." It is an important term because it highlights

necessity of strong relationships to help build well-functioning communities. Levitan

argues that social capital studies have shown that communities that are rich in social

capital have benefited in terms of mental and physical health, early childhood

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[34] Eric Levitan, "Building Community Through Partnership," *Caledon Institute of Social Policy*, April 5 2001, 2.

development, educational performance and reduction in crime rates.[35] There is also an economic benefit in physical infrastructure, but also in social infrastructure that helps communities to collectively solve problems and act on opportunities.

In addition, Levitan talks about factors that influence successful collaboration. A study by the Wilder Foundation in the United States identified environment, membership, process/structure, communication, purpose and resources as possible factors that help build collaborative relationships. Along with these positive factors, Levitan also acknowledges serious challenges to collaborative partnerships. The process is time consuming, difficult and requires patience and perseverance. There is a constant balancing act between achieving short-term goals and retaining a long-term vision. Both citizens and government need to see tangible results and there are many factors that tend to pull partners in opposite directions.[36]

For all of these conceptual reflections, however, there have been few direct examinations of the collaborative governance models described in the literature over the past twenty or so years. While it has been noted that the emerging trends of 'governance' and NPM have begun to reshape the way in which government functions since the 1970s and 1980s, we need a specific case study to see how the various elements work in practice, concretely in Newfoundland and Labrador. The following case study of the Strategic Social Plan and the Rural Secretariat, its successor, will cast light on an important experiment in collaborative governance, one that has both a beginning and an end.

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[35] Levitan, "Building Community Through Partnership," 3.
[36] Ibid., 4-6.

In summary, the arguments that surround the governance debate are critical in understanding the case studies of the Strategic Social Plan and Rural Secretariat that will follow. There are those who argue that the conceptual trends of new public management and the growing need for greater citizen engagement only amplify the necessity of increased forms of collaborative governance. That collaboration is only meaningful, therefore, if government acknowledges the role that not only the public sector can provide, but the private sector as well. Building partnerships both within government and accompanied by strong relationships within and outside government, strengthen the capacity of communities, individuals and organizations to play an increased role in both the design and implementation of policies that encompass cultural, economic, environmental and social sectors. What results is a more inclusive society where those involved in the governance approach often produce the knowledge needed to continue

On the other hand, the literature also underscores the issues that prevent collaborative governance models from achieving success. As will be evidenced by the SSP case study, the issue of departmental "silos" inhibits successful collaboration. Therefore, breaking the traditional modes of bureaucracy where government departments often protect their own turf can enhance collaboration. As well, governance models are time-consuming, may lack quantifiable results and may have to be modified to fit social and economic realities. Finally, because governance does not have a single, universally agreed to definition, models of governance specify different structures and processes and produce different results.

The next chapter will be a thorough description of both the SSP and Rural Secretariat. In light of the above literature, there are a few questions to keep in mind. Was

the SSP part of a larger effort toward governance and partnerships in Newfoundland? That is, did the provincial government make the SSP part of a broader project or was it one off? It may be that the government had a commitment to the principles of the SSP, even if it proved a weak one. Or the SSP may have been a crash course in collaborative governance without adhering to proper implementation. Did the provincial government actively seek to decentralize and share the burden of governing or did they simply respond to economic and social pressures by giving the appearance of promoting collaborative governance? These are points to consider in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: The Strategic Social Plan and the Rural Secretariat

With the governance literature in mind, the focus shifts to the case studies of the

Strategic Social Plan and Rural Secretariat. The following chapter is descriptive in nature,

tracing the beginnings of the SSP, its development and processes through to the

incarnation of the RS. The objective is to give the context in which the programs evolved

as well as the structural details of both programs. Throughout the description, the

concepts of collaborative governance, citizen engagement, social capital and government-

third sector partnerships will be carried forward.

Strategic Social Plan

In the 1993 Speech from the Throne, Premier Clyde Wells announced his

government's intention to create a Strategic Social Plan (SSP) for Newfoundland and

Labrador. This followed the creation, in 1992, of *Changes and Challenges*, the

Province's first Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and Newfoundland's first exercise in

strategic policy planning.[37] The SEP was the first step in the process of preparing

government and its citizens to meet the changes and challenges that lay ahead. The next

step was the development of a Strategic Social Plan which initially was meant to

compliment the SEP.

There was an array of factors that precipitated these major changes in government

thinking. Severe economic conditions in the province, exacerbated by the closing of cod

fishery, led to a changing social environment. Federal spending restraint by the Chrétien

government to control spiraling Canadian budget deficits had a direct impact on

intergovernmental transfers used for social service provision. Coupled with that was

rising pressure from the voluntary, community-based sector to employ the emerging

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[37] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Speech from the Throne*, March 4 1993.

principles of collaborative governance and partnership. The development of social policy and direct involvement at the program and service delivery level was to be integrated among various sectors, namely citizens-organizations-government. A collaborative approach involving multiple sectors in order to combat the growing social and economic pressures in the province was the very essence of a strategic social plan for the province.

With all the problems facing Newfoundland and Labrador by the early 1990s, Premier Clyde Wells was forced to recognize that his government could "no longer govern alone."[38] An economic recession (1989-92) and federal spending cuts hit Newfoundland particularly hard. For example, federal budgetary cuts led directly to the province reducing its own budget for schools, municipalities, healthcare and social service delivery. Reductions in federal transfers also gave rise to a major reorganization of health, education and social services that left a system which "was the bare-bones minimum."[39] Furthermore, with the1992 collapse of the ground fishery, over 40,000 jobs were eliminated. That is the equivalent to the relative loss of an industry twice the size of the Ontario automobile industry or the loss of the entire forestry industry in British Columbia.[40] Between 1989-90 and 1996-97, average monthly social assistance cases rose from 20,000 to 36,000 with costs from $108 million to $243 million. A National Council of Welfare report summarized that from March 1990 to March 1996, those on social assistance rose from 47,000 to 72,000 people.[41]

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[38] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Speech from the Throne*, March 4 1993.
[39] Malcolm Rowe and Vivian Randell, "Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan," Susan Delacourt and Donald Linehan, eds., *Collaborative Government: Is there a Canadian Way?* (Toronto: IPAC, 1999), 81.
[40] Ibid., 82.
[41] Ibid., 82.

Stark demographic figures reflected a harsh reality of the upheaval that had

occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador by the early 1990s. Entering Confederation with

Canada, Newfoundland had the highest birth rate in the industrialized world. By the early

1990's, the rate was one of the lowest. As well, net out-migration rose from around 3,700

annually in 1992 to peak at 11,300 in 1998. The population had declined from about

580,000 in 1993 to 544,000 in 1998.[42] Furthermore, there was an increased population

shift from rural to urban areas (places with more than 5,000 people), especially to the

greater St. John's metropolitan area.[43]

The plethora of economic and social crises led to a need to re-evaluate the

provincial government's broad policy directions.[44] While the importance of the social and

economic environment cannot be understated, the development of a strategic social plan

was indicative of various policy and research trends that existed. In the 1980s and 1990s,

there were emerging analytical and conceptual concepts of greater citizen participation

and public opinion. These focused on collaborative governance and new public

management principles which linked social and economic development based on

integrated and horizontal management approaches to policy, planning, program delivery

and early prevention and intervention. A strategic social plan for the province would

focus on collaborative partnerships, collective responsibility and integrated policy

perspectives, including voluntary, community-based groups, various institutional boards

across the province (i.e. health, education, zone boards) and government agencies. It

would represent a shift from public policy making that focused on "command and

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[42] In 2001 Census information, population had declined to 512, 930. The 1996 population was listed by Census Canada at 552, 196. Statistics found at http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/census2001.
[43] Rowe and Randell, "Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan," 82.
[44] Ibid., 81.

control", to one that emphasized the need for mutli-sectoral involvement and accountability.[45]

In 1996, Premier Brian Tobin continued the development of the SSP by releasing a consultation paper evaluating the province's social services and programs and seeking improved social development. The consultation paper announced the establishment of a Social Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC) to conduct public consultations on the framework of the SSP.[46] In explaining the benefits of a strategic social plan, Premier Tobin said:

> Piecemeal or ad hoc changes to existing programs will not achieve needed reforms...we cannot address 21st century problems with 20th century or in some cases 19th century solutions or attitudes. We must consider realistically where we are and where we are going as a province. We must assess the services we provide and re-think the ways they are provided. Then we can formulate our priorities and our choices as a rational and sustainable strategy strategy for the future.[47]

The SPAC was composed of fourteen volunteer representatives who reflected geographic diversity and key community and volunteer agencies. Chaired by Penelope Rowe, CEO of the Community Services Council, the committee undertook months of public meetings, roundtable discussions, and individual and group submission reviews. In total, the committee held over 100 separate meetings in over 30 communities, heard from over 1600 participants and received nearly 600 written briefs.[48] As well, in-camera sessions were held with government employees involved in program delivery stage to gather their opinions on current programs and how they respond to people's needs.[49]

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[45]Rowe and Randell, "Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan," 83. (None of this was actually thought of until SPAC. This is important because it shows government had not thought about the model it eventually adopted prior to SPAC)

[46] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Press Release, 19 June 1996.

[47] GNL, 19 June 1996.

[48] Rowe and Randell, "Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan," 84.

[49] Ibid., 84.

SPAC released two reports following their public consultations. The first, *Volume*

I: What the People Said was released in March 1997 and reported on the consultation

process and the ideas and comments brought forth by the participants. There was an

overwhelming consensus that a strategic social plan was needed to address the serious

fiscal and social problems of Newfoundland and Labrador and to create an environment

of sustainable development for the province.[50] Volume I declared that "...new

approaches to social policy require more coherent planning and decision-making. Policy

coherence among financial, economic, environmental and social policy directions must

be directed at the highest level."[51]

Volume II: Investing in People and Communities, A Framework for Social

Development was released in April 1997. This report transformed the public's comments

and ideas into a set of new strategic directions and initiatives for the province. SPAC's

recommendations represented a new way of thinking and governing. Themes such as

collaborative partnerships, public consultations and citizen engagement were discussed

throughout the report:

> The Social Policy Advisory Committee has proposed that the Provincial
> Government adopt a new framework for social development which is based on
> investing in people by integrating economic and social initiatives and by
> strengthening individual, family and community resources. Establishing this
> framework and advancing its objectives demand a significant shift in policy-
> making, a reorientation to horizontal policy and program design and reorganized
> service-delivery systems...Catalysts for change must exist both within
> Government and at the community level.[52]

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[50] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's: Office of the Queen's Printer, 1998), 4.
[51] SPAC: Volume I: *What the People Said* (St. John's, NL: Office of the Queen's Printer, 1997).
[52] SPAC: Volume II: *Investing in People and Communities* (St. John's, NL: Office of the Queen's Printer, 1997).

