Governance for Sustainability:
Dynamics of Collaborative Arrangements

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Preface

The "Biosphere Sustainability Project" is an SSHRC-supported inquiry, more formally called "Citizen Engagement in Governance for Socio-Ecological Sustainability: Concepts and Case Studies". Its purpose is to [a] draw together concepts and insights, along with case study applications, from three rapidly developing areas of academic enquiry – complex open systems, sustainability of social-ecosystems, and civil society roles in governance -- and [b] determine (through consultations with examples) the potential application and usefulness of some of these concepts and insights for people associated with biosphere reserves in Ontario.

Biosphere reserves were chosen mainly because of the stringent criteria they must meet to receive this designation of recognition from UNESCO. The criteria include local organizational arrangements to be in place for developing collaborative capacities to address local and regional issues about the ecological, economic and ethical components of enhancing the sustainability for local communities and individual livelihoods. People associated with these local organizations are informed and committed to the ideals of sustainability and thus are in a good position to identify which perspectives, from among a range of concepts and examples from the academic literature, could be especially appropriate to the situations they are in and are striving to improve.

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Introduction

Citizen engagement in local and regional governance is currently promoted as a central tenet of sustainability. Ironically, this celebration of civic involvement is occurring against a backdrop of devolution of risks and responsibilities by upper-tier governments who often neglect to provide the resources required to deal with them. Lawrence (2004:1) puts it this way:

> "…what we are witnessing throughout the so-called advanced world are experiments in sub-national regional governance that are themselves a response to wider problems in managing global capitalism. Rather than solving the problems that are emerging, and rather than unequivocally producing a dynamic that leads to sustainable development, they appear to be generating their own tensions and contradictions – some of which will not be readily resolved within, and indeed may be exacerbated by, the structure of global neoliberalism."

Despite this paradox, Lawrence and numerous others (e.g. Frame and Taylor 2005, Sancassiani 2005, Armstrong and Stratford 2004, Dorcey 2004, Loorbach 2004, Whittaker et al 2004, Bulkeley and Mol 2003, Rowe and Fudge 2003, Parson 2001, Roseland 2000) urge the continued pursuit of these sub-national governance experiments as the best path – perhaps the only viable path – to sustainability. The aims, in their view, must be to understand the tensions and contradictions in various approaches to collaborative governance, and to learn how to do it better.

The focus of this literature review is on studies of the inception and evolution of collaborative governance at the regional/local level, focusing on the structure and dynamics of such arrangements; the possible roles of volunteerism and virtuous-circle patterns in how people become and remain engaged in collaboration -- or not; and lessons learned about achieving effectiveness and avoiding failure in building collaborative governance arrangements.

Collaborative governance

This review addresses three broad categories of collaborative governance: other-organized, self-organized and hybrids of these. How and by whom the process is initiated influences its subsequent development, particularly in terms of citizen engagement or rejection. The image of people becoming more intimately and effectively involved in their own governance evokes at least two ideal-type models of how this comes about, plus the combinations that we will call hybrids.

1) *Other-organized* collaborative-governance arrangements seek to link the public sector (elected governments), private sector, non-governmental and non-profit organizations, and ordinary citizens in decision making and other activities for the public good – often now conceptualized as sustainability . Usually, though not invariably, these are projects and programs that originate with higher-tier governments outside of a region or community. The intent, officially at least, is to engage and mobilize local citizens individually or as sector stakeholders in addressing goals developed by the initiating actors. Szerszynski (1997:150), perhaps somewhat unfairly, lumps

these efforts together as "consultative exercises" such as those carried out by UK Local Authorities under Agenda 21:

> "[These], however genuine the intention, are circumscribed in a number of ways. They are always in some sense on the terms of the body which is doing the consulting; they are circumscribed in time, in that they have a clear beginning and end; they are restricted in terms of the kinds of activity members of the public can engage in during the exercise; and participants, it has been said, generally feel they get very little out of participating in them, in terms of influencing outcomes or of any more indirect, personal benefits of participation."

2) *Self-organized* governance arrangements are most commonly found in citizen advocacy and service groups, Common Property Resource (CPR) regimes, biosphere reserves (Kuhn 2000) and myriad types of NGO organizations. Self-organization does not imply that some sort of totally spontaneous process is involved, but rather that organizing the citizen involvement and activities was done by the actors themselves for their own purposes rather than by some outside level of government or other sector for their purposes. These "self-generating initiatives", Szerszynski (1997) maintains, are closer than are bureaucracies to people's lives and sustainability concerns:
"[T]heir agendas and activities are more likely to be 'owned' by their participants, as opposed to being felt to have been determined and imposed from outside" (151); associations develop trust, which is required if people are to change their values and behaviours in support of sustainability [addressing the collective behaviour problem]; "the very act of participating in associational activity can itself generate the kind of human flourishing which any definition of sustainable development should include." (157)

In reality, of course, there are continua of *hybridized* collaborative governance arrangements that differ not only on locus of initiation but on a number of parameters. John Donahue (2004:5) of Harvard's Weil Program on Collaborative Governance maintains that conceptually there is a need "to define collaborative governance and to anchor it within a taxonomy of collective-action models" if it is to be a suitable subject for research. He suggests a set of eight "dimensions along which collaborative governance can be defined, and by which specific examples can be categorized" (see Appendix 1).

Examining *Structures* of Collaborative Governance

When it was still early days for complexity thinking about forms of governance, Emery and Trist (1965) maintained that

> "[T]he appropriate organizational structure for turbulent organizational fields (fields characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and multiple interconnections between component systems) is not a single hierarchical organization. They put forward the case that an 'interorganizational domain, held together by shared values, is the most appropriate organizational form' because 'social order is negotiated between the stakeholders rather than imposed at the outset'." (Benn and Onyx 2005:88).

Many analysts agree. For example, Paquet (2005) elaborates on essentially the same idea in describing what he calls "distributed governance", as does Barraket (2005:83) in observing that "to the extent that community self-help both relies on and needs to include the satisfaction of diverse community interests, a coalitional structure is more likely to achieve long-term community field effects than a pyramidal structure, which is by its very nature an exercise in exclusivity."

