

The Collaborative Governance Conundrum

A Preliminary Analysis of New Regionalism in BC, ON, QC, and NL

Hiroaki Nakashima¹, Ryan Gibson¹, and Kelly Vodden²

¹Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Saint Mary's University and

²Environmental Policy Institute, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University

Introduction

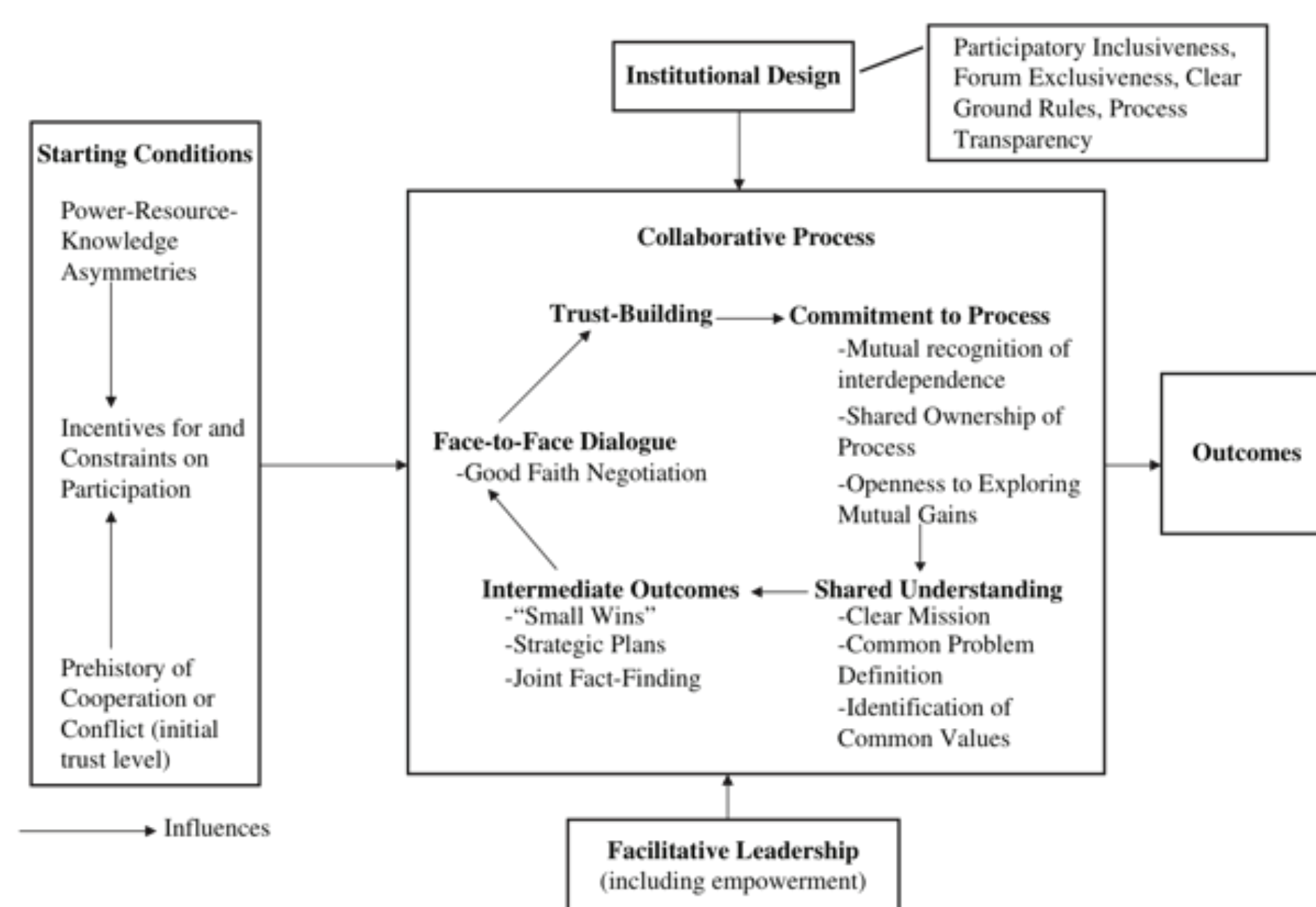
New regionalism has emerged as a prominent approach for addressing the complexity of territorial development and mitigating the negative impacts associated with both political and industrial restructuring. One of the key themes within new regionalism literature is collaborative governance. This research initiative provides a preliminary examination of what appears to be a collaborative governance conundrum: organizations with an ability and interest to participate in collaborative governance but do not. This analysis provides insight into challenges and opportunities for current and future collaborative governance initiatives.