Subsequently, government accepted SPAC's recommendations in principle and formed special ministerial and interdepartmental committees to develop the plan. Following nearly a year of program development, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador translated the plan into policy and released *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador 1998*.

The Strategic Social Plan established four main goals to form the basis for a new direction in social development. They included:

- vibrant communities built on citizen engagement;
- sustainable regions based on strategic investments in people;
- self-reliant, healthy citizens living in safe communities; and
- a commitment to integrated, evidence-based policy and practice.[53]

Measuring these goals was to form the basis of the SSP's evaluative mechanism, the *Social Audit*, which would measure the well-being and quality of life of Newfoundland citizens' through key economic, social and health indicators.

The plan shifted social development to a place-based approach by expanding the focus of policy making to include six regional steering committees.[54] The expectation was to integrate social and economic development by matching investment with communities and regional based approaches to economic development.[55] More importantly, the SSP sought to treat the problems of individuals by addressing the underlying causes of people's needs in their community and region.[56] Rather than employing the traditional reactive model of policy formulation, design and delivery, the SSP sought to shift to a model focused on prevention and early intervention.

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[53] GNL, *Strategic Social Plan*, 1.
[54] David Close, "Linking Government and the Voluntary Sector: The Strategic Social Plan of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998-2004," Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2004, 6.
[55] GNL, *Strategic Social Plan*, 8.
[56] Ibid., 8. (Note that regions were defined in socio-economic as well as geographic terms.)

The SSP employed three interrelated strategies to establish the framework for the plan:

1) Building on community and regional strengths;
2) Integrating social and economic development;
3) Investing in people.

The provincial government addressed the growing concern of the long-term economic viability of rural communities by supporting economic initiatives where they could prosper. The plan was to help government work with individuals and communities and not directly for them, by practicing integrated, horizontal policy approaches to social and economic development.

The plan also sought to increase informal partnerships involving the provincial government, federal government – though with no policy input – and voluntary, community-based organizations to help shape program delivery. In particular, VCB's sought place-based developmental input and their role in program delivery redefined. While VCB's had often collaborated among themselves, they continued to bypass their own networks and seek direct government assistance. What was needed was an organizational shift to place-based development.

In addition, the SSP acknowledged the impediments to accommodating people's needs because current program criteria were often rigid and often their issues were caught between departmental jurisdictions.[57] Government departments would have to cooperate with each other, but also with the community groups in the design and delivery of services for the plan to succeed.

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[57] GNL, *Strategic Social Plan*, 12.

To carry out the objectives of the SSP, new structures were created that established a partnership framework in the areas of interdepartmental partnership and regional partnership:

Figure 1: Organizational Chart of the Strategic Social Plan
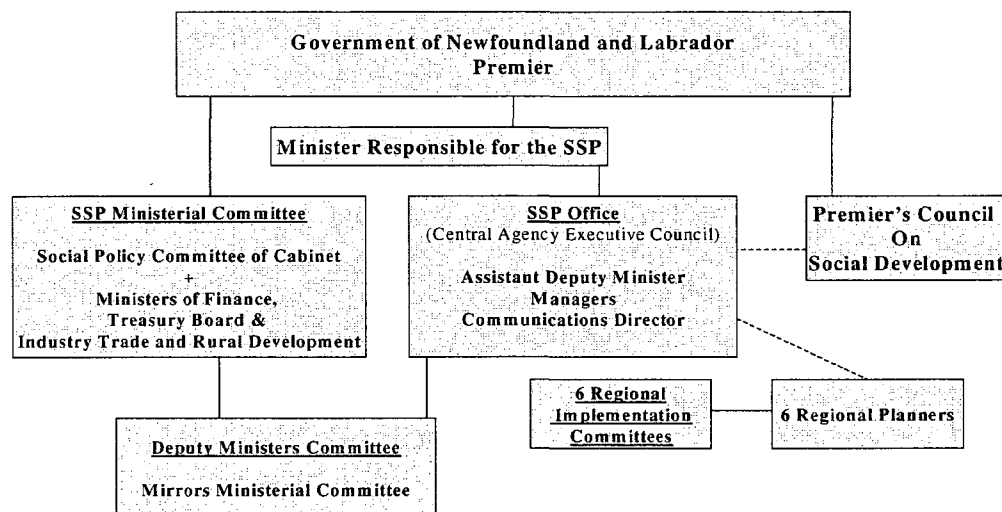
58

Building interdepartmental partnerships included helping departments promote the strategic social plan's vision and objectives in several phases. A Cabinet committee consisting of the social policy committee of Cabinet, minister of Finance, minister of Industry Trade and Rural Development, the lead minister responsible for the SSP and their deputy ministers would begin to conduct government business through better coordination and integration across departments. Deputy Ministers in particular had both administrative and implementation responsibility in their respective departments in

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[58] GNL, *Strategic Social Plan*, 14.

cooperation with other government departments. Another phase involved the regional

steering committees, which would provide meaningful public input through regional

structures and begin to shift from reactive to proactive policy modes. Thus, government

would begin conducting itself in horizontal rather than vertical public policy

management.

The SSP initially sought to include federal government representation on the

regional steering committees to seek better coordination, delivery and support of social

programs where federal programs affected provincial ones. There is often confusion as to

the roles and responsibilities of two levels of government carrying out social programs.

By increasing federal-provincial dialogue, the Plan would help reduce program

duplication and provide for more meaningful collaboration to strengthen social

programs.[59] While a federal staff person was seconded to the SSP office for one year, the

traditional federal-provincial relationships continued. In the end, Ottawa did not have any

representation on the regional steering committees and one can suggest that there was

simply little interest from the federal government on a social policy experiment in

Newfoundland and Labrador.

The plan also created a standing advisory body, the Premier's Council on Social

Development (PCSD), which would meet four times a year in two-day sessions. The

premier appointed members with expertise and experience in social development to

reflect the views and regions of the province. The PCSD was made up of 18 members,

the majority from community based and social sectors, with some from the business and

arts communities.[60] Their mandate was "to provide advice through round table

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[59] GNL, *Strategic Social Plan*, 12.
[60] Close, "Linking Government and the Voluntary Sector," 11.

discussions and through research and assessment activities on questions referred to it by the Premier or Ministers...and be involved in the process leading to the development of the social audit."[61]

Six SSP regions undertook implementation of the SSP at the regional and community level. Each zone had a regional steering committee with the mandate to carry out the plan. The SSP regions were Labrador, Western, Central, Eastern, Avalon and Northeast Avalon. The committees were composed mostly of *ex-officio* appointments from the various regional boards such as health, education, Regional Economic Development Boards (REDB's), other government departments, and federal and provincial service providers. Yet, the steering committees had only one or two members from the voluntary, community-based sector, a departure from the SPAC's vision of strong VCBS representation. Each Steering Committee had a full-time Regional Planner that provided a linkage between the Committee and the SSP Office.

The Regional Steering Committees were responsible for the regional implementation of the SSP. They were given two main functions. One was to ensure that program and service delivery were carried in a coordinated and integrated manner to meet the social development needs of a region. As to their second responsibility, the Steering Committees were to reach out to the community-based sector by partnering with them to develop the capacity in communities for building and strengthening local community involvement.[62] The community-based sector would partner with the Steering Committees to plan and undertake integrated social and economic initiatives, provide volunteer services in a coordinated and client-centered manner, contract with government

[61] GNL, *Strategic Social Plan*, 17.
[62] Ibid., 18.

to provide client services, and where possible, provide employment opportunities in the voluntary sector to provide and deliver services that carried out social and economic development.[63]

The final step in implementation involved a regional phase-in, where each steering committee began operating over a year-long period, beginning with the Labrador region in 1999 and finishing with the Northeast region in 2000. Each Steering Committee also had access to a flexible initiative fund to support demonstration projects.[64] Each committee had a regional planner who was to help develop the framework for a Social Audit and start developing the appropriate linkages among government departments to fulfill the objectives of collaborative and place-based development through horizontal program delivery.

A Social Audit to measure well being and quality of life, the first of its kind in Canada, provided an empirical base for determining community needs. The audit was designed to measure strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of looking at key social and economic indicators. There were two components. One, a report entitled *From the Ground Up* examined key social and economic indicators of health, education, employment, income and prosperity and where possible, noted the differences between men and women, age, regional differences and make comparisons with the rest of Canada. It was compiled from data from the *Community Accounts*.[65] The report was to

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[63] GNL, *Strategic Social Plan*, 18.

[64] Some of those included Healthy Communities Project (Labrador); Development Alliance of Western Newfoundland (Cormack-Grenfell); New World Island School Site Development Initiative (Central); Facilitating Community Partnerships Initiative (Eastern); Early Childhood Development and Literacy (Avalon); and Poverty Strategy (Northeast Avalon).

[65] Community Accounts was developed by the Newfoundland Statistics Agency, in partnership with the Strategic Social Plan (SSP) and Memorial University of Newfoundland. They developed a government and public-wide system that involves an integrated, evidence-based approach to policy and program development through collaboration within and across government departments, and economic and social

be used as a base line from which to measure progress over time. External to government was a consultant's evaluation, *Learning Study: Has Government Started Doing Business as Envisioned by the Strategic Social Plan,* undertaken by Jane Helleur & Associates during the summer and fall of 2003. They interviewed 119 people within government and outside government about their opinions on the effectiveness of the SSP and how successful the plan's implementation had been. This second phase of the social audit found significant achievements in the way government business was being conducted, especially the working partnerships among regional steering members and government departments such as Human Resources and Employment and Health and Community Services.[66] However, the Helleur report also acknowledged that progress was slower than had been envisioned, especially so for government line departments such as the department of Finance.[67] A lack of resources was identified by government funded programs as one of the main impediments to meeting the needs of communities and regions.[68]

While the SSP was never given a definitive timetable, it became apparent from the Helleur Report that the Plan needed some changes. However, the provincial election in the fall of 2003 brought upon not only a change in government but also the end of the SSP.

sectors. It is the first internet-based date retrieval and exchange system in Canada that provides a single comprehensive source of key social, economic and health data and indicators that would not be readily available or too costly to compile otherwise.