Insights such as these about governance structures and the central importance of the glue that holds them together (common interests, shared norms and values, reciprocity, etc.) have become a kind of conventional wisdom in the public, private and civil society spheres. We'll look first at the structures, later at the glue –often characterized as social capital.

First, some typical models of other-organized collaborative governance. Based on their study of six Local Agenda 21 (LA21) projects in the UK, Freeman et al (1996) developed three structural models of collaborative governance for sustainability. Local Authorities played a central role in these governance structures, particularly in terms of pump priming resources such as personnel time, guidance, information and publicity. But their mandate was primarily to act as a *catalyst* to LA21 by creating a *forum* "to take a crucial role as the *liaison* body for a range of cross-sectoral and agency interests, and a pivotal role in liaisin*g* with the voluntary sector." [LA21 Working Groups dealt with "particular areas such as employment, transport, waste management, minority groups and so on, and in addition sought to facilitate some measure of sectoral representation into the process." (Freeman et al 1996:70)]

Because Biosphere Reserve (BR) lead groups, though in a different context, could play similar catalyst, forum and liaison roles within BRs, it is useful to examine the three types of structural models identified in this study: the cascade model, the sectoral model and the thematic model.

Cascade model: A typical hierarchical structure where action is expected to cascade down from the Local Authority to the forum, the working groups, sectors and individuals. While this facilitates focus and control, it is not conducive to others taking ownership nor to communication and energy moving up the structure.
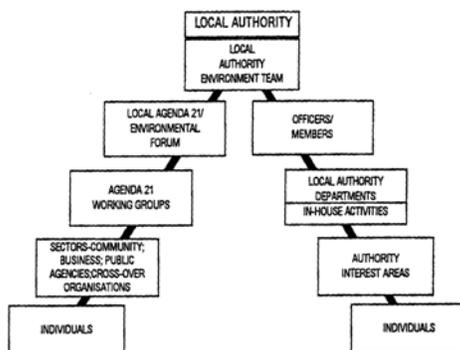

Figure 1. Cascade model.

(from Freeman et al., 1996)

Sectoral model: "A more integrated and complex structure, an intermediate stage in devolved policy ownership" (Freeman et al 1996:72) with the Local Authority in the lead role (but as a facilitator) and the Forum as a non-hierarchical hub accessible equally to all of the working groups, which integrate sectors and are mainly community based. This structure could be vulnerable to domination by interest groups and could leave some sectors, such as business, disinterested.
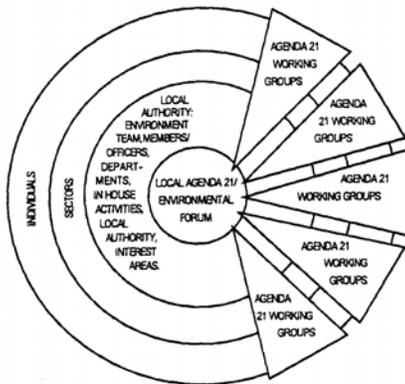

Figure 2. Sectoral model.

(from Freeman et al., 1996)

Thematic model: Focus is on an overarching theme such as The Living City or Sustainable Development which "integrates the activity of a diverse range of community groups, individuals, fora and organizations. The local authority may co-ordinate activities but is not necessarily pivotal. This model is the most explicit attempt at realigning stakeholders within a new structure of local governance. It has the advantage of being able to build on established groups and practices and can easily identify likely participants. It is particularly suitable for local areas which have a degree of spatial fragmentation, possibly comprising distinct urban sub-centres or communities." (Freeman et al 1996: 72-73). For success, this model depends on the theme being of common interest, there being a clear structure and goal and widespread early commitment of energy and resources. Coordination may prove difficult and there is the danger of some groups being excluded.
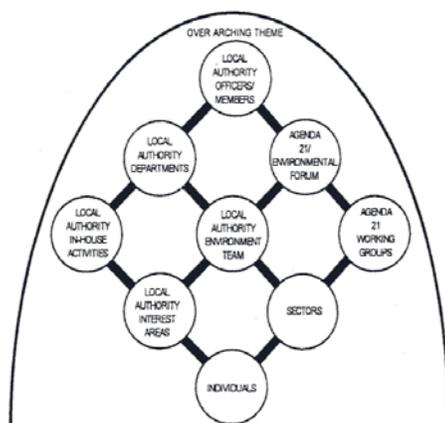
Figure 3. Thematic model.   (from Freeman et al., 1996)

As this study and others on partnerships (e.g. Armstrong and Stratford 2004), network governance (e.g. Whittaker et al 2004), coalitions (e.g. Weber 2003; see Appendix 2) and variations of these make clear, there is a recognizable continuum among collaborative governance structures from more to less hierarchical and/or centrally controlled, with tradeoffs to be made in deciding on the adoption of one model or another. The literature on the dynamics of collaborative governance arrangements, as well as the discussion above of these three models, sheds light on what may be involved in these trade-offs.

Examining *Dynamics* of Collaborative Governance

How do such collaborative structures materialize and evolve? Selman (2000) offers an example of the classic "stages" approach to this question. Utilizing the Actor Network Theory (ANT) framework, he examines the sociology of translation (transformation) in terms of four stages:

> *P Problematization*: key actors define or frame a problem, identify and define a common goal
>
> *I Interessement (Engaging)*: when alliances are sought and networks constructed. A period of consultation and promotion, but also characterized by opportunities for resistance. Negotiations about appropriate structures for partnerships
>
> *E Enrolment*: consolidation of networks and embedding of a set of relationships that define the operations within the partnership
>
> *M Mobilization*: a live process, constantly evolving as partnership alliances ebb and flow. Allows consideration of the realpolitik of power in practice, especially conflict as well as consensus
> (from Davies 2002:196-97) (See also Pollock and Whitelaw, 2003:11-12)

This general type of framework – involving stages of development – is appropriate for examining the initiation and evolution of most types of governance arrangements. Here, the key questions are why and how do people get involved in the first place? why do some reject involvement? and what are the dynamics of collaborative governance negotiation? Davies (2002), for example, found the ANT framework valuable in her study (see p.12) of LA21 pilot projects in the UK " 'because it enables analysis of partnerships to move beyond the simple dichotomy of structures and agents….it offers a way to 'conceptualise how people and organizations operate' (Selman 2000:19)" in (Davies 2002:190).

