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Designing Social Partnerships for Local Sustainability Strategy Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter details the role of and design of cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs) at the local level. It highlights the emergence and diffusion of CSSPs for solving community-wide social problems, by showcasing the role of partnerships for local sustainability and the uptake of collaborative community sustainability strategies (such as Local Agenda 21s). It contrasts a partnership (collaborative) approach with a participation (consultation) approach to formulating and implementing a strategic plan. In addition, the chapter uses four case studies about collaborative community sustainability strategies to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different ways to design a CSSP. These four cases all focus on the implementation of a collaborative strategic plan, and consider structural features such as the decision-making entity, the partner engagement mechanisms, the communication systems, the monitoring systems, and the involvement of partners in action-taking. By considering the comments of 63 interviewees - representing local authorities, large corporations, business associations, non-governmental organizations, universities, and small- & medium-sized enterprises - conclusions are drawn about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of four different CSSP designs. These results show that if partnerships are to be considered as a means to engage responsible businesses in community sustainable development (or other social issues at the local level), then the design of their ongoing (implementation) structure is a critical consideration. This is particularly true for CSSPs that are aiming to achieve collaborative goals, CSSPs addressing complex topics that require a long-term partnership and/or CSSPs with a large number of organizations involved. This chapter provides insights for both practitioners and collaboration scholars. Given the choice of case studies, it is also relevant for those interested in community sustainability, sustainable development, and strategic management.

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INTRODUCTION

At the local level, much like national and global levels, social problems which are too large for one organization are being addressed through cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs). One particular approach being used is for a new social partnership to formulate and implement a collaborative strategy (Astley and Fombrun 1983, Clarke and Fuller 2011, Huxham and Macdonald 1992). In regards to the challenge of unsustainable development, in the last twenty years, there has been an emergence of Local Agenda 21s (LA21s) and other collaborative community sustainability strategies (CCSSs). Businesses engage in these LA21s (or other CCSSs) for a number of reasons, including as part of their community engagement and corporate social responsibility efforts (Bowen et al. 2010), and because of the benefits of being involved (Clarke and MacDonald 2012). In practice, when it comes to the implementation of these collaborative strategic plans, a wide variety of governance structures are being used. Only in the last few years have researchers started theorizing about these implementation structures and the implications of their design for partner organizations (e.g., Barrutia et al. 2007, Clarke 2011, Fidélisa and Piresb 2009, Garcia-Sanchez and Prado-Lorenzo 2008, Michaux et al. 2011). The focus of this study is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different governance structures for the implementation phase of a CCSS. This is an important question as practitioners would like to know the best way to design their governance structure to engage partners and achieve desired results, and scholars wish to further theoretical understanding about collaborative governance and about collaborative strategy implementation.

The chapter begins by introducing the role of partnerships for local sustainability, collaborative community sustainability strategies, and the Canadian situation. This is followed by a description of the study's methodology. Next, four in-depth cases provide further insight into the perceived advantages and disadvantages of different implementation structures. A cross-case comparison details the CSSP designs in regards to five key structural features. In general, this chapter highlights the emergence and diffusion of cross-sector social partnerships at the local level as a means of solving social problems. It also shows that if partnerships are to be considered as a means to engage responsible businesses in community sustainable development, the design of their implementation structures is important. By considering the advantages and disadvantages of different collaborative governance structures, the chapter introduces some of the challenges faced by social partnerships.

THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS FOR LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

Partnerships are increasingly used to address social problems such as unsustainable development (Dienhart and Ludescher 2010, Geddes 2008, Glasbergen 2007). The 'problem' is that increased global human population and increased affluence, each, have impacts on ecosystems, social systems, and economic systems. There is considerable concern that humans are exceeding the Earth's ecological carrying capacity and depleting its natural capital (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). There has also been a trend towards increased urbanization, with more than 50% of the world's population now living in urban centers (UN-Habitat 2004), and this too has serious implications for the sustainability of human development.