[66] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Learning Study: Has Government Started Doing Business as Envisioned by the Strategic Social Plan?* Jane Helleur & Associates, 2003, 7. http://www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/pdf/learningstudy-dec2003.pdf

[67] Finance is usually classed as a central agency of government responsible for the budgeting and fiscal policy of government; a line department usually delivers services.

[68] GNL, *Learning Study,* 8.

Rural Secretariat

During the 2003 Newfoundland and Labrador General Election in his "Blueprint

for the Future," Progressive Conservative leader Danny Williams envisioned "…a Rural

Secretariat as the focal point for government to work with local and regional partners to

build strong and dynamic communities."[69] The Secretariat would be dedicated to

promoting the well being of rural Newfoundland and Labrador through a comprehensive

approach aimed at integrating economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of

rural and regional development. The platform promised to ensure that rural concerns and

needs were considered throughout government; to support rural comminutes and regions

to take charge of their own futures; help communities and regions identify opportunities

for business expansion and increase the competitiveness of local companies; and conduct

and support research on economic and social issues affecting rural Newfoundland and

Labrador.[70]

Danny Williams became premier in October 2003, and his government

announced in early 2004 that the SSP steering committees would continue to function,

but operate under the auspices of the new Rural Secretariat. During the CURA interviews

conducted with former SSP Committee members, there was a strong feeling that the

motivation for replacing the SSP was mainly partisan. The Conservative administration

wanted to put its own stamp on social and rural development.[71] In February 2004, as part

of government departmental restructuring, Premier Williams said, "I am pleased to report

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[69] Progressive Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Blue Book 2003"
http://www.pcparty.nf.net/plan2003.html. Accessed on March 6 2006.
[70] PC Party, http://www.pcparty.nf.net/plan2003.html
[71] CURA Interviews, SSP Regional Steering Committee's, December 2005.

that government is establishing a new Rural Secretariat which builds on the framework of the Strategic Social Plan."[72]

The provincial government examined the SSP and came to the conclusion that its vision - healthy and vibrant communities built upon local strengths and capacity - was in line with that of the Rural Secretariat. The SSP regional steering committees would be used as the basis for developing the formal structure of the RS. The Minister responsible for the Rural Secretariat was announced as Kathy Dunderdale, MHA for Virginia Waters and Minister of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development. The Rural Secretariat came under the mandate of the Executive Council, just as the SSP had.

Throughout 2004, the six SSP regional steering committees continued to meet and carried out their mandate to some extent, parallel to the development of the RS. A Dialogue Day was held at Port Blandford, October 14 and 15, 2004, to determine how communities could best directly influence the long-term sustainability of both their region and the province. In attendance were 60 community representatives, 40 government officials and 26 Members of the House of Assembly, including Premier Williams and the Minister responsible for the Rural Secretariat Kathy Dunderdale.[73] The purpose of the dialogue day was to gather input from various stakeholders to help shape the role and mandate of the RS and discuss a shared vision and shared responsibility for rural development.

Following subsequent informal and formal consultations held by Cabinet, deputy ministers, and to some extent the SSP regional planners, the formal structure of the Rural

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[72] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Press Release, 20 February 2004.
[73] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Rural Secretariat Annual Report, 2004-2005* (St. John's: Office of the Queen's Printer, 2006), 5.

Secretariat was announced on March 9, 2005. Minister Dunderdale acknowledged the

new role for the Rural Secretariat:

> To help promote cooperation among communities and to maximize the
> assets we have available...we have identified nine regions each of which
> has two or three larger centers, a number of smaller communities and
> shared infrastructure. If the province is to prosper in the future,
> communities, regions and government must cooperate, recognize our
> strengths and our weaknesses and build strong regions which work
> together.[75]

The Rural Secretariat would provide a community forum for discussion that

would help shape development of economic, social, cultural and environmental sectors at

a regional level.[76] As an advisory body, it would help facilitate policy discourse and

direction.

Funding for the SSP committees did not extend beyond March 31, 2005, and the

committees were disbanded. The provincial government acknowledged that the SSP did

some excellent work, helped influence new ways of collaborative relationships, promoted

the use of evidence-based decision-making, especially the value of the *Community*

Accounts. Yet, the Rural Secretariat would not be providing direct program funding as

the SSP had the ability to do. Rather, the Regional Councils would have influence in

policy and program development, thus making programs more responsive and flexible to

meet regional development needs.[77]

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[75] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Press Release, 9 March 2005.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Figure 2: Organizational Chart of Rural

Secretariat

Minister Responsible for the Rural Secretariat

Cabinet

Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat

Assistant Deputy Minister

Deputy Minister Committee of the Rural Secretariat

Manager of Partnership Administration

Director of Partnership Research & Analysis

Director of Regional Partnership Development

Nine Regional Councils of the Rural Secretariat

Clerk Typist III

Policy & Program Specialist

10 Regional Partnership Planners

Labrador
Corner Brook – Rocky Harbour
Grand Falls-Windsor-Baie Verte-Hr. Breton
Gander – New-Wes-Valley
Avalon Peninsula (2, due to population size)

St. Anthony - Port Au Choix
Stephenville – Port aux Basques
Burin Peninsula
Clarenville - Bonavista

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The core elements of the Rural Secretariat:

- The Rural Secretariat is part of the Executive Council. It will work with all government departments to promote rural issues and develop regional approaches, which effectively link economic, social, cultural and environmental issues.

- The Rural Secretariat will report directly to the Minister Responsible for the Rural Secretariat.

- There will be nine regions – each with two or three larger communities and a network of smaller communities.

- Each region will have a regional council.

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[78] GNL, *Rural Secretariat Annual Report, 2004-2005*, 6.

- Each region will have a representative on the Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat.[79]

The RS was divided into nine regions:

- Labrador
- St. Anthony – Port Au Choix
- Corner Brook – Rocky Harbour
- Stephenville – Port Aux Basques
- Grand Falls – Windsor – Baie Verte – Harbour Breton,
- Gander – New-Wes-Valley Clarenville – Bonavista,
- Burin Peninsula
- Avalon Peninsula.

They were identified by studying factors such as available infrastructure, number of communities, population and economic and labour market activity. The nine Regional Councils will each meet four times a year to develop a collaborative approach to regional visions and priorities, as well as identify barriers that prohibit success. As well, the Regional Councils will advise government on policies and programs needed to help promote the RS vision.[80]

The make-up of the RS is much different from the SSP steering committees. Each council has a Regional Planner and brings together 14-18 community leaders with a gender and age balance, reflecting a cross-section of community leaders with proven records in economic, social, cultural and environmental development. They also nominate individuals to sit on the Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat.

The selection process was done on the basis of an open nomination process. Over 350 nominations were accepted and after months of deliberation, the composition of the nine regional councils was announced on August 25 2005. Minister Dunderdale was thrilled with the interest shown by the people of the province and she said, "It reinforces

[79] GNL, *Rural Secretariat Annual Report, 2004-2005,* 1.
[80] GNL Press Release, March 9 2005.

my belief that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are committed to this province and are willing to work together to see it succeed".[81] Minister Dunderdale announced that Sheila Kelly-Blackmore would chair the Provincial Council. Kelly-Blackmore had over 30 years experience in business management, and community and international development.

Each Regional Council has its mandate:

- To develop a common, evidence-based understanding of the social, economic, environmental and cultural realties of a region;
- To review key regional economic and social measures (e.g. education levels, demographic trends, health status, income levels, EI usage, economic diversity) and to reach agreement on the priorities for change over the next five years;
- To identify policies and programs which either advance, negatively impact or need to be developed to encourage the necessary change over the five year period;
- To advance regional cooperation through the sharing of information on and discussion about economic and social measures, and to encourage regional partners to take action on and be accountable for those areas within their mandates;
- To serve as a sounding board in their region for new or proposed initiatives;
- To nominate an individual to represent the region on the Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat.[82]

As well, the Provincial Council was given the following mandate:

- To develop a common, evidence-based understanding of the social, economic, environmental and cultural realties facing the province;
- To review key regional economic and social measures (e.g. education levels, demographic trends, health status, income levels, EI usage, economic diversity) and to reach agreement on the priorities for change over the next five years;
- To identify and advise government on policies and programs which either advance, negatively impact or need to be developed to encourage the necessary change over the five year period;
- To advance cooperation through the sharing of information on and discussion about economic and social measures, and to government and

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[81] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Press Release, August 25, 2005.
[82] GNL Press Release, March 9 2005.

community partners to take action on and be accountable for those areas within their mandates;
- To meet twice annually with the Provincial cabinet and deputy ministers to advance regional development priorities;
- To serve as an external sounding board for government for the development of strategies, policies, programs and budget issues that will affect provincial and regional sustainability.[83]

The Rural Secretariat budget of 2005-2006 was $1.7 million which was ultimately revised to $1. 638 million for the end of the 2006 fiscal year. For 2006-2007, the program was given a budget of $1.8 million.[84]

Another component of the Rural Secretariat's permanent structure is the Deputy Ministers' Committee on Regional Development, through which Deputy Ministers are charged with the responsibility to develop cross sectoral and cross departmental approaches to regional and rural issues and ensure that policy and programs are designed to complement one another.[85] The Clerk of the Executive Council chairs the committee. As well, the Deputy Ministers Committee will meet with the Provincial Council at least twice a year.[86]

In terms of potential influence of the Regional Councils, the provincial government said they would represent a cross-section of individuals in a region. The regional council members would look at the regional information from *Community Accounts* and other data pools to assess their current assets and compare themselves to other regions in the province. It would allow them to address problems facing the region and then move on to formulate practical solutions. Each region would have two members on the Provincial Council. It would provide the regions direct access to government

[83] GNL Press Release, March 9 2005.
[84] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador," Budget 06: The Right Choices-Momentum for Growth and Prosperity," http://www.budget.gov.nl.ca.
[85] GNL, *Rural Secretariat Annual Report, 2004-2005*, 2.
[86] Ibid., 3.

representatives, because the Provincial Council would meet with the full cabinet twice a year to discuss regional development, priorities and suggested solutions.[87]

More specifically, RS officials noted that each regional council was given a presentation as to the state of the province, in terms of demographics as well as social and economic statistics in order to develop a collective vision for the next 15 years. That is, they have asked each regional council to address what they want their region to look like by 2020. The officials acknowledged that the province has come to grips with the fact that people are essentially voting with their feet by leaving the province, not just seasonally, but leaving on a permanent basis, going to places such as Alberta to work and live. The province also has to ask if these expatriates would ever come back if their region is no longer providing sustainable development. Thus, the regional councils have to address issues involved in formulating policy that one hopes can lead to sustainable development.[88]

A number of key questions became apparent after the announcement of the Rural Secretariat and the Plan's structure. One concerned why have nine regions instead of the six under the SSP? The provincial government's response was that they took a good look at what was happening throughout the province and realized there were areas of common interest that shared social, cultural, economic and environmental backgrounds.[89] Government research had shown that smaller rural communities are most viable when they work collaboratively with larger communities in their region. The nine identified regions possess natural internal linkages, which suggests the ability for communities to

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[87] GNL, *Rural Secretariat Annual Report, 2004-2005*, 2.
[88] This leads to the question of whether the RS is yet another program for "rural re-development."