Collaborative governance must begin with people becoming engaged: spontaneously (self-organized) or by being somehow drawn into a process that attempts to engage them (other-organized) or by some mix of these ingredients. Virtually every contemporary discussion of governance for sustainability in communities, (bio)regions (e.g. Whelan and Oliver 2004), watersheds and other "space-places" (e.g. Gooch 2003) takes as a central focus, if not first

premise, the necessity of citizens, residents, stakeholders, sector actors becoming involved as active participants in significant governance processes, particularly problem definition, goal setting and decision making (e.g. MacKinnon 2005, Brandes et al 2005, Meadowcroft et al 2005, Backstrand 2004, Diduck 2004, Donahue 2004, Dobell 2003, Blaney 2003, Mendelsohn and McLean 2000, Owens 2000, Roseland 2000, Tindall 2000).

The rationales for initiating and promoting citizen engagement in governance are by now almost mantra-like: equity considerations; building trust in institutions; better information from multiple perspectives--for visioning, strategizing, priority-setting, decision making in general; better public buy-in (taking ownership) for less conflictual, more efficient implementation of decisions (e.g. Bryner 2001, Rydin and Pennington 2000, Blumenthal and Jannick 2000; Beierle 1998).

Among the hypothesized longer-term results of citizen engagement are development of trust and shared norms (social capital) as well as effective conflict resolution mechanisms; strengthened citizen skills and confidence (social learning, community capacity building, action competence; enhancement of deliberative, participatory democracy structures and processes (e.g. Fien and Skoien 2002, Cox 1995, Towers 2000, Wilson and Musick 1999).

But there are also questions regarding the reality of these effects (e.g. Selman 2001), arguments for evaluation of citizen engagement based less on process and more on outcomes such as measurable effects on ecosystem health and public policy (e.g. Munoz-Erickson and Aguilar-Gonzalez 2003, Sharp 2002), and issues around power relations, representativeness, insularity, and accountability (e.g. Donahue 2004, Evans 2004, Lawrence 2004, Weber 2003, Oels 2003, Gibbs et al 2002, Rydin and Pennington 2000, Swift 1999). These questions point to an agenda for further research that should include a rich variety of case studies.

Volunteering as a Path to Citizen Engagement: a virtuous-circle pattern?

Because local-level citizen engagement in collaborative governance is often seen as key to progress towards sustainability, researchers are probing the extent to which citizen volunteering activity leads to civic engagement, social capital creation, social learning, community capacity building and more authentic local democracy. A particularly comprehensive conception of the importance of promoting volunteer activities as a path to civic engagement is that of Cuthill and Warburton (2005), who focus on roles for local governments in supporting volunteerism:

> "Literature reviewed for this research identifies four key points. First, social capital provides an appropriate theoretical basis for research on volunteering. In addition, volunteering is also inextricably linked to concepts of active citizenship and civil society, social inclusion, participatory democracy, social equity and justice, and community capacity building. Second, local governments are well placed to play a role in building social capital ….Third, recent research suggests that there are diverse social, environmental, economic and democracy benefits from volunteering although empirical data to support this assertion are lacking. Fourth, there has been little research undertaken on the role local government can play in supporting volunteering. "(114).

Similarly, commenting on the experiences of catchment volunteers in Australia, Gooch (2005) notes that volunteering leads to:

"both bonding ties and bridging ties [that] contribute to the building of 'social capital'—which can be defined as social networks, norms and levels of trust within and between social groups (Putnam, 1993). Social capital may be seen as a public good which enables a greater output to be produced from the stock of physical and human capital in society. This stock accumulates through use and over time, reinforcing networks, norms and trust (Putnam, 1993). Pretty and Frank (2000) believe that social capital and social learning are critical to the effective functioning of community-based natural resource management groups." (Gooch 2005:13)

These studies and others point to the possible creation of what might be termed *virtuous circles*: volunteer activities create/strengthen friendships, bonding, and social capital, promote social learning (knowledge, skills, political tactics) and feelings of empowerment, bridging to other organizations, community capacity building, achievement of objectives, long-term commitment of those involved and, it is hoped, eventuate in the engagement of seasoned citizens in collaborative governance arrangements. Further research, including detailed case studies, is required to gain a better understanding of how such virtuous-circle patterns develop, or don't, in different types of collaborative governance experiments.

Understanding Volunteering: Motivations , Retention, Effects

A reasonable first step towards better understanding of these possibly mutually-reinforcing social and psychological processes among individuals is to look at volunteers themselves, in the context of the volunteering situation. What draws them in? What keeps them active and committed? Can there be a one-size-fits-all formula? And what do we know about the effects of the experience on them? While the focus in this review is on environmental volunteers, many of the motivations and effects discussed are common to most types of volunteers.

A traditional research approach has been to examine the motivations of volunteers. Typical is a study of 148 long-term (one year or more, median 2 years) environmental preservation volunteers in Michigan. Ryan et al (2001) found that, in terms of retention of volunteers as well as initial motivations for volunteering, activities where results were tangible were a strong draw and that "helping the environment" together with developing "environmental expertise" were strongly associated with commitment and duration of effort. Organizational characteristics ("well-organized", "make me feel needed", "tell me what is expected of me", "working with a good leader") were also important as were social aspects (familiar faces, meeting new people, fun). For those who saw volunteering as a high-priority activity (a "commitment"), the social aspects and good project organization were the most important motivators.