Collaborative Governance

To understand and advance the new regionalism agenda in rural Canada this research utilizes the collaborative governance model developed by Ansell and Gash (2007) (see Figure 1). Ansell and Gash (2007) define collaborative governance as an “arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage programs or assets” (p. 2). The collaborative governance model places emphasis on the role of collaboration at multiple points throughout the multi-phased governance process and consensus building. Collaborative governance embodies the shift from hierarchical structures to co-constructed networks. The collaborative governance model consists of five components: starting conditions, collaborative process, institutional design, facilitated leadership, and outcomes. This analysis focuses on the collaborative process component of the collaborative governance model.

Preliminary Findings

Of the 107 key informant interviews, 25 respondents indicated the absence of any collaboration or service sharing with another organization within their region. Of these 25 respondents, 8 interviews were selected for further examination as they indicated no collaboration was taking place in their region even though they were willing and had incentives to collaborate. The 8 interviews were distributed across all four provinces: 1 in British Columbia, 3 in Ontario, 3 in Québec, and 1 in Newfoundland and Labrador. Of the 8 interviews, 5 represented municipal staff (i.e.: town, county, village) and 3 represented community-based development organizations. Since all of the 8 organizations are willing and have incentives to collaborate, they meet the starting conditions for collaborative governance and thus they already have taken the first step in the collaborative process as outlined. Therefore, the absence of collaboration of these organization can be attributed to the lack of components of the collaborative process including trust-building, commitment to process, shared understanding, intermediate outcomes, and face-to-face dialogue. Illustrations of the collaboration conundrum are organized based on Ansell and Gash's collaborative governance model, specifically the collaboration process.



Next Steps

This research is a preliminary analysis of the collaborative governance conundrum: a willingness to participate in collaborative governance but an absence of collaborative governance activities. Researchers will continue the analysis in the fall 2015 by constructing narratives of local experiences from the interview data to further identify common themes and to build an enhanced understanding of their experiences. Researchers will also look towards utilizing additional codes from the interview dataset to identify further respondents that fit the parameters of the conundrum. The outcome of this analysis will generate implications and recommendations for collaborative governance policy, programs, and application.

Methods

An empirical assessment of Canadian regional development was employed, using a multi-level network, mixed methods case study approach in four provinces: British Columbia, Newfoundland, Ontario, and Québec. One region (see inset box on right side) within each province was identified for focus. A total of 107 key informant interviews were conducted with local residents, municipal officials, community organizations, and private businesses in the four case study provinces. Each key informant interview covered questions related to the five themes of new regionalism: integrated development, place-based development, rural-urban interdependencies, knowledge and innovation, and governance. This analysis focuses on questions regarding the degree of participation in governance, hesitations towards governance, and capacity to participate in governance.

All interviews were coded for governance activities, processes, and engagement building on Ansell and Gash's collaborative governance model. Further coding was added to integrate the seminal governance literature from a multi-disciplinary perspective. This analysis focuses on interview respondents who noted an absence of collaboration in their region but indicated they were willing to collaborate.