[89] GNL Press Release, March 9 2005.

work together. Each region has a cluster of two or three larger communities that provide support and access to education, training, healthcare and employment.[90]

The nine regional councils met together for two days in October of 2005 for an orientation session and discussion. Attended by premier Williams, Minister Dunderdale and other government officials, it marked the first time that the nine councils had come together to discuss ways to address the many issues facing Newfoundland and Labrador. Premier Williams called the meetings a milestone for the province and made several important points. One, government has no intention of telling the regions what to do. Neither does it plan to continue the "drive-by funding" approach to rural development that is aimed at crisis management rather than long-term sustainability.[91] Premier Williams also echoed the sentiment voiced by many government leaders in recent years that governments cannot do it alone anymore. "I can't come up with the solution alone, my ministers can't come up with the solutions alone. My caucus members can't come up with the solutions alone. The deputy ministers or staff can't do it." He added, "You are the ones that know it...the problem is, in the past you've been tied up with the frustration of having all these great ideas and being aware of the problems, but you put it in the system and it gets lost...we're going to try and open it up as much as we can. We're going to try and free the red tape. We're actually going to listen, but we have to act as well."[92]

The provincial government also stated that the Rural Secretariat has developed a partnership approach, both internally and externally, to coordinate an open dialogue and

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[90] GNL Press Release, March 9 2005.
[91] Gary Kean, "Co-operation the key to rural growth: Williams," *The Telegram* St. John's, NL, A4. October 22, 2005.
[92] Ibid., A4.

create better horizontal working relationships within government and between government and the nine regions. They were to cover the following policy initiatives: a labor market strategy, poverty strategy, sustainable development committee, Labrador strategy, violence prevention initiative and a literacy initiative.[93]

The provincial budget for 2006 allocated an additional $150,000 to the Rural Secretariat for a total budget of $1.85 million.[96] However, does this reflect a strong commitment when the RS's allocation reflects only 0.0036% of the provincial budget? Compared to the budget that the SSP received, $2 million/year from 2000-2003, there is a decrease of $115,000. The mandate of the Secretariat was to continue to work on developing a realistic, sustainable, achievable and affordable 15-year vision of the nine regional councils while the additional funding would support the on-going work of the councils, allow for additional public discussions and enhance the ability of the RS to undertake research on issues that impact rural Newfoundland.[97] The question is whether a budget of under $2 million dollars can accomplish these ambitious goals?

As of June 2006, officials indicated that the regional councils have all met at least three times and the regional representatives and alternates for the Provincial Council have been identified. There was a pre-Provincial Council meeting in May 2006 for all the Regional representatives to meet with the Chair and to discuss membership. The target was set to have the composition of the Provincial Council finalized by the end of summer

[93] GNL, *Rural Secretariat Annual Report, 2004-2005*, 6.
94 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador," Budget 06: The Right Choices-Momentum for Growth and Prosperity," http://www.budget.gov.nl.ca. Accessed June 5 2006.
[97] Ibid.

2006, but which did not take place until late fall of 2006.[98] As well, the RS is working on regional visions for long-term sustainable development and planning to present those regional visions to the provincial council for the third dialogue day in the fall of 2006. Within government, RS officials note that the Rural Secretariat has representation on numerous inter-departmental committees and is finalizing a Rural Lens.[99] It is also preparing for additional demographic consultations across the province, and will be doing a survey of how larger and smaller communities currently interact with one another socially and economically.[100]

In summary, the evolution of governance mechanisms that began with the idea of a strategic social plan and subsequently its successor, the Rural Secretariat, covers thirteen years of incremental changes. The SSP program was first formulated by the Social Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC) in 1996 and subsequently the provincial government in 1998. Formally beginning in 1999, the SSP lasted until 2005, when a change in government brought in new priorities and a new approach. Instead of carrying on with the SSP, the Progressive Conservative government of Danny Williams replaced it with a new incarnation, the Rural Secretariat.

The transition of the SSP to the Rural Secretariat raises important questions. While the original SSP initiative was announced in 1993, it was not running at full strength until 2000, and for all purposes was hung out to dry after the 2003 provincial election. The RS was not up and running until 2005. This results in essentially four years out of fourteen. What can we make of the government's commitment in this regard? Or

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[98] Provincial Council composed of one member from each of the nine regions and eight members at large.
[99] Information on the Rural Lens was not received by the time the thesis was completed.
[100] Correspondence with Rural Secretariat office, June 8 2006.

of its commitment, when the Rural Secretariat's budget allocation is 0.0036% of a provincial budget over $5 billion. Does this reflect a strong commitment to continue a collaborative governance model that began with the creation of the SSP?

The following chapter will explore in details the government's commitment to both the SSP and RS by addressing several key questions. Why was the SSP replaced with the Rural Secretariat? What can be identified as some of the strengths or weaknesses of the SSP, as well as how the Rural Secretariat can advance the governance approach that the SSP began to shape since 1999? By interviewing those with first-hand experience with both the SSP and RS, those questions and many more can be considered.

<u>Chapter 3. Interview analysis on the transition of the SSP to the Rural Secretariat</u>

The author worked with the Community Services Council, under the auspices of the Community University Research Alliance (CURA), to research the Strategic Social Plan and the transition of the SSP to the Rural Secretariat. What the research wanted to examine was not only the transition of the SSP to the RS, but also several broad themes covering the strengths, weakness and positive accomplishments of the SSP. Specifically, can the RS address specific shortfalls of the SSP or build upon the SSP's accomplishments. Second, whether any improved communication or working relationships have developed among government departments and their quasi-government agencies on the SSP committees? Third, what happened with the transition timeframe from February 2004 to June 2006? Finally, which themes above point to possible effects of the Rural Secretariat?

In total, there were seven former SSP steering committee planners and two officials in the Rural Secretariat interviewed from late November 2005 to January 2006. Three categories of individuals were interviewed: 1) some former chairs and planners of SSP Steering Committees who are neither members of the Rural Secretariat Regional Councils nor active regional council planners; 2) some former Chairs and Planners who are on the Regional Councils or are still in the position of planner; 3) people in the Office of the Rural Secretariat.[101] Their views and opinions reflect their personal experience in the SSP or the Rural Secretariat, and represent various points of view on the transition of

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[101] Names and/or titles do not appear as they may undoubtedly identify the respondents

the SSP to the RS, strengths and weaknesses of the SSP, how (or if) the RS can address these issues and where they see they RS may be headed in the future.[102]

SSP Accomplishments and Strengths

During the interviews, a variety of positive aspects, strengths and accomplishments of the Strategic Social Plan were highlighted. There were several interviewees who felt the SSP brought different sectors together, such as community organizations, school boards, health boards and quasi-government agencies. One respondent noted that increased horizontal partnership was ultimately the 'raison d'etre' of the SSP. The steering committees tried to reinforce how partnerships could work and create horizontal linkages in departments where there were shared interests, such as the Department of Education and in Health and Community Services. The Plan helped lay the groundwork for stronger partnerships in the six SSP regions.

One of the major strengths noted was that the SSP steering committees brought together the 'movers and shakers' in a region. That is, the steering committees were composed of CEOs, executive directors, or chairs of regional economic zone boards, health boards, education boards, community organizations and provincial government departments. They were known as the decision-makers. If they committed to a planning process with a social plan for the region with strategic directions and goals and priorities, they had the influence to see it follow through. One respondent noted that when quasi-government officials followed a specific program and policy decision, committee members knew it was a good decision.

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[102] The author would like to acknowledge the role of the Community Services Council, specifically Penny Rowe, Fran Locke and Patti Powers, in providing the author the opportunity to partake in the interview stage of their research on the transition of the Strategic Social Plan to the Rural Secretariat

An illustration of the coordinated and collaborative approach to social policy implementation can be found in an approach to the important issues of early childhood development and poverty. The SSP helped provide the forum to identify factors and concerns and therefore provide an opportunity for collaboration across various service providers. For example, one regional steering committee had gained access to a part-time speech pathologist that was shared between the Departments of Health and Education. As the regional planner noted, "this was unheard of... Usually, an idea such as this was kept on your own turf. If you wanted somebody from speech language, you went to government yourself. These were two areas in the region that actually shared, for three hours a week, which wasn't much but was something."[103]

Another accomplishment signaled by some respondents was the creation and use of *Community Accounts* and the related *Neighborhood data* in the St. John's region. The use of evidence-based decision-making was one of the core tenets of the SSP. By providing detailed statistical information for every region and community in the province, the SSP greatly enhanced the capacity to analyze the condition of one's community. Before the SSP, this information never existed. This allowed having that information at the disposal of the SSP steering committees to make evidence-based decisions in areas such as physical recreation. One interviewee noted that their committee could ascertain what kind of recreation programs were needed for what their municipality could offer. Previously, decisions would be made without the use of demographics and programs would not often match the interest or age groups in a specific community.