Recent surveys of the literature on environmental volunteers (e.g. Gooch 2005, Christie 2004, Forsyth et al 2004, Smith and Finley 2004, Austin 2002, Ryan et al 2001, Curtis and Van Nouhuys 1999, Donald 1997) indicate that frequently-reported motivations for initial environmental volunteering include the following:

Initial Motivations
Childhood experiences
• positive outdoor experiences, especially in childhood
• inspirational mentors during childhood, youth

Learning opportunities
• opportunity to learn new things
• access to training on the subject matter
• opportunities to meet natural resources professionals,
• up-to-date materials,
• provision of equipment such as field guides, compasses, and binoculars
• gaining knowledge about the natural world, including environmental problems

Environmental concerns
• working to restore natural environments leading to desire to protect such environments
• concern for local issues of environmental degradation
• a sense of loss or witnessing habitat alteration
• desire to help the environment
• sense of urgency felt for the impending loss of native sites and species
• intergenerational concerns

Making a difference
• belief that volunteers can make a real difference in protecting the environment
• ability to see tangible progress from volunteer efforts

Successful retention of volunteers appears to depend on many of the same factors, with the important addition of inclusion of volunteers in decision processes:

Volunteer Retention/Commitment factors
• social interaction (bonding, working as part of a team)
• meets need for personal actualization, development, growth in skills, knowledge
• good mentoring
• project well-organized and well-led
• efforts seen as part of a long-term larger plan, organization, the bigger picture
• opportunity to participate in decision making
• perceived results of efforts
• acknowledgement and appreciation
• celebration of milestones
• broad range of volunteer tasks, many ways people can participate locally
• adequate time (ability to balance work, family, volunteer activities)

Many recent studies of successful volunteer recruitment and retention particularly stress the importance of a variety of activity options and of matching activities to the motivations and interests of the individual volunteer (e.g. Cuthill and Warburton 2005). Young people, for

example, increasingly look for volunteer opportunities that further their career ambitions (e.g. Clary and Snyder 1999). As Appendix 3 suggests, this is not a new insights, but a principle always to be borne in mind.

Effects on Volunteers
In one sense, the significance of environmental volunteerism lies in the concrete results of thousands of hours logged in monitoring, rehabilitation, research, preparation and presentation of briefs, fundraising, lobbying and the like (Bell 2003). But another important outcome is the development of what might be termed an *environmental vanguard*. People who initially focus their volunteer efforts on a single politicized local issue such as water pollution are drawn into broader environmental concerns through their research and advocacy activities. Others, primarily interested in recreation, nature study or simply enjoying special places, are often politicized by the necessity of mounting activities to protect what they value.

In both cases, people tend to be affected by their volunteer activities. Not unexpectedly, they feel an even stronger commitment to any cause in which they invest time and effort, whether by participating in stream cleanups or monitoring council meetings (Lerner 1994). They are drawn into involvement in community politics, social justice concerns (Towers 2000), and additional networks. They often develop new skills – public speaking, research, organizing meetings and lobbying campaigns – and thus new self-confidence (e.g. Ryan et al. 2001, Jackson 1992, Jackson and Weller 1984). In short, while burnout afflicts some long-term volunteers, for many their environmental involvement is an empowering first step into a virtuous circle of civic activities.

A review of quantitative studies of many types of public volunteering (Wilson and Musick 1999) found significant correlations between volunteering and other civic activities, physical and mental health, law-abiding behaviour and occupational achievement. However, the authors caution that it is not possible to establish directional causal linkages between volunteering and the other variables on the basis of the correlational research they reviewed. Clearly, more studies based on volunteers' own reports are needed.

Creating Collaborative Governance: what can go wrong and how to do better

Taking volunteers as a point of departure for discussion of the formative stages of collaborative governance arrangements seems to ignore the distinction between self-organized and other-organized forms. In reality, though, recruitment and continued commitment of ordinary citizens to both types of arrangements is broadly voluntary – as far as we know, no one is dragooned into an LA21 project! But the differences between the two ideal-types can come crucially into play from the very outset in terms of what the citizen-volunteers are led to expect and what they experience with regard to whether they are included, or not, in problem/opportunity identification and framing, agenda setting, decision making, skills development, leadership opportunities, and other core activities (e.g. Cavaye 2004). Their understanding of what sort of involvement they will have is important in their recruitment and, especially, retention; any discrepancies between their expectations and what is experienced does not bode well for their continuing engagement. Self-organized citizen organizations typically set their own goals and by nature depend on the leadership, talents and initiative of their volunteers ("activists" is the term preferred by some) to

implement strategy and action. Compared with other-organized collaborative governance experiences, there seems to be less danger of these people feeling sidelined or used, though such problems can surface as an organization develops factions and/or becomes more institutionalized.

The research reviewed suggests that arguments can be made for both the necessity and the efficacy of *other-organized* and *hybrid* multi-stakeholder governance arrangements, despite the problems they encounter. Many do aspire to establish broadly inclusive governance of space-places by moving beyond consultation towards genuinely shared decision making. In general research suggests that other-organized governance efforts need to work harder and smarter to engage local citizens in striving for sometimes lofty sustainability goals in whose formulation they may have had little say. Giving them that say, and decision-making power, about specific objectives and strategies in their local place appears to be a necessary (often ignored) first step to success for other-organized initiatives.

LA21 projects in the UK (e.g. Davies 2002), the Landcare program in Australia (e.g. Brunkhorst 2001) and local sustainability programs in Tasmania (Armstrong and Stratford 2004, Stratford et al 2003), for example, were purportedly designed with citizen participation as a goal. But analysts of these programs have invariably noted problems (tensions and contradictions) linked to both design and implementation shortfalls at every stage of development. This research is of particular value because it highlights lessons learned about what works well and poorly in a variety of experiments with collaborative governance. Interestingly, the research makes clear that many of these efforts could have benefited from closer attention to existing political tensions as well as better understanding of citizen engagement in successful self-organized volunteer initiatives.