In industrialized countries, the consumption patterns of cities are severely stressing the global ecosystem, while settlements in the developing world need more raw material, energy, and economic development simply to overcome basic economic and social problems... (Chapter 7.1, Agenda 21, UNCED 1992)

According to the United Nations' Sustainable Cities Programme, the problem of environmental deterioration is not necessarily due to urban population growth, but rather from poor planning within urban communities (Sustainable Cities Programme 1999). A key challenge of managing complex social

problems is orchestrating the involvement of not only local authorities and other levels of government, but also businesses, higher education institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

The concept of sustainable development (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) addresses this challenge by incorporating an intergenerational timeframe, recognizing ecological limits, and integrating ecological, social and economic considerations. Sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 43). Its achievement requires that it be simultaneously tackled at multiple levels and in multiple contexts (Manderson 2006). Non-governmental organizations, governmental institutions and businesses have roles to play in achieving sustainable development, in part through making their own activities more ecologically sustainable (Jennings and Zandbergen 1995) and in part by carrying out their role in society with reference to this societal goal (Bowen et al. 2010, Gladwin et al. 1995).

Cross-sector social partnerships have been promoted as a way of achieving sustainable development (Glasbergen 2007). Local authorities have jurisdiction over numerous ecological and social considerations and, therefore, have the potential to play a leadership role in community sustainability (Gibbs et al. 1996). In fact, local “territories are far more than physical spaces: they are communities, systems of relations, and they represent the most suitable level for managing the economy, social cohesion and relations between society and the environment as a whole” (ICLEI 2012b: 4). Yet local authorities are unable to resolve sustainable development issues alone, as the complexity of these issues necessitates interorganizational collaboration (Biermann et al. 2007b).

The Sustainable Cities Program (SCP) is a program of UN–Habitat and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). These two organizations work to build capacity for urban environmental planning and sustainable development management in cities; the SCP specifically addresses attitudinal change, behavioural change, infrastructure change and organizational change in order to institutionalize sustainable development planning (Sustainable Cities Programme 1999). The SCP recognizes the importance of collaborations (Sustainable Cities Programme 1999).

...The SCP does not view environmental deterioration as a necessary or inevitable consequence of rapid urban growth; equally, the SCP does not consider financial resource constraints to be the primary cause of environmental problems. Instead, the SCP considers environmental deterioration to be primarily caused by: 1) inappropriate urban development policies and policy implementation; 2) poorly planned and managed urban growth which does not adequately consider the constraints (and opportunities) of the natural environment; 3) inadequate and inappropriate urban infrastructure, both in terms of investment and especially in terms of operations, maintenance and management; and 4) lack of coordination and cooperation among key institutions and groups.

(Sustainable Cities Programme, 1999: 76-77)

The Sustainable Cities Programme emphasizes the development of strategies that recognize ecological limits, ensure cooperation between organizations, integrate traditionally separate issues, and consider the long-term implications (Sustainable Cities Programme 1999). The SCP specifically targets both local authorities and their partners and are founded on ‘broad-based stakeholder participatory approaches’ (UN-Habitat 2012). In other words, UN-Habitat and UNEP recommend a partnership approach (Clarke and Erfan 2007).

A partnership approach (or collaboration approach) is a strategic management process that enables organizational partners to be a part of the formulation and implementation decision-making processes and generally includes formulating collaborative strategic plan (Clarke and Erfan 2007, Clarke and Fuller

2011). A participation approach (or consultation approach) is a strategic management process where one focal organization consults other organizations, and thus the decision-making is conducted by that focal organization (e.g., the local authority). This approach generally includes formulating an organizational strategic plan (Clarke and Erfan 2007). Collaborative community sustainability strategies use a partnership approach; the word ‘collaborative’ indicates this. That said, in practice, it is possible that a strategic plan with community-wide content (and not solely an organizational strategic plan) can be formulated through a partnership approach, but implemented through a participation approach; and vice versa, a collaborative strategy might be formulated with a participation approach, but when it comes to implementation, the local authority decides to switch to a partnership approach. While in Canada, local authorities are still likely to only use a participation approach, a number of CCSSPs are formulating collaborative community sustainability strategies to tackle complex issues such as unsustainable development and climate change mitigation.

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES (CCSSs)

Collaborative strategies and collaborative strategic management has been discussed in the literature (Astley and Fombrun 1983, Clarke and Fuller 2011, Huxham and Macdonald 1992). At the local level, the topics that are typically covered in a collaborative community sustainability strategy are integrated social, economic and environmental topics such as adequate housing, natural resource use, infrastructure, carbon and waste management, green economy, etc. (Clarke 2011). It is important to note relevant differences between collaborative community sustainability strategies and most partnerships theorized in existing management literature. Specifically, CCSSs: 1) can involve a large number of partners from the private, public and non-profit sectors; 2) are very long-term in their vision; and 3) tend to begin with the formulation of a collaborative strategic plan, and therefore have distinct formulation and implementation stages.