An additional strength of the SSP was the development of personal relationships through the regional steering committees. Two respondents noted that both individuals

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[103] CURA Interviews, Former SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.

and community groups began to know each other when previously there was no contact at all. It developed more collaborative relationships and partnerships through initiatives that were undertaken in the region. As one interviewee said, "I think of people who used to have differences in the past but now because of the SSP and the regional steering committees, they could call each other up and say I have an issue in health that impacts on kids in schools and how can we work to resolve this. That was the whole intent."[104]

Along with the development of personal relationships came a shift in community relationships and thinking. Three respondents held that their steering committees started to see the region as a whole, rather than as individual communities looking out for their own interests. It provided a mechanism for organizations that came to the table to be much more informed about their region, to express their opinions, and apply their knowledge to act upon matters that affected their region. For instance, one regional planner noted that when the SSP steering committee began its work and held a series of community consultations in order to identify regional priorities, some people conceived of government as simply a mode for direct financial assistance. They did not identify existing infrastructure or community organizations that were already in place in or in close proximity to their own community. The planner noted that there was a lot of "turf protection." While this still continues to exist in some communities, there are many other communities that began to work together. By realizing that individual communities can not go it alone, especially in rural Newfoundland, the design and delivery of services such as waste or water management could provide more effective service delivery. And, the respective communities could still maintain their identity. In sum, the SSP permitted

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[104] CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.

people on the steering committees to get beyond their individual responsibilities and organizations to work for the best interests of the region as a whole.

Finally, one respondent saw having the ability in their region to develop a regional profile which gave the partners in the region a tool for using evidence-based decision making as a vital strength:

> The regional steering committee here decided to take enough time to learn about the region. Part of that process was to start documenting what's happening in our region, what are some of the steps that are being taken by some of our partners, and by government and the community to address some of these issues... One of the main reasons for doing that was so that the steering committee understood what the issues were and therefore could identify what are some of the steps that are needed to be taken to change to move the region forward. We were talking about uniting social and economic issues, that hadn't been done before but people had talked about it.[105]

The interview data above provides a clear picture that the SSP steering committees began to develop strong communication and working relationships that previously did not exist before. One of the main tenets of building collaborative governance is the creation of horizontal linkages at both the regional level, which occurred with the interaction between quasi-government officials and other members of the regional steering committees, and at the provincial level within some government departments. The use of evidence-based decision making through *Community Accounts* was invaluable in developing those horizontal relationships because all those involved, from quasi-government officials, municipal and provincial representatives and community organizations at least started off in the right direction by having the same statistical information at their disposal.

With the development of stronger interpersonal relationships that stressed increased partnership and communication, the SSP steering committees began to look at

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[105] CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.

their health of their communities as directly related to the health of their region as a whole. While building social capital is not directly related to collaborative governance, a more cohesive regional strategy in social policy innovation is no less important. Social capital can benefit communities in terms of mental and physical health, early childhood development, educational performance and collective action.

Yet, without a commitment from the provincial government to wait for those relationships to continue to grow, a tremendous opportunity may have been lost. The hope was to be that the Rural Secretariat could address the next theme of the interview process, the SSP shortfalls and weaknesses.

SSP Shortfalls and Weaknesses

Although there were various strengths and accomplishments identified by the former SSP regional planners, it is important to note the shortfalls and weaknesses that were discussed as well. There were two individuals who saw a lack of a clear direction or blueprint from the provincial government as a problem; the objective seemed to be for the SSP committee to focus on projects rather than long-term planning. This point is interesting to note because the Rural Secretariat does not involve neither a focus on projects nor long-term planning centered on social policy innovation. Therefore, will the issue of a lack of direction remain with the Rural Secretariat regional councils?

Two others noted that there was a lack of understanding of what SSP committee members were actually to do. One response was that "initially, nobody knew who we were, they didn't know if we were fit to eat."[106] Another respondent remarked that because the SSP was such a complex shift in government thinking and how people worked inside and outside of government, enough was not done in the beginning stages

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[106] CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.

of the SSP to have committee members understand where they were going with it. The

planner acknowledged that while having adequate resources at your disposal was

important "you need the proper training and understanding of 'front-line' people that

could say that they were doing things differently in this department and this is why and

how we have begun to change the way the department operates to a more horizontal

approach. If the basis is not there, you can't get the 'buy in or get the changes you are

looking for."[107]

As a corollary, a lack of connectivity to government departments was addressed

by other former regional planners. One noted that there was a naïve belief in the

beginning of the SSP that at the regional level, committees would have a greater role, yet

in the end they had very little power. The missing link may have been at the deputy

minister level. As the SSP began, it seemed that the opportunity was there for deputy

ministers and assistant deputy ministers to be directly involved, but after a while interest

was lost and support from Confederation Building waned. This lack of connection with

the provincial government was also noted by another respondent:

> There was no link into government. Coming from a person who was in a key
> position in the SSP, when you come up with policy recommendations or things
> that needed to be addressed or changed in programs or services and the impact it
> would have on the area you were servicing, it was difficult to get the ear of
> government, whether it was official or bureaucrats. We were paid by government
> but on behalf of the steering committee so our direction came from that (steering
> committees).[108]

This result may not be all that surprising because the very nature not create a

direct mechanism from which the steering committees could provide direct policy

recommendations to cabinet. Any policy recommendations had to be passed through the

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[107]CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.
[108] Ibid.

regional planners to the SSP Office and the deputy and assistant deputy minister involved in the SSP administration. Coupled with the issue of departmental "silos", where government departments acted as their own single unit rather as part of a collective entity, it would undoubtedly have taken much time and some tinkering before the SSP steering committees had a sense that any policy recommendations had an impact on the decision-making processes of the provincial government.

In addition, two of those interviewed felt that the steering committees could have achieved more if they had been given more money and more people. During 2000-2004, the SSP budget remained constant at $2 million while the government budget grew from $3.1 Billion to $3.7 billion.[109] For example, when the SSP was first established there was one regional planner who was dedicated to trying to engage as many citizens or as many community organizations in a large geographic area. The former planner noted that it was an almost impossible task. There were not enough resources to allow the committee to move forward the best way they could have.[110] While it can almost always be argued that more money and people would have helped the steering committees move forward with their agenda, the provincial Liberal government that undertook the SSP was hindered by budgetary restraints that may not have allowed for a budget beyond what the SSP as a whole operated under ($2 million dollar average). The SSP steering committees simply had to work with what they were given.

Finally, one respondent noted that while having the CEO's and regional directors of education or health departments was an advantage for the SSP steering committees, there was a sense that communities did not have a seat at the table. Therefore, you were

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[109] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Rural Secretariat: Financial Summary," http://www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/publications.asp. Accessed March 28 2007.
[110]CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.

not getting to what individuals within communities saw as ways to address social and economic issues in a more collaborative approach. There were no mayors or other official representatives of local government. Furthermore, the SSP undoubtedly did not have the proper representation from the voluntary, community-based sector that was argued for in the SPAC reports. The question that needs to be addressed is whether this shortfall will be adequately addressed with the make-up of the Rural Secretariat regional councils.

Rural Secretariat addressing SSP shortfalls

Is there the potential for the Rural Secretariat to address some of the above concerns? There were those during the interviews who felt that the Rural Secretariat did have that potential. The make-up of the regional councils may address the issue of community representation. Council members no longer represent a specific organization or group but are there because of their community experience and knowledge. In particular, they are not accountable to a specific organization and can therefore they do not have to be concerned with bringing the voice of that particular organization to the table. The SSP steering committees were composed mostly of *ex-officio* appointments from the various regional boards such as health, education, Regional Economic Development Boards and other government departments while community based organizations played a small role. With the RS, those with direct experience as community leaders and activists may play a greater role for policy input and program design. While in one sense they are losing members of the SSP who had multiple years of experience on the steering committees, they still have what Donald Linehan and Tony Valeri referred to as community 'corporate knowledge and memory.' That is, to address

community-specific issues where a consensus-based approach can often legitimize difficult policy decisions by involving those citizens most directly affected.

The RS may also address the concern of having a direct linkage to government through the mechanism of the Provincial Council. Each regional council will have a representative that will sit at the provincial table to bring forward the concerns of the region, to hear the concerns of other regions in the province, identify priorities for the province, to see the commonalties and bring that information back to the regional council where discussion can also happen. The Premier's Council on Social Development with the SSP did not have linkages to the strategic social plan steering committees. Therefore, what was being discussed at a provincial level with the PCSD and what was being discussed in regions was not coming together. Having the provincial council meet with caucus and cabinet was felt as being a huge step forward.[111]

Yet, the lethargy shown in actually choosing the members of the Provincial Council makes one wonder how committed the government is to developing a direct linkage from those involved on the regional councils to cabinet. If the concerns of the respective regional councils are not being heard by cabinet directly, which is the goal of meeting with the regional councils twice a year, one would suspect that concerns, issues and areas of social and economic policy identified as important are being channeled to the Rural Secretariat office. One can then ask whether this facet of the Rural Secretariat has improved on the lack of direct linkages as identified with the SSP.

Several other issues associated with the composition and structure of the Rural Secretariat also arose. There was a response that the RS has a completely different

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[111] CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.

composition of members and that it lacks a clear purpose and direction. In particular, one

interviewee noted that:

> Council members are good people and their heart is in the right place, but
> it's going to be a process where it may be two years before we start doing
> anything. It's about learning about what the RS is all about. Regional
> council members sidestepped all the information that was given to them
> and wanted to get at the issue of rural NL dying. It's going to take a while
> before you get to that point and you have to learn the steps in order to for
> it before you get to that point. They are not aware of what is expected of
> them.[112]

It seems apparent that this respondent has echoed what became a reoccurring

theme throughout the interviews in that the regional councils would be hampered by a

lack of continuity between the members of the SSP and Rural Secretariat.

As well, another respondent was very skeptical of the lack of clarity surrounding

the role and function of regional committees, indeed of the Rural Secretariat as a whole:

> (I) don't know how they picked it (regional councils). Some of these people have
> never been involved with any kind of a committee or any idea of what the process
> is all about. We went to Corner Brook for three or four days for a workshop, it
> gave us the basic generic idea of what the RS was all about. (We) had out first
> meeting, another in a couple weeks time. No wiser today of what it's all about
> today. Give us an indication of where are going with it, what is the purpose of it,
> what's the mandate, what are we going to do? Are we just a think-tank, is that all
> we are going to do is give our view of rural NL.[113]

The above quote symbolizes the confusion regarding the selection of the RS regional

councils and the subsequent meetings where there remained unanswered questions as to

why the SSP was replaced by a body that had no clear agenda, no clear purpose and

lacked an understanding by its new council members of what was being asked of them.