Davies (2002), for example, utilizing Selman's ANT framework (see p. 6), identified significant problems at various stages of the LA21 transformation process:

Stages P and I:
• Locals were not involved in problem identification, program definition.
• Lack of clarity of aims and objectives led to different interpretations and expectations on the part of different actors. If aims are to be flexible, this must be made clear at the outset.
• Too much top-down pressure to follow specific initiatives derived from top tiers.
(Davies 2002:197-98, 202)

Stages E and M:
• Tension between local government with statutory duties to fulfill (short on time, few members involved) and opportunities for innovation presented by the pilot project.
• Difficulty of "trying to integrate flexible and dynamic developments with what has been called the 'hard infrastructure' (Healey 1997) of established democratic and bureaucratic structures" .
• Partnerships should not be "grafted onto areas with existing dynamics and networks of association" but rather "work with, rather than ignore, initial conditions…"
• Much leadership turnover.
• Known end point – 3 years – constrained participant commitment. (Davies 2002:198, 201)

Davies concluded that "… most locals perceived the LA21 initiative as a 'top-down, formulaic project structure' with insufficient consideration of local circumstances, little

communication with local people, and thus no real empowerment of local people (Davies 2002:199-200). No initial measurement was made of the attitudes and behaviours of locals; funding and accounting requirements came from remote centers; "… the reality of the partnership was of the district council as a broker of money, personnel and information for a distanced community." (Davies 2002:200)   "As there was no role for local people in either the selection of the project areas or the choreography of the project, it was hard for them to develop a sense of ownership or influence within the partnership." (Davies 2002:200). All of these factors worked against building alliances and trusting relationships.

A similar point about the dangers of alienating the very local people who need to take ownership of a community effort is made in a recent report on consultation with citizens across Canada about the challenges their communities face in adapting to the New Economy (National Council Working Group 2005):"[In what are supposed to be partnerships] decision making often flows in one direction only: from the top down – that is, from government officials to the community organizations. In such circumstances, the "partner" is little more than a contract worker for government." (21). The caveat here and in other studies is clear (see Appendix 4).

Lessons Learned

The literature on citizen engagement/participation is voluminous to the point that it nearly defies review and summarization. There is a wealth of how-to material in the form of handbooks, tool kits, and the like (see, for example, New Economics Foundation 1998, Aslin and Brown n.d., Beierle 1998). A central focus of this literature is how people in a community can be equipped and mobilized for active, effective engagement with and participation in civic sustainability-oriented decisions and activities. There are also numerous studies (previously referenced) of what has worked well in what kinds of places and situations.

Typical is Lukasik's (2003) study of "local stakeholders with an interest in environmental issues" in the Hamilton, Ontario area (primarily representatives from local grassroots volunteer organizations and not-for-profit organizations, but including some business and industry environmental initiatives, local institutions and government agencies) that examines the complex challenge of how to promote broad and successful citizen engagement in environmental and other civic issues when situations are contentious.

Lessons learned about successfully promoting citizen engagement in Hamilton were as follows:

• the stakeholder approach works well to involve different sectors.
• partnerships among stakeholders are key to successful public involvement initiatives.
• prominent local champions can be important to success.
• a diversity of meaningful opportunities to become involved spurs public engagement.
• a sustained presence in the community is important to success (need core funding).
• framing issues in the larger picture attract the broader public.
• personal interactions with the public work best (but do stretch resources).
• valid, reasonable arguments based on solid research attract citizen engagement.

(based on Lukasik 2003: 9-10)

Five key barriers and limitations were also identified:

• lack of funding, core and other
• need for more volunteers or, conversely, too many volunteers for limited staff to deal with
• problems with engaging the public in less charismatic issues (e.g. sewer upgrades)
• the difficulty of reaching youth and marginalized groups
• lack of support for organizational capacity-building ((based on Lukasik 2003: 10-13).

Power imbalances need to be recognized. Given the confrontational nature of many environmental issues, Gould et al (1996) note that these conflicts are often politically charged, multilevel – "local groups may act locally but competing national and transnational interests have local supporters" – and require a serious level of resources to match those of powerful opponents. Citizen groups can be surprised and defeated in such cases (79-80). Linking local environmental groups and their causes to national and international ENGOs may be a promising way to address these challenges. (See Pralle 2003 for a discussion of Canadian forestry advocacy in the context of venue shopping).

How to operationalize principles for creating successful collaborative governance, such as those discussed, for example, by Pollock and Whitelaw (2003), is an important challenge. A number of guidelines for accomplishing this are suggested by studies of other-organized and hybrid initiatives that attempted with varying degrees of success to engage people in governance activities (e.g. Sancassiani 2005, Cavaye 2004, Evans 2004, Diduck 2004, Koontz and Johnson 2004, Stratford et al 2003, Rowe and Fudge 2003, Lukasik 2003, Davies (2002), Fung and Wright 2001, Konisky and Beierle 2001, Blumenthal and Jannick 2000 (see Appendix 5), Roseland 2000, Owens 2000, Goodwin 1998, Gould et al 1996.) These guidelines include the following:

• look for local (e.g. neighbourhood) points of contact in larger areas
• take effective steps to loosen top-down control, encourage bottom-up 'ownership'
• strongly involve local people in *initial* identification/framing of problems/opportunities
• respect local knowledge and decisions – avoid higher-tier veto of local plans
• include local ongoing planning and decision making: avoid forcing goals on local actors
• build on what's already happening rather than ignore or supercede it
• open process up for debate, discussion, even conflict; consensus not always the best goal.
• clarify actors' expectations of the program – roles, timelines, outcomes
• promote interactions that increase citizen capacity, build trust and understanding
• focus on gaining longer-term commitment than one pilot project can command
• strive for continuity of leadership – avoid excessive turnover of personnel
• show trust in local actors – keep accountability demands simple
• keep communication lines open to give, receive information
• avoid weak engagement due to overburdening of local actors, e.g. local governments
• stress inclusivity – be alert to prevent domination of process by local elites or experts
• coordinate policies at various levels (e.g. local level with upper-tier governments)

Drawing on insights from the Madison Watershed Workshop, Born and Genskow (2001:12) suggest a useful general framework for thinking about factors that influence the success of collaborative governance initiatives. They note that "each critical factor/variable on this list: a) has a large set of potential values; b) in many cases has an unpredictable impact on accomplishments; and c) is not independent from other factors." This type of framework can be useful in describing and analysing specific collaborative governance initiatives.