In practice, one tool to achieve sustainable development at the local level is termed “Local Agenda 21” (LA21) (Fidélisa and Piresb 2009). LA21s are one type of CCSS, and are supported by an international organization called ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. Local Agenda 21 is defined as:

A participatory, multistakeholder process to achieve the goals of *Agenda 21* at the local level through the preparation and implementation of a long-term, strategic plan that addresses priority local sustainable development concerns. (ICLEI 2002a: 6)

A 2012 survey found that about 10,000 local authorities have engaged in LA21s, including involving the local community and local stakeholders (ICLEI 2012b). In order to qualify in a similar 2002 survey as having undertaken LA21 activity, a community must have engaged in one or more of the following:

- Multisectoral engagement** in the planning process through a local stakeholder group which serves as the coordination and policy body for moving toward long-term sustainable development;
 - Consultation with community partners** such as community groups, non-governmental organizations, businesses, churches, government agencies, professional groups, and unions in order to create a shared vision and to identify proposals for action;
 - Participatory assessment** of local social, environmental, and economic needs;
 - Participatory target setting** through negotiations among key stakeholders or community partners in order to achieve the vision and goals set out in a community action plan; and/or
 - Monitoring and reporting** procedures, such as local indicators, to track progress and to allow participants to hold each other accountable to a community action plan.
- (ICLEI 2002a: 6).

These quotations make it clear that the LA21 approach involves collaboration in both the planning and the implementation stages. This can be seen from the language in the above quotation; terms such as

‘stakeholder group which serves as the coordination and policy body’, ‘shared vision’, and ‘community action plan’ (instead of local authority’s action plan) all indicate that it is a partnership approach and not a participation approach. And while the definition of an LA21 implies a partnership approach, the 2002 survey allowed for initiatives that involved ‘consultation with community partners’ to be included (in other words, a participation approach to the formulation of the shared vision). This indicates that in practice, stakeholder/partner involvement can vary in LA21s. While many local communities still pursue LA21s, many others have chosen to focus on climate change and/or biodiversity planning as their entrance into sustainable development (ICLEI 2012b). ICLEI’s programs for these topics also promote a partnership approach.

Guidance on the planning process is available for communities, as well as information about best practices (ICLEI 2012a); but absent from LA21 documentation is information on which structures to put in place during the implementation phase (beyond monitoring and reporting). Some recent academic research has been done in this area (Barrutia et al. 2007, Clarke 2011, Fidélisa and Piresb 2009, Garcia-Sanchez and Prado-Lorenzo 2008, Geissel 2009, Michaux et al. 2011, Owen and Videras 2008, Peris et al. 2011), but it is still a gap in extant knowledge.

Of particular note for implementation structures, is the work by Clarke (2011). This article offers five criteria by which to evaluate the key structural features of a collaborative governance structure for implementing a collaborative strategy. In particular, the evaluation criteria consider if the structure: engages partner organizations; has a collaborative oversight entity for decision-making and networking; enables individual organizations to implement the collaborative strategy within their own organizations; has a communication system; and has a monitoring system (Clarke 2011). Clarke (2011) explains that in order to achieve the collaborative goals outlined in a collaborative strategic plan, all five key structural features are needed as part of the implementation structure. These criteria are used later in this chapter to consider the CSSP implementation structures of the four in-depth case studies. As these are Canadian-based case studies, the next section introduces CCSSs in Canada.

THE CANADIAN SITUATION

Community sustainability strategic plans are still a relatively new concept with wide variations in strategic plan formulation approaches (Devuyst and Hens 2000). In 1992, Canadian local administration was in a state of flux with departments being renamed, new advisory committees being created, new positions being established, and new networks being formed; and, in general, most sustainability initiatives (but not all) had a strictly ecological focus (Maclaren 1992). By 2012, most local Canadian sustainability initiatives, while still incorporating an ecological focus, also included social and economic topics (Clarke 2012, Devuyst and Hens 2000). Most are still limited to issues falling within the local authority’s jurisdiction; and involve a participation approach instead of a partnership approach (Clarke and Erfan 2007). Hence, only a limited number of the Canadian community sustainability strategies are “collaborative” (i.e., involve partners), though this is more common in countries with national LA21 policies (Cartwright 1997, Eckerberg and Forsberg 1998, Mehta 1996, Rotheroe et al. 2003, Sofroniciu 2005). Indeed, the existence of national-level LA21 policies - as in some countries (but not Canada) - increases the probability of local authorities pursuing a collaborative community sustainability strategy (ICLEI 2002b).