It took nearly five years and a very conscious communication effort in the six

regions for the SSP to become understood and for people to realize how it could relate to

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[112] CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.
[113] Ibid.

their community. While the RS is still in its infancy, one would have to question the lack of continuity between the SSP and RS in terms of either carrying over knowledge and experience of the SSP into the regional councils.

In short, the knowledge and experience gained from the SSP was simply lost in the transition. There was a resounding response that the RS regional councils would have to "start from scratch." Strong collaborative governance can only occur when a sense of long-term planning is being achieved. If, only after a couple of years both SSP members and the structure are scrapped for a completely different entity, any long-term planning is cast aside. As well, if a lack of direction from the provincial government is lacking, are the RS regional councils suffering the same fate of the SSP steering committees?

Yet, one respondent argued that the RS is *not* a dramatic departure from the SSP structure. For example, the RS has ten planners and nine regions. Yet, the RS structure has not addressed what each planner found to be SSP shortfalls. Instead, the RS structure is not dramatically different, only some of the participants. It is still people coming together from all sectors working on a multi-disciplinary committee to provide advice to the provincial government.

Certainly this respondent is in the minority. While there have been structural changes from the SSP to the RS at both developing direct linkages to government and the committee's themselves, the interview data suggests that the Rural Secretariat has not made significant changes to concerns that were raised by the SSP.

As well, there was a concern that because of the very name of the Rural Secretariat, there seems to be more of a focus on rural development. What then could that mean for the St. John's metropolitan area, for example? Rural Secretariat officials

responded that emphasis is not placed on one area of Newfoundland over another. Instead, they argued that they have to come to the realization that both rural and urban communities affect each other and no longer differentiate between 'urban' versus 'rural' but 'smaller and 'larger' communities. However, people have begun to come to a common understanding that demographics for the region, whether looking at infrastructure or a Labour Market Strategy, affect everyone in the region and that by coming together and developing priorities and planning, people can work together in the region. The challenge is therefore to involve more communities.

Yet, to argue that the Rural Secretariat will not direct its approach more often then not towards rural Newfoundland would ignore several realities. One, the northeast Avalon Peninsula is experiencing an economic boom never seen before. It encompasses communities from St. John's to Conception Bay and its surrounding communities. On the other hand, rural communities on the Burin, Connaigre, and Northern Peninsula continue to suffer from the decline in industries such as the fishery and forestry and large-scale out migration caused by the most part from wealth that can be attained in the oil sands of Fort McMurray and Grand Prairie, Alberta. Rural Newfoundland simply can't compete. In the end, it may not be a bad thing for the Rural Secretariat to focus on what its title suggests.

Lastly, RS officials noted that each regional council was given a presentation on the state of the province, in terms of demographics as well as social and economic statistics in order to develop a collective vision for the next 15 years. That is, the Rural Secretariat asked each regional committee to address what it wants its region to look like by 2020. Officials acknowledged that the province has to come to grips with the fact of

emigration and the strong possibility that this may be permanent. Thus, the regional

councils have to address the conundrum of finding policies that can generate sustainable

development.[114] The simple question is what, if any, policies have been generated by the

Rural Secretariat to generate sustainable development for rural Newfoundland? If it can

be argued that the SSP did not generate sustainable development, or any government

program in rural Newfoundland for that matter, the Rural Secretariat may face an

impossible task.

Transition from the SSP to Rural Secretariat

As to the transition period between March 2004 and March 31, 2005, a number of

respondents noted this was a time of personal uncertainty and disappointment. Six

respondents spoke of their personal feelings during the process. There was a degree of

uncertainty because there were those who were directly employed as regional planners

and their jobs were up in the air. There was a sense that those who participated on the

regional steering committees had a vested interest in the progress of the SSP. During this

period the SSP regional planners were left in limbo, with no planning occurring and no

direction from the SSP office. The net effect, as noted by many throughout the

interviews, was that the momentum created by the SSP was lost. Partnerships that were

developed both within specific steering communities and between the SSP and

government had the direct effect of being placed on standby while government decided

what the Rural Secretariat would look like.

One noted that there were bruised feelings from a regional point of view because

the members of the steering committees had a taken on extra work with the SSP.

Moreover, the transition occurred with very little knowledge of what was happening as to

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[114] CURA Interviews, RS Officials, 2006.

the development of the Rural Secretariat and no real reasons given to the committees for why their program was being phased out. Several noted that it was frustrating to continue on working on the SSP steering committees and be asked to stay involved while the RS was announced, yet receive minimal details. Specifically, one respondent that there was very little direction from government, making the members of the steering committees increasingly frustrated, and that it was evident that the end of the SSP was near.

This lack of direction from government suggests several reasons why the SSP steering committees were left by the wayside. Political partisanship almost certainly played a factor, given that the SSP program was labeled a Liberal policy and the Conservative government under Danny Williams chose not to be affiliated with the SSP. It may also suggest that those responsible for developing the new approach of the Rural Secretariat were simply focused on the future and not the past. It was clear from the outset that the SSP would be replaced so why place any more time and energy on a program that was drawing to a close.

More frustration was also echoed by another respondent who noted that he felt the SSP was beginning to make a difference in the region. They were at the stage where steering committees needed to evolve so that their strategic plan was in line with the strategic plans of their respective regional health, education and economic boards. The partners involved at the steering committee level were putting major efforts into the SSP and they did not see any reason to make a major change.

As to the communication between government and the steering committees, there were several respondents who mentioned the lack of communication during the transition process. One respondent said there was 'absolutely none.' The SSP was

brought to a close and after the RS was formally announced in March 2005, the only

communication was a press release indicating who was being appointed to the RS.

Concerning the programs that had existed with the SSP, it seemed apparent that those

may not have survived with the introduction of the Rural Secretariat.

Another respondent noted that the only consultation occurred in a forum in Terra

Nova in the fall of 2004. Specifically, the respondent held:

> From my own perspective, consultation in a sense that people give their input, yet
> ministers or whoever decision makers were at the time were doing what they
> wanted regardless. It was consultation in the loosest sense of the word... In the
> end, there were no details, but there was a rush to get announcement out, that by
> March 31, 2005, the committees would be disbanded. There was very little to say.
> It was always called a transition year, but what that transition meant leaves a lot to
> be desired. It wasn't very well communicated.[115]

There was also a sense that there were certain things lost in the transition. Four

respondents felt that there may have been a loss of momentum in replacing the SSP with

the RS. Some members of the various steering committees had worked for several years

with the SSP and had felt they had contributed to a greater understanding of their region,

as well as advancing programs and policies to government that impacted economic and

social issues. All of a sudden, they came to an end. Coupled with the lack of direction

from government to the SSP steering committees, several programs that were being

worked on were shelved.

One respondent from the Avalon region felt that in that region, social programs

were doing what they were intended to do, that money was available for workshops and

research studies, that detailed information on every recreation facility with the region had

been complied and was readily available. Yet, an initiative called the Avalon Games,

which had brought youth throughout the Avalon Peninsula together to compete in various

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[115] CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.

recreational activities had ended. There was also doubt about the continued use of a speech-language pathologist that was being shared in a collaborative effort between the Department of Health and Department of Education.

One said that there was a lack of understanding by government both as to how the committees operated and to their importance. The transition process left some feeling that their work was not appreciated. Another noted that the shift brought with it a tremendous loss, not just from a volunteer's standpoint, but of institutional knowledge that those involved on the steering committees had gained over several years. This refers particularly to details of economic, cultural, environmental and cultural programs and policies in their regions. With the advent of the Rural Secretariat, the 4-5 years of working on the SSP and gaining policy and program formulation and implementation could simply be lost. Thus, the lack of a proper succession plan from the SSP to the RS seemed to cause a loss in 'momentum'.

This suggests that government may have lacked a sense of gratitude towards the members of the steering committees and the work they accomplished. Besides the regional planner for each steering committee, members volunteered their time and energy. Wouldn't it have made sense to include the knowledge, experience and work of the SSP steering committees in the development process of the Rural Secretariat? And therefore also assess the strengths and weaknesses of the SSP to better determine how the Rural Secretariat could build upon them? To simply ignore the committees, as some of those interviewed had felt, downplayed nearly four years of dedication to the SSP.

There was, however, one respondent who was of the opinion that the SSP continued to function and that the work that the steering committee had performed would

be rolled over into the RS. Strategic planning continued to be worked upon and that their agenda reflected the anticipated change in status from the SSP to the RS.

Yet, this was a minority view as to the transition of the Strategic Social Plan to the Rural Secretariat. Most of those interviewed touched on the reoccurring themes of a lack of direction from government in the transition timeframe between the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2005; a lack of communication as to how the transition was taking place and what effects that would have on the steering committees and their members; a lack of consultation as to what the shape and scope would be of the provincial government's new entity, the Rural Secretariat; and a loss of momentum that had been created by the SSP in setting a foundation for increased horizontal partnerships and holistic approaches to economic and social policy development.

In the end, the transition period was symbolized by a lack of compassion and a lack of understanding of the commitment made by the SSP steering committees. While it is of the understanding that change does not occur overnight and that programs such as the SSP or Rural Secretariat can take months or even years to design, it is often those who are directly impacted, such as the SSP committee members, who feel the brunt of that change.

Potential reasons for change from SSP to Rural Secretariat

Most respondents (7/10) thought that the shift from the Strategic Social Plan to the Rural Secretariat was at least partly caused by a change in government that saw Progressive Conservatives replace Liberals. Some felt the change signaled a shift in policy to a more of a focus on rural Newfoundland and specifically rural economic

development. Yet the overall feeling was that it was politically induced, a case of where new administrations want to put their own stamp on things.

However, one should not deduce that politics was the sole reason why the SSP was replaced. Some respondents perceived problems in the operation of the SSP. One was a view that the SSP needed more connectivity to government departments, which was an area of concern raised in the Helleur report. Specifically, one respondent noted that their committee had identified issues regarding program and service delivery to bring to the attention of the senior bureaucracy but never really found a proper way to do that. It may have been that government did not fully understand its own developmental and social policy.