> "Exogenous factors: Conditions that are outside and present prior to the partnership; beyond the direct influence (at least initially) of the partnership or partners:
> > Nature of the ecological setting and related use problems
> > Demographic and socio-economic setting
> > Situational history
> > Issue salience
> > Regulatory/programmatic context
>
> "Endogenous factors: Conditions that are inside the partnership and under the direct influence of the partners
> > Partnership initiation
> > Composition
> > Statement/clarity of purpose
> > Organizational process, direction-setting, and structure
> > Staffing
> > Governmental commitment and support
> > Funding
> > Watershed plans"

[See Born and Genskow 2001: 13-21 for a detailed discussion of these factors]

Virtuous Circles: Social Capital and Social Learning

Though actual virtuous-circle processes are more simultaneous, iterative and circular than sequential, an ideal-type dynamic sequence at the regional and community level might look like this:

Citizen engagement: *self-organized* as a response to an identified problem, threat, opportunity or *other-organized* by governmental or other *hybrid* institutions as a planning consultation, visioning exercise, or similar process depending on or encouraging citizen participation – either of which may eventuate in – or fail to achieve:

Active involvement: *self-organized*: volunteer monitoring, research, advocacy; *other-organized*: participation in (a variety of) processes (with varying degrees of decision-making power), which may lead to:

Strengthened capacity: forging bonds of friendship, trust, shared values and norms, (*building social capital*; learning together by doing and dialoguing (*social learning*), which may lead to:

Empowerment through knowledge, skill-development, enhanced organizational skills (*agency*, *action competence*) leading to increased influence (often political clout) which in turn encourages new levels of engagement and involvement in governance…and so on.

A report on a study of Australian community catchment groups (Fien and Skoien 2002:1) neatly characterizes the virtuous-circle pattern:

> "The findings suggest that social capital is enhanced through processes of community participation in the catchment consultation processes…[T]he relationship between social capital and action competence is complementary, with social capital and action competence being mutually enhanced by the social learning that accrues from the process of community participation."

Others explicitly link these social patterns to the development of sustainable communities (e.g. Dale and Onyx 2005), and, broadly, to the creation of "social arrangements which contribute to achieving … cooperation in pursuit of sustained well-being." (Dobell 2000:1)

An initial look at the literature on the varieties of citizen engagement in environmental issues, health, poverty and other sustainability concerns leads to a substantial list of references on social capital and social/collaborative learning that suggest the potential virtuous-circle nature of these governance components.

Social Capital. Schuurman (2003:1008) offers an excellent contextual introduction to the concept of social capital, analysing its rise to World Bank icon status over the past decade and illuminating the concerns of its detractors, particularly that it was anti-political and "led to a domestication of critical social science." He concludes, somewhat wistfully, that a better understanding of social capital might provide "valuable insights in assessing the capability of societies (at global, national or local levels) to reconnect the political and the social."

In an overview of the many debates about what, if anything, social capital means, Woolcock (2001) notes an emerging contemporary consensus that the concept is most useful when defined narrowly: "social capital refers to the norms [e.g. reciprocity] and networks that facilitate collective action" and it should be clearly recognized that social capital resides in relationships. (70). In this view, the focus should be on its sources rather than its outcomes.

Trust, for example, would be seen as an important pre-condition rather than as part of what social capital is. Others, however, give trust a more central role and discuss it as an important outcome of people's network relations. Cox, for example, highlights these dynamics of the concept: "[social capital] refers to the processes between people which establish networks, norms and social trust and facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." (1995:15). Thus one of the academic questions about social capital (in addition to how best to measure it) is whether it should be considered an independent or dependent variable – or both. Onyx (2005:3), introducing a collection of studies of social capital and sustainable community development, maintains that "[s]ocial capital, as we are coming to understand, is a complex and multi-layered

concept….[w]e are not yet in a position to clearly delineate the boundaries of the concept (any more than we can do so for concepts such as 'beauty' or 'governance' or 'intelligence')."

Types of social-capital networks have been identified as *bonding* (within small groups, and not always with positive outcomes), *bridging* (horizontally between actor groups), *linking* (vertically) (Woolcock (2001) and *bracing* (strategic linkages that create or strengthen heterogeneous networks) (Rydin and Holman 2004). This taxonomy allows a rough mapping of social capital in specific situations without entering the arcane world of formal network analysis. An advantage of granting centrality to networks is that this allows us to build towards a conceptual framework that locates "governance for sustainability" in collaborative networks of actors (highly-organized and institutionalized NGOs, various public/private/civil society actors in partnerships, strategic *ad hoc* alliances, etc.) and makes clear the need for examination of how these function on the ground in specific localities.

Social Learning. Diduck (2004) discusses the importance of participatory approaches and social learning to resource and environmental management. His focus is on *other-organized* processes. From the "theory-of-action" perspective (504), double-loop learning (questioning and changing underlying values and then behaviour) leads to "an improved theory of reality" (Lee 1993:149) and is based on "engaging all stakeholders in participatory forums" of an open deliberative type (505). The "civics approach" to social learning "emphasizes social learning through the integration of scientific, local and traditional knowledge. It focuses on interactive models of planning, which centre on broad participation, dialogue, negotiation, co-operation, and mutual learning" (506) Both approaches stress the importance of "complete, accessible, and understandable information, early and ongoing involvement, high degrees of participation, and deliberative participation mechanisms"(507). Maarleveld and Dangbegnon (1999:1) suggest that systems thinking, experimentation and communicative rationality are essential to social learning in collective decision-making processes around managed resource systems; analytically it is important to ask: "who learns, what is learned, why is it learned, and how."

Self-organized citizen activities, such as those of environmental NGOs, have also been shown to involve social learning as well as the other elements of virtuous circles (Lerner 1993). Addressing challenges such as the need to question authorities, research technical subjects, resolve conflicts, organize and speak at public meetings, prepare and present briefs, find funding and allies, and the myriad other activities required of NGOs and similar civic groups leads to strong learning curves not only for participating members individually but collectively for the groups themselves. In the process, of course, social capital is created and drawn on, and action competence develops. Successful NGOs and place-based collaborative partnerships such as those in watersheds (e.g. Weber 2003, Maarleveld and Dangbegnon 1999) offer some of the best examples of virtuous circles in action.