Case Study Regions

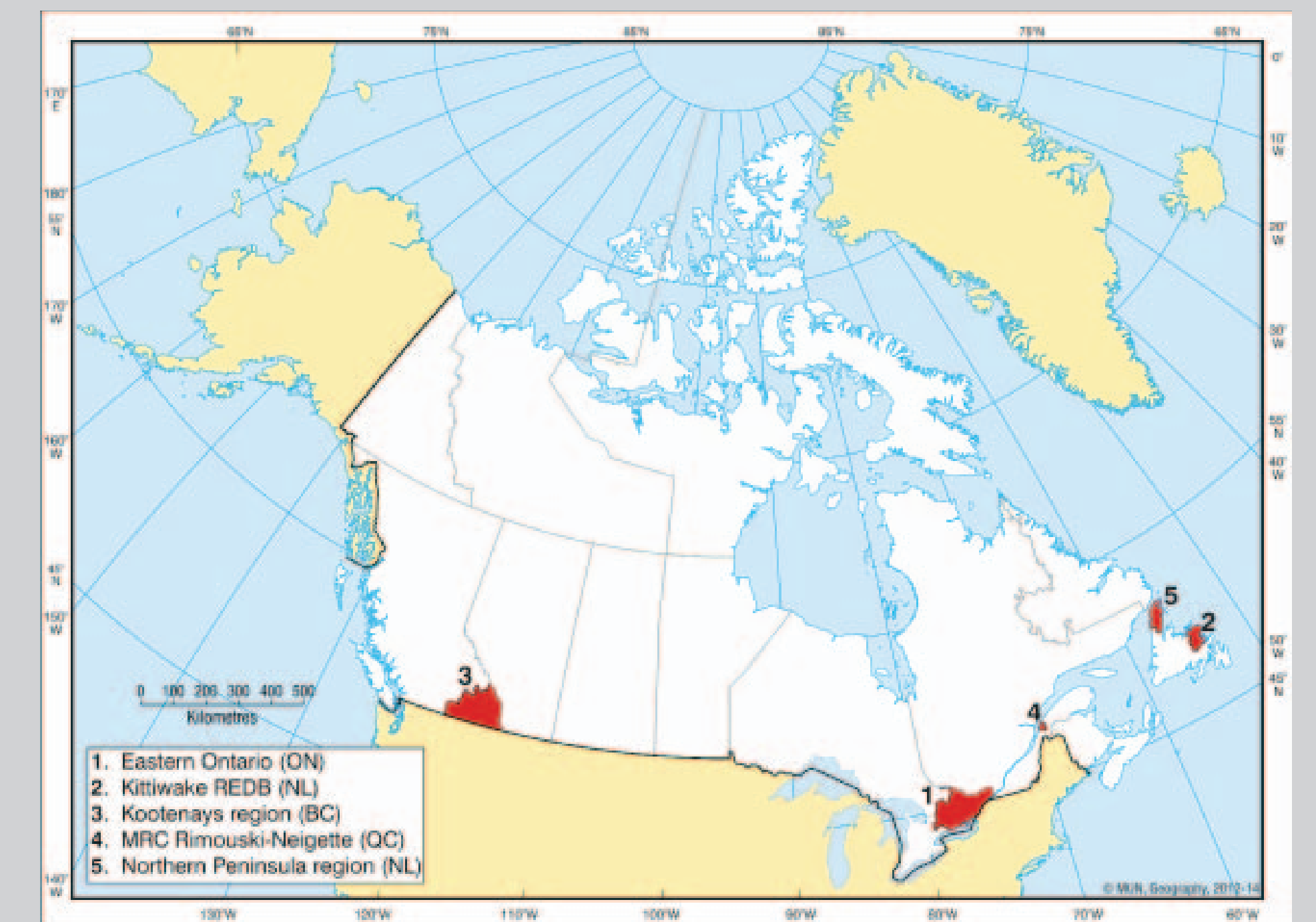
Case studies were selected based on criteria of national scope and regional characteristics, ability to provide insight into the five themes, and feasibility. A range of data sources are being utilized, such as literature reviews, key informant interviews, participant observation at the sub-regional level.

Eastern Ontario

The boundary of Eastern Ontario as designated by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is the region spanning from Durham Region to the Ottawa area. The region is composed of a population of over 1.72 million people, with 14 united counties and 110 townships, municipalities and cities.

Kittiwake/Gander-New-Wes-Valley, Newfoundland

Located in the north eastern coast of insular Newfoundland, this region is delineated by the Regional Economic Development Zone (Kittiwake) and the provincial Rural Secretariat region (Gander – New-Wes -Valley). The region is composed of 119 communities and the total population is 48,850.



Kootenays Region, British Columbia

The region is an aggregation of three of British Columbia's Regional Districts: East Kootenay, Central Kootenay, and Kootenay Boundary. The region consists of 23 Electoral Areas and 25 incorporated municipalities. As a result of physical geography of four mountain ranges the region is isolated, with an area of 57,786.8 km² and a population of 142,110.

MRC Rimouski-Neigette, Québec

The region is located on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River in the heart of the administrative region of Lower St. Lawrence. The regional municipality of Rimouski-Neigette consists of nine municipalities and unorganized territory and represents 54,374 inhabitants.

Northern Peninsula, Newfoundland

The region encompasses approximately 17,483 km², consisting of barren hills, flat marshy plains, rock outcrops, fjords, and mountains. The Northern Peninsula consists of 51 communities with a population was 13,140, a decline of 12.6% from 2001.

* All population figures are based on the 2006 census.