For other respondents, the question was difficult to answer. In some instances, this was because they were unsure of the motives behind the change. One thought that the SSP worked well for their region and saw no obvious reasons for change. Another pointed out that some people were not aware of the work the SSP was doing at the ground level but personally felt that the SSP was doing great work in the community. When the change occurred, the feeling was the committees' work was not recognized and the program was being scrapped in favor of something completely new.

There were also those that said the SSP was only to be a five-year initiative that went a little beyond its timeframe and that the planning had not been done beyond a five-year time frame.[116] This information was reinforced by officials in the Rural Secretariat office. They noted that the SSP went beyond its timeframe but was kept for over a year after the change in government in order to allow for the transition to the RS. Aspects of

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[116] With respect to this point, it does not appear in any SSP related information that the program was given a five-year timeframe. There is reference, however, to the Social Audit being completed during the first five years of the SSP's existence.

the Social Audit such as the Helleur Report had taken place and there was a realization

from that report that changes were needed to work better within government departments

and involve greater community and citizen involvement in the policy making process.[117]

With the change in government in 2003 and the policy of a Rural Secretariat in the

Progressive Conservative's Bluebook, they were given the responsibility of turning the

policy into a program that focused on collaborative development that focused on linking

economic and social development.[118]

Yet, neither the Helleur report not any other documentation pointed to the SSP

having a five-year timeframe or it being a five-year strategy. In fact, the Social Audit was

to be completed in five years, but that did not necessarily imply the end of the SSP. That

is, there is no evidence that the SSP was to be coextensive with the Social Audit.

Finally, others felt that instead of simply seeing it as a political change, the shift

to the RS was the next step in the social policy process. The Helleur report highlighted

changes that needed to be made in terms of community and community group

connectivity to provincial government departments to let them have more influence. It

can be said that the RS may address this issue. Along the same lines, one former member

noted the RS regional councils seemed like the next step in the process toward building a

collaborative relationship between government and community decision-makers. Based

on the response from the individuals and communities participating in the Dialogue Day,

the respondent felt it came across loud and clear to government that the SSP needed to be

more involved in designing development strategies for long-term development within the

province. It was natural for things to go in different directions to move forward.

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[117] CURA Interviews, SSP Steering Committee Planners, 2005.
[118] CURA Interviews, RS Office, 2006.

However, what conclusions can be draw from the 'move forward' from the SSP to the Rural Secretariat.? More importantly, is it collaborative governance and what does this new instrument imply for the future?

Chapter 4: Conclusion – The Strategic Social Plan, the Rural Secretariat and Governance

At the outset, changes that occur in programs described above from the Strategic Social Plan to the Rural Secretariat have the potential to suffer from political partisanship between the province's two main political parties, the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives. This political partisanship can often distort the argument that a new administration wants to chart a new policy direction. In this case, it may simply have been that the Premier Danny Williams did not want to be associated with what was seen as a 'Liberal' policy aimed at social and economic development in the SSP. It may have also been that the Premier wanted to centralize decision-making authority within the Rural Secretariat and provincial bureaucracy, countering the emphasis on decentralization of the SSP.

While we can speculate as to the role "politics" played in the decision to chart a new direction, the complexities of the 'governance' literature and the detailed accounts of the Strategic Social Plan and Rural Secretariat say much more about collaborative governance in Newfoundland and Labrador.

From the outset, it must be noted that despite claims to the contrary, the Strategic Social Plan and the Rural Secretariat are completely separate entities. With that said, it is apparent from both government's perspective and that of the former regional planners of the SSP, that the Rural Secretariat is meant to build upon not only the strengths and weaknesses of the SSP, but the attitudinal change that had begun to take place at the steering committee level. Although the SSP lasted only five years, its legacy was that it began to shift government's way of doing business toward a more collaborative governance approach involving government departments, voluntary-community based

organizations and the public at large. The question is does the Rural Secretariat continue along the same line?

In comparing the Strategic Social Plan and Rural Secretariat, there are similarities and differences readily visible. The shared terrain is that both are mechanisms of decentralization, apparently intended to promote regional sustainability by integrating social, economic, cultural and environmental development, using place-based approaches and the promotion of evidence-based decision-making.

For example, both the SSP and the RS stress that citizens must be actively engaged in the policy process. Voluntary organizations, community groups, social activists and individual community leaders *must* be involved in both designing and implementing social policies which break the traditional bureaucratic nature of government and lead to a governance model that places emphasis on cooperation, legitimacy and effectiveness of public-private relationships. The stereotype of the voluntary sector as simply service providers must be cast aside. Susan Phillips contends they must play a vital role in policy input in order to promote vibrant communities capable of helping themselves. As a by-product of being actively engaged in the policy process, greater trust in both citizens and governments is produced. Both the state and the voluntary sector must respect the autonomy of each sector and place the overall emphasis on partnership.[119]

Yet there are significant differences in the details of how the SSP and RS tried to secure increased involvement of the volunteer, community based sector. One area in which the difference is noteworthy concerns cross-sectoral partnerships, with the SSP having done more to secure VCBS involvement than the RS. Collaborative governance

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[119] Phillips, "Reforming State-Volunteer Sector Relations," 198.

models have the ability to significantly increase cross-sectoral relationships, thus greatly enhancing horizontal relationships among all actors, public and private. As Susan Phillips noted, governance recognizes the flexibility, credibility and diversity of the partners involved.[120] Therefore, governance depends on the strength of building horizontal relationships. Furthermore, a collaborative governance model also involves enhancing communication and coordination across government departments by the development of horizontal approaches to planning, managing and delivering programs. Interdepartmental partnerships thus become a main tenet of collaborative governance.

With respect to the Strategic Social Plan, the program had begun the process of developing stronger horizontal relationships by establishing a framework for both interdepartmental and regional partnerships. The SSP steering committees were composed of quasi-government officials, federal and municipal officials and voluntary, community-based organizations which had a direct stake in their respective region. Throughout the interviews, committee members noted that relationships that had never existed before began to develop and form coordinated approaches to tackling social and economic issues within their regions. The committee provided the forum to identify factors and concerns which provided an opportunity for collaboration across various service providers. At the very least, the SSP was making a concerted effort to build horizontal networks in places that had very seen them before.

On the other hand, the Rural Secretariat created no formal linkages to the voluntary, community based organizations that was identified as one of the weaknesses of the SSP. While those with experience and knowledge in the voluntary sector sit on the RS regional councils, one has to question the capacity of the sector to assume a greater

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[120] Phillips, "Reforming State-Voluntary Sector Relations," 183.

policy role, especially in rural Newfoundland, if organizations play the traditional role of service providers, rather than a two-way partnership of both service provision *and* policy design.

Therefore there is a tendency to overestimate the capacity of volunteers and their organizations. Many of them, both as individuals and as groups, will not have the resources or sophistication to deal with mid-level policy making. Government may want to consult them to tap their local knowledge and perhaps use them to deliver specific services but making them into active parts of the policy network may be asking too much.

This may be the case with the SSP much more than the Rural Secretariat. The SSP may have been designed to tap the local knowledge of voluntary groups and local activists within a specific region, but government and the SSP office was unwilling to hand over mid-level policy design to those who lacked both the capacity and experience to make decisions that were not just in the best for their specific group but for the region and province as a whole. In a roundtable on volunteer sector issues at the Community Services Council for the Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada held February 6 2003, it was suggested that the SSP had to recognize the importance of volunteering because it had the capacity to link communities with the provincial government.[121] However, it was also suggested grassroots organizations did not have the know how to link to the SSP. As well, the SSP did not devote enough time to address the issues facing the voluntary sector, while others pointed out that the SSP lacked the resources and coordination to promote a role for the private sector.[122]The provincial government may have simply not have had the faith to give up policy design to

[121] Report of the Roundtable on Volunteer Sector Issues: Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada, February 6 2003. Conducted by CSC, 7.
[122] CSC, "Report of the Roundtable on Volunteer Sector Issues." 7.

individuals and organizations, especially in rural Newfoundland, that had no previous experience in areas which involved designing social policy against the backdrop of budget constraints and/or the complexities of program implementation.

With respect to interdepartmental partnerships, a cabinet committee consisting of several cabinet ministers, the lead minister responsible for the SSP and the appropriate deputy ministers began to conduct government business in a more coordinated way. I have already noted that the Helleur Report acknowledged in 2003 that significant changes had occurred in the way government business was conducted. This was especially evident with respect to the partnerships between the SSP steering committee members and government departments, such as Human Resources Labour and Employment and Health and Community Services.

Thus, one can argue that in the building horizontal relationships and interdepartmental partnership, the SSP began to accomplish much in the way of a governance agenda. New horizontal relationships and partnerships, both within the six SSP regions and in the provincial government, began to show a collaborative effort at addressing a myriad of social and economic concerns. Given how little time the Plan actually lasted and how little support it was given shows the possibility that a collaborative governance agenda does have the capability to grow within the province.

Yet, a counterargument exists that while the SSP committees were beginning to work together, they may have in fact been building social capital instead of building a collaborative governance agenda. While building a social capital can make communities more effective in working with government, is this governance in the framework that was presented in the introduction? While governance was part of the SSP program, there were

partnerships that involved the voluntary sector and federal government that never materialized. The SSP may have simply offered a means for building alliances and social capital that could have proven useful tools for social policy innovation and economic development. Given the little experience that existed between communities stretched along hundreds of miles of coastline, any form of increased partnerships, call it governance or social capital, that involved stressing collaborative means to combating social and economic ills was the first step forward.

On the other hand, while the Rural Secretariat has continued to promote interdepartmental cooperation throughout government with the deputy ministers committee on regional development, the formal partnership approach that was developed under the SSP no longer exists. Regional councils are no longer composed of members who specifically represent quasi-government organizations, such as a regional healthcare, education or regional economic boards. Instead, the councils represent a cross-section of community leaders with experience in economic, social and cultural development. What exists in its place is an informal partnership approach that lacks what several interviewees noted as the 'movers' and 'shakers' in a given region. That is, quasi-government officials who had formal linkages to government departments through their respective agency and had extensive knowledge of the region through their organizations strategic planning and budgetary and program policies. Wouldn't it have been more effective to carry over some members of the SSP to the RS who had extensive knowledge of their regions socio-economic policies?