Conclusions

Addressing the broad question of how people become engaged in collaborative governance at the local/regional level requires envisioning pathways that could lead to such involvement. These might include election to office, appointment as a civil servant,

leadership in a private-sector or NGO organization, or simply an interest on the part of ordinary citizens in joining with others to achieve some valued goal or objective related to the public good in a geographic area. The latter path involves citizen activities that are generally characterized as volunteerism and/or activism. We are interested in how people are attracted and become committed to this path. As well, we want to understand the individual and social dynamics involved in creating what appear to be patterns of mutually reinforcing experiences ("virtuous circles") that move these people towards effective roles in collaborative governance arrangements.

This literature review suggests that the experiential (hands-on) nature of volunteerism and activism attracts people to these activities and promotes learning (individual and social, skills and critical thinking) and the development of social capital. Both of these can contribute to an increase in participants' action competence and to their sense of empowerment. To the extent that these outcomes occur, people are equipped and motivated to engage in collaborative governance arrangements which accord them a meaningful, respected role in goal setting, strategy development, and decision making. Tensions arise in the implementation of collaborative governance arrangements when citizen expectations are not met. This may be because structures are rigidly hierarchical and citizens are excluded from goal setting and decision making, or merely because there are poor lines of communication between local/regional levels and the upper government tiers that often initiate collaborative governance experiments.

Most Canadian Biosphere Reserves have moved beyond their initial organizing phase and are thus familiar with some of the patterns and tensions described. As their organizations evolve, however, it may be useful to remain aware of the lessons learned in the studies reviewed. In particular, if opportunities arise to receive financial or other support from interested private or public parties, Biosphere Reserve participants may wish to consult these lessons about how to conduct successful collaborative governance.

Appendix 1

Dimensions of collaborative governance

Donahue (2004:3) identifies eight dimensions along which collaborative governance can be defined, and by which specific examples can be categorized:

> *"Formality* – A degree of formalism at least sufficient to permit objective descriptions of participants, procedures, and goals is necessary to distinguish collaborative governance from other categories of public-private interaction.

> *"Duration* – At one extreme are governance arrangements meant to be permanent (or at least indefinitely enduring); at the other extreme are ad hoc collaborations that dissolve as soon as a crisis is resolved or a goal achieved. Other things being equal, long-lived collaborations seem more consequential, and hence more worthy of study.

> *"Focus* – Collaboration can be narrowly structured to meet a single shared challenge, or can be more broadly designed to address a range of concerns common (whether simultaneously or sequentially) to the collaborating parties

> *"Institutional Diversity* – A minimum level of diversity among participating institutions – at least one public and one private player – is the price of entry for collaborative governance. But beyond this baseline, collaborations can display a greater or lesser degree of internal diversity.

> *"'Valence'* – A better term is needed than this one, borrowed from chemistry, to refer to the number of distinct players linked together in a collaboration and the number of links among them.

> *"Stability versus Volatility* – A collaboration is stable to the extent its members share a normative view of successful governance, and volatile to the extent members' norms or interests diverge. The less stable is the collaboration, the larger the share of its energies must be devoted to maintaining the collaboration itself.

> *"Initiative* – Which collaborating institution(s) instigated the joint effort, and what is the allocation of initiative among the parties for defining goals, assessing results, triggering adjustment, and so on? In other words, who is leveraging whom? *First*, to count as collaborative governance, a large and even dominant share of the initiative must rest with a player holding a plausible claim to represent the broad public interest. . . *Second*, each of the collaborating parties must have some role in setting the goals of the collaboration. . . *Third*, the relationship among the parties must be strategic, in the sense that each acts with an eye to the others and anticipates that the others will respond to its own

behavior. In other words, arms-length interactions where the government role is limited to setting 'the rules of the game,' or where the private role is limited to providing goods and services on a purely market basis, don't count.

"Problem-driven versus Opportunity-driven – Is the collaboration primarily defensive – devoted to solving or ameliorating some joint threat – or primarily offensive, meant to pursue a shared opportunity? That is, is the success of collaborative governance defined as maintaining, or as improving upon, the status quo?

"Something comparable to the list is certainly needed…both to bound the field and to distinguish among different kinds of collaboration within the boundaries… An equally important (though longer-term) function for an array of discriminate characteristics is to frame a rubric for assessment. Since the answer to the question 'does collaborative governance work?' is almost certainly 'it depends', we will need a disciplined array of conditions and characteristics on which it depends."
[See also Leach, Pelkey & Sabatier 2002 and Beierle 1998 for evaluation protocols].

Appendix 2

A Bioregional Approach to Collaborative Governance

In his book, *Bringing Society Back In*, Edward Weber (2003:3-4) describes efforts in U.S. Western rural regions to establish successful collaborative governance regimes that stress accountability at both local and broader scales:

> "By grassroots ecosystem management (GREM), I mean an ongoing, collaborative governance arrangement in which inclusive coalitions of the unalike come together in a deliberative format to resolve policy problems affecting the environment, economy and community (or communities) of a particular place. Such efforts are governance arrangements because the act of governing involves 'the establishment and operation of social institutions or, in other words, sets of roles, rules, decision making procedures, and programs that serve to define social practices and to guide interactions of those participating in these practices…Politically significant institutions or governance systems are arrangements designed to resolve social conflicts, enhance social welfare, and, more generally, alleviate collective action problems in a world of interdependent actors. . .In more specific terms, GREM organizes on the basis of geographic 'place'….participants in GREM efforts seek to manage valleys, watersheds, forests, or landscapes as a whole, rather than in fragmented, piecemeal fashion.

> "GREM also relies extensively or exclusively on collaborative decision processes, consensus, and active participation, which means that private citizens and stakeholders often take on leadership roles and are involved directly in deliberative decision-making, implementation, and enforcement processes along with government officials, especially when it comes to how goals are to be achieved. … In addition, such efforts are iterative and ongoing as opposed to being single-play problem-solving efforts."