In Canada, there are a number of government, non-governmental and private organizations that focus on supporting communities becoming more sustainable, many of which promote collaborative community sustainability strategic plan formulation. Each organization has its own approach, which partly explains the wide variance of approaches to formulating CCSSs taken in Canada (Clarke and Erfan 2007). Recently, there has been a Canada-wide wave of community sustainability strategic plans being formulated, in part due to new funding arrangements. In 2005, Infrastructure Canada, which is federal

government department, brought in an initiative called The New Deal for Cities, through which Canadian provinces and territories can access federal ‘gas tax’ money for local water and transportation infrastructure development, so long as recipient local authority commits to developing a long-term integrated community sustainability plan (ICSP) (Infrastructure Canada 2006). These ICSPs may be developed using either a partnership or participation approach. Over 200 communities in Canada now have or are developing an ICSP (Clarke 2012). This study uses Canadian case studies to explore the advantages and disadvantages of different structures used by social partnerships to implement their collaborative community sustainability strategy. This is an important question as it is known that implementation structures influence what partners are involved and what outcomes can be achieved (Clarke 2011, Hood et al. 1993, Huxham and Vangen 2000).

METHODS

This chapter includes empirical research regarding the advantages and disadvantages of different cross-sector social partnership structures for local sustainability strategy implementation. The research design used four case studies. Data was collected through documents and interviews, and inductively analyzed through coding, data reduction and cross-case comparison.

When selecting appropriate cases, it is critical that criteria be used (Yin 2003). In order to qualify as a collaborative community sustainability strategy for this study, the Canadian community must have, as of March 1, 2008, *finalized* a document that: 1) included the words vision / imagine / future / long-term, sustainability, sustainable development, Agenda 21, community or equivalent in the title; 2) included a vision for a sustainable future; 3) addressed economic, social and ecological needs together; 4) was community-wide (i.e., not a neighbourhood); 5) described a cross-sector roundtable, multi-organizational group, multi-sectoral community group, multi-organizational planning committee, partnership team or equivalent that led, or participated as a decision-maker, in the planning process (in other words, the strategy was not developed by only local authority staff and counsellors; or the committee was not only advisory); and 6) included sustainability goals that were relevant for the different organizations within the geographic community (not just the local authority’s jurisdiction). These criteria ensured that included in the study were multi-organizational collaborations (i.e., a partnership approach) implementing a CCSS, thus enabling the study of collaborative strategies. In addition, these criteria are consistent with prior research on Local Agenda 21s. From these results, four were selected because they were award winning, had a history of implementation (including reporting), and represented different collaborative governance structures. These cases were: Whistler2020; Montreal’s collective sustainable development strategy; Hamilton’s Vision 2020, and Greater Vancouver’s cities^{PLUS}. The case studies considered the time period from the strategy’s start (for example, 1992 in the Hamilton case) to 2009. Data was collected in 2008 and 2009, following ethics approval from McGill University.

Interviews were used for data collection. In total, 63 interviews were completed with partner organizations. In each case, the partners included the local authority, large corporations, business associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and in three out of four cases there were also university partners and small- and medium-sized enterprises. Each interview was transcribed in its original language (English or French) and inductively coded by a bilingual researcher. In particular, the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the implementation structure were coded. The comments with a single code were clustered and compiled separately for each of the four cases. These were further reduced to key concepts (in English) which are presented in tables in the case descriptions later in this chapter. In addition, informative quotations were retained to provide a richness in the case descriptions. As promised on the consent form that interviewees signed, all quotations were later verified with interviewees to ensure they agreed to the final wording and agreed to their usage in subsequent presentations and publications. All quotations in this chapter have received this approval from the interviewee.

The coded comments were further reduced by clustering the ideas regardless of case, and presenting them in relation to one of four categories - partners, implementation framework, processes, and other. In this situation, other is anything else (the planning process, the content, and the interpersonal aspects), as the interest is in the collaborative implementation structure. In addition, a cross-case comparison was completed based on the implementation structure in each case, using the five criteria from Clarke (2011).

IN-DEPTH CASES

This section details each of the four case studies, including their CCSS implementation structure, and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of interviewees about their structures.