This leaves the new regional councils less able to shape the design and implementation of specific regional programs. The RS regional councils have no

mandate to implement policy, whether economic or social. In fact, the Rural Secretariat does not involve social planning at all. Horizontal relationships function when government identifies the need for not only partners to provide advice, but with the ability to carry out those policies. The downside of the RS is that it lacks the ability to implement policy at the regional level and the community connections necessary to garner sufficient and effective community input to the development of policy. Initially, the SSP was supposed to have the ability to carry out specific service provision, mainly through a commitment to use volunteer and community - based organizations. This would have provided a more holistic approach to service delivery. In practice, however, this did not occur. The prudent response would be that government of Danny Williams simply didn't buy into the idea of the devolution of service provision when his administration has built a reputation of centralization.

Yet, the Rural Secretariat was conceived without the possibility of any implementation mechanism whatsoever. Building partnerships is one of the main tenets of collaborative governance. Without the possibility to build formal partnerships between the provincial government and VCBS, horizontal relationships may undoubtedly suffer. In essence the SSP committees, due to their focus on community councils represented a bottom-up approach to governance. Conversely, the RS employs a top-down approach much like traditional government decision making. Similarly, it could be argued that premier Williams and his Progressive Conservative government went back to a more conventional model of administration by recentralizing authority under the RS. As a result, was the Strategic Social Plan a blip on the government's radar screen, or is there possibility that a policy like the SSP can reappear in the future?

For effective collaboration to occur, mutual trust must exist between government and local stakeholders throughout the community, with the involvement of not only voluntary, community-based but quasi-government and municipal or regional organizations as well. It requires a learning period that includes experimentation and readjustment. As Delacourt and Linehan noted, "collaboration is by nature a dynamic experiment that requires debate, consultation and initiative."[123] Yet, the SSP experiment, with both its accomplishments and failures was shelved following a change in government, leaving some of those interviewed feeling the change was more about partisan politics rather than about a sound policy decision. The Progressive Conservatives simply did not want to be identified with the 'Liberal' SSP. Although the SSP had its weaknesses, at least some of those interviewed identified other possible reasons for change, such as the need to strengthen connectivity to government departments and community, while others claimed that the SSP was only meant to be a five-year initiative.

Thus, specific readjustments in the SSP experiment did not take place which would have let the plan continue. That would have implied some structural changes but keeping the essence of the Plan in place and continuing to build a stronger collaborative governance model. Certain respondents noted that the SSP was beginning to make a difference in their region and their steering committees were at the stage where their strategic plans started to come in line with strategic plans developed by education, healthcare, municipal and regional economic development boards. As well, the transition to the RS represented a loss in the corporate, institutional knowledge that those who had been on the SSP steering committees had gained over time. Moreover, in the mind of one former planner and implicitly as an undercurrent through many of the interviews, there

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[123] Delacourt and Linehan, "So Is There a Canadian Way?" 113.

was the sense that the abrupt shift from the SSP to the RS caused all the momentum built up by the SSP to be lost. One wonders what success the Strategic Social Plan could have achieved if the Plan had undergone incremental change, instead of being replaced by the Rural Secretariat?

However, in fairness to the Rural Secretariat, it has addressed one of the main weaknesses of the SSP, which was the lack of linkages to government departments, and to the provincial cabinet. By incorporating the Provincial Council, which will be made of members from each regional council, the mechanism is in place to meet directly with the entire provincial cabinet and their officials at least twice a year. SSP steering committees had no direct membership on the PCSD, thus no direct access to cabinet. As well, the membership of the Rural Secretariat is another area of potential strength. With the RS, those with direct experience as community leaders and activists may play a greater role for policy input and program design. Instead of representing a specific organization or board where they may not be able to be completely forthright, the council members may be more open to speaking their minds freely and thus providing more open dialogue.

In order to have any form of collaboration, the Rural Secretariat must also avoid what became a major issue with the SSP and that was the issue of departmental "silos". The Helleur report did find areas where collaboration was increased within the SSP, but progress was slow in achieving the collaboration that was hoped for when the plan was initially released. If departmental collaboration does not continue to evolve, progress towards governance will be lost and the "silos" issue remains.

There are major challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the Rural Secretariat. The RS Annual Reports acknowledge a need to find ways to further link

economic, social, environmental and cultural aspects of sustainable regional development. To achieve any success, a collaborative working relationship between government and the regions in understanding and tackling local economic, social and demographic issues must be a priority of the Rural Secretariat. It will also include helping government, community-based organizations and other stakeholders assess the impacts of programs and policy changes in rural areas and ensuring that regional and rural issues are properly addressed across all policy and program development fields.[124]

Ultimately, the RS may be hampered by various issues that face Newfoundland and Labrador. The focus of the program is undoubtedly on rural Newfoundland. While it may be argued that the Secretariat is a province-wide approach to developing sustainable regions from Labrador to the Avalon, one should not pretend that there is concern with the northeast region of the Avalon Peninsula. The St. John's metropolitan area is experiencing a substantial economic boom from the oil and gas industry, and generally has significantly more economic resources than other areas.

Rural communities that have depended on traditional Newfoundland industries, such as the fishery, pulp and paper or even shipbuilding, are concerned their communities will cease to exist. How can those involved on the regional councils in communities such as Harbour Breton, Stephenville or Marystown expect to project what their region will look like in by 2020 when their immediate concern is today, not tomorrow? As one former SSP regional planner and current member of a RS regional council noted, committee members want to deal with how to save rural Newfoundland from dying in the short-term, not 15 years in the future. The short and long term are plausibly related: seeing a bleak future may spur action.

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[124] Rural Secretariat Annual Report, 2004-2005, 12.

The apparent inaction of the RS has led members of the Liberal opposition to continue to question its validity in sustaining the province's rural regions. The inability of the RS to sustain regions outside of the Avalon has led some MHA's to rename the RS the 'Relocation Secretariat'. Judy Foote, MHA for the district of Grand Bank and Opposition Critic for Innovation, Trade and Rural Development, has argued that while the Secretariat has been given a budget of $1.6 million in 2005-06 and $1.8 million in 2006-2007, there has been a shortage of ideas or actions generated.[125] In fact, the Secretariat has falsely raised the hopes of people in rural Newfoundland that government had plans to revitalize rural areas. Foote explains, "By its own admission it states that it is working on a long term 15-year vision. Even this begs the question of how long it will take to even put together this plan – three to five years perhaps; and thus we are into a 20 year process, while rural communities are dying...by then, any strategy or plan will be dated and impractical."[126]

The case studies of the Strategic Social Plan and Rural Secretariat as collaborative governance models represent broader issues that must also be addressed. Rural Newfoundland is facing many challenges from the fragile condition of the fishery, to the loss of large-scale industries such as the paper-mill in Stephenville. The rural population has been in decline for years. The question therefore is whether or not the provincial government has the capacity to plan or envision the long term agenda of rural Newfoundland. Even with the formation of the SSP and Rural Secretariat, a generation of young, especially skilled workers continue to find stable and lucrative employment in

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[125] However, the percentage of the Rural Secretariat is a mere 0.0035 of the provincial budget.
[126] Liberal Party of Newfoundland Press Release, "Foote tags Rural Secretariat as impractical and ineffective," http://www.liberal.nf.net/News_Releases_2006/may_11_foote_secretariat.htm Accessed on May 11 2006.

the oil sands of Alberta or elsewhere. Data continues to show that the pace of emigration continues to advance, not only from Newfoundland to other provinces, but within the province itself. The trends show that more and more people are moving out of small communities and to the metropolitan centres, such as St. John's, where employment possibilities exist.

The province should reflect on the fact that many other places in rural North America are facing the same problems as Newfoundland and are doing no better in resolving them. The whole of the American Great Plains, Kansas to North Dakota, faces emigration from rural areas. What can the experiences of the SSP and Rural Secretariat teach those places in how to tackle the issue or rural survival? And more importantly, what can we learn from them?

Can we also speculate that while the provincial government has the best intentions for rural Newfoundland, are outside forces simply too much for rural Newfoundland to handle? With the cheap labour that exists in China it is more economically feasible for companies like FPI to process fish in Asia rather than in Newfoundland. Along with the downsizing of the paper industry that brought upon the closure of Abitibi Consolidated's plant in Stephenville and threatens the closure of another in Grand Falls-Windsor, should the provincial government just throw in the towel?

The easy answer would be 'yes'. However, if one knows of the Newfoundland spirit, the answer can never be 'yes'. Newfoundlanders are a resilient people who, when faced with adversity, can find the capacity to tackle the most serious of challenges. There is a sense that the present William's government has begun the attitudinal change needed to secure a feeling that Newfoundlanders control their own destiny. The hope is that

policies like the Rural Secretariat, and its predecessor the SSP, can build the capacity to provide the solutions to the complex problems that face the province. As noted by former MHA Chris Decker, "The problems are difficult but not impossible to solve. No task is insolvable if there is a strong enough will to solve it."[127] Yet he also echoed what many people still feel and that is "We're running out of time. If we do nothing, the (northern) peninsula will die. The time to act is now. And even if we do everything in our power to do, there are still no guarantees. But let's not let history condemn us for not trying."[128]

Conclusion

In conclusion, public policy development and implementation has been a major challenge in Newfoundland and Labrador given the socio-economic challenges the province has faced in the past 20 years. The creation of the Strategic Social Plan and Rural Secretariat are public policy initiatives that the government has created in order to combine economic and social development in a healthier and more sustainable policy environment. Although the SSP lasted only five years and was replaced by the Rural Secretariat, its legacy was that it began to shape government business in a collaborative governance approach with government departments, voluntary-community based organizations and the public at large. The hope is that the Rural Secretariat will continue these collaborative relationships in order to confront the challenges that lie ahead. However, this presentation above illustrated that if the current form of the Rural Secretariat continues to exist, consultation, rather than collaboration, will be its legacy. Thus, Newfoundland and Labrador has missed an opportunity to be recognized as engaging both government and its citizens in a strong collaborative governance model.

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[127] Chris Decker, "If we do nothing, the peninsula will die," *Northern Pen*, February 6, 2006, 21.
[128] Ibid., 21.

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