Appendix 3

Specific Motivations to Volunteer

One exasperated professional recruiter of volunteers complained, in 1998, that researchers on volunteerism keep reinventing the wheel:

> "I am near to saturation with always hearing some variation on the theme of *what motivates people to volunteer?* There is a disproportional number of scholarly articles on why people volunteer – very few of them offering new insight. In fact, just last month I was asked to blind review a submission to a university-based journal that presented the results of a study and concluded that *practitioners would be well advised to consider volunteer motivations in matching applicants to assignments*. Wow! Why didn't any of us ever think of that? …

> "I question the relevance of the question *why do people volunteer?*, when asked generically. Too many studies (not only those on motivation, I might add) approach volunteers as if they are indistinguishable from one another and are interchangeable parts of some monolith…. On the other hand, I think the question of "why" has meaning when asked specifically about one organization, cause or assignment."

> – Susan J. Ellis (1998). Ellis is president of Energize, Inc., a training, consulting, and publishing firm that specializes in volunteerism.

Appendix 4

In a study of conservation programs in rural Kent (UK) that reached conclusions similar to Davies' (2002), Goodwin (1998) notes that the "socially constructed discourse" around local conservation efforts highlighted the tensions between the desire of experts to educate locals (to provide more accurate scientific information) and the fact that the locals "often see themselves as the only ones who are either capable, or willing, to identify and resolve their concerns towards their everyday environment." (Goodwin 1998:488).

Local people can feel used by higher tiers of government if they are given no real share in decision making about the local environment: "As a result, participation is seen by local respondents not so much in terms of the exercise of 'local voice', but rather the recruitment of 'hired hands' to undertake conservation action."(Goodwin 1998:489) Locals' attitudes were shaped by lack of trust in governments to respond to local agendas, the feeling of having been sidelined in decision making, and perceptions of little "process responsiveness" to their concerns.

> "…local respondents saw local participation as being [about] a much more open-ended and, essentially, transformative process, as being about ideas as well as action, and, at its best, becoming a dialogue that may redefine and reshape what conservation is about…..In these terms, nature conservation is perceived to be a means of extending civic society, emerging not just as a physical space but as a 'network of individuals, a community participation process… Evoking qualitative rather than quantitative measures of success, locals spoke of 'a sense of belonging', of the development of 'community spirit' or of 'better quality' of the environment." (Goodwin 1998:489-490)

In conclusion, Goodwin provides a useful picture of the difficulties that have dogged the transition from top-down to bottom-up/collaborative environmental stewardship efforts.

> "In revealing the different understandings and experiences of local participation held by conservation professionals and local participants, the research outlined in this paper suggests that there may be a mismatch in expectations, which undermines the effectiveness and credibility of existing participatory conservation initiatives. By failing to make a link between the sense of agency of local people and their willingness to participate, the deployment of an instrumentalist approach to participation, which grants only a weak decision making role for local people, may ultimately be self-defeating in achieving legitimacy for and identification with conservation organizations and ideas." (Goodwin 1998:495).

Appendix 5

Paths to More Successful Collaborative Governance

Examining evaluation of governance experiments, Blumenthal and Jannick (2000:1-5) suggest numerous paths to more successful collaborative governance of natural resources, derived from common pool resources theory and general theories of collaboration and cooperation (see Axelrod 1984, Gray 1989, Ostrom 1999). These are equally relevant to the more comprehensive governance involved in moving toward sustainability. Five key criteria for successful collaborative governance can be identified:

Participation – "[t]he extent to which a collaborative method [of governance] fosters discourse between…divergent groups, allowing for the productive interaction of different types of knowledge…" (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:2): Best-practice participation provides multiple perspectives that lead to a comprehensive understanding of a situation, reduces stakeholder obstruction of decision implementation, increases social learning and trust among stakeholders, and thus "facilitates collaboration by increasing the ease of planning and decreasing the costs associated with monitoring stakeholder behavior" (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:2).

Institutional analysis – "…how participants organize their interactions with one another" (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:2): "Factors leading to effective resource management institutions include (1) a well-defined group of stakeholders, with legitimate stakes in management of the natural resource and sufficient autonomy to act on their decisions; (2) a balance of power among those stakeholders; (3) financial resources to sustain the institution; (4) sanctions to encourage cooperation once decisions have been made; and (5) mechanisms for resolving conflict (Gray 1989, Baland and Plateau 1996, Ostrom 1999)." (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:2)

Simplification of natural resource – "[d]eveloping a common understanding of a resource to facilitate managing that resource collaboratively (Gray 1989, Ostrom 1990,1999)" (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:2): "Stakeholders must come not only to see the resource from multiple perspectives, but also to understand the improvements that might be made through management (Gray 1989, Ostrom 1999). Particular attributes of the resource may facilitate such understanding, such as clear boundaries, predictability, and the presence of indicators of resource quality (Ostrom 1999). Where natural resources are less easily understood, ways of simplifying those resources are necessary if collaborators are to reach a common understanding of the resource and options for its management. [This] criterion describes the attention that a method gives to natural resource complexity and the techniques that it provides for making that complexity easier to understand." (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:2)

Scale of application: "The spatial scale on which the methods of governance are designed to operate varies considerably, from single farms to very large ecosystems. Spatial scale has been found to influence both the social and natural aspects of resource management. More stakeholders are involved at larger scales, making the *collaboration* part of collaborative management both more essential and more difficult. As the number of stakeholders increases, the number of interactions among stakeholders and the stakeholders' knowledge of each other's actions decrease, lowering the likelihood of collaboration (Axelrod 1984, Ostrom 1992). Larger scales also encompass more variation in the ecosystems being managed, making generalizations about the system and its management more problematic. Conversely, at very small scales, important stakeholders may be left out of the process (Gray 1989) and collaborators may not have the resources necessary to organize and maintain the social institutions of collaborative management (Ostrom 1999)." (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:2-3)

Stage of application – "… at what point in the process of management a particular method [of managing governance] is designed to be used: For example, a method may be most useful in decision making; alternatively, a method may be designed for assessing the impacts of decisions made through other processes … Inclusion of multiple stages and/or iterations among stages serves to increase the frequency and duration of interactions among collaborators, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful collaboration (Axelrod 1984, Ostrom 1999). Individual stages may also be particularly important. For example, much stronger forms of collaboration are thought to occur in methods that guide, rather than simply respond to, decision making (Rocheleau 1994)." (Blumenthal and Jannick 2000:3)

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