Whistler 2020

At the time of the study, the Whistler2020 structure was led by the local authority in an informal partnership with other ‘early adopter’ organizations. The strategic plan formulation was formal, locally driven, and resulted in a collaborative strategic plan with a long time horizon (55 years). The main levels at which implementation was carried out are that of joint projects and individual organizations, with 15 issue-based task forces meeting annually to establish priorities; and Implementing Organizations agreeing to assigned actions. In terms of systems, the structure had centralized decision-making (i.e., action setting) through the task forces; and centralized communication and monitoring managed by a small staff.

Whistler interviewees identified the main advantages of their implementation structure. These are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages for Whistler

| Perceived Advantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) | Perceived Disadvantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diversity of organizations involved • A community with an ability to monitor progress on sustainability • An alignment of organizational, joint project, and collaborative strategies • A replicable and ongoing process • An ownership of the CCSS by the organizational partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase of costs & workload / A lack of resources • A lack of ownership by organizations • A lack of alignment of organizational, joint project, and collaborative strategies |

This quotation from Whistler2020 highlights the advantages of this structure,

“Whistler2020 helps us to use community-wide resources in a more coordinated and strategic way to work toward our shared vision. It also helps organizations prioritize actions to better use their internal resources. Rather than requiring new resources, it requires alignment of existing budgets and resources to ensure that all are dedicated to moving toward a shared goal, rather than working inefficiently or at cross-purposes.”

Frequently Asked Questions. Whistler2020

It is interesting to note that the alignment of the local authority’s organizational strategy with the collaborative strategy was noted as a real strength (an advantage), but the alignment of the other partner organizations’ strategies was considered to be inadequately addressed through the CCSS implementation structure. This is also intimately tied to ownership being considered an advantage by some and a

disadvantage by others. In terms of addressing the lack of ownership by partner organizations, Whistler2020 employees have identified that there is a perception in the community that this is a local authority plan. The solution has been to create a new NGO to coordinate Whistler2020 task forces, partners, and processes. The trade-off with this decision is the potential loss of control by the local authority, but the gain in ownership and funding from other partners. The move to an NGO also potentially addresses the cost concern as other partners will contribute and other sources of funding can be leveraged. Whistler2020 also addressed the lack of implementation by some partners (those which signed the MOU to become official 'Partners') by creating a new mechanism for partners to meet (i.e. distinct from the task forces) and to share progress on their individual implementation efforts, and new programs targeted at partners and citizens.

Some tradeoffs of Whistler2020's implementation structure are that the more partners that are engaged, the more core costs rise. Interviewees also commented on the implications of Whistler being a smaller community; one person thought that the process relies on personal relationships which create a 'peer pressure' for businesses to engage. Others thought it is a scalable approach. In summary, this case presents the perceived advantages and disadvantages if the formal implementation structure in the Whistler2020 case².

Montreal's First Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development

The strategic plan formulation used a formal process, was locally driven and resulted in a plan with a short time horizon (5 years). The implementation of Montreal's First Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development was led by three organizations (Conseil régional de l'environnement de Montréal, the City of Montreal and the Conférence régionale des élus). In terms of its framework, two formal committees were constituted at the full partnership level; individual organizations implemented relevant aspects of the collaborative strategic plan; and there were informal interactions among organizations at the joint project level. In terms of processes, decision-making about which collaborative goals to implement and actions to take was left to each individual partner, but CCSS communication and monitoring were centralized with the three lead organizations, with individual partner organizations providing information to these processes. In comparison with Whistler2020, Montreal has no task forces, and instead individual organizations choose actions from a list.

Montreal interviewees identified the main advantages of their implementation structure, and these are presented in Table 2. The main trade-off identified was in relation to the number of partners: as the number of partners increases, the quality of interactions decreases; also the need arises to make commitments required of partners easier, and the cost increases due to a need for more capacity.

² For more information about Whistler2020's implementation structure, see Clarke (2012).

Table 2: Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages for Montreal

| Perceived Advantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) | Perceived Disadvantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An opportunity for organizations to network & share resources • A diversity of organizations involved • An ongoing autonomy of organizational decision-making • An alignment of organizational, joint project, and collaborative strategies • An ownership of the CCSS by the partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of focus by some local authority departments & politicians • A broad coverage of topics so lack of consensus & vulnerable to shifts in opinion |

This quotation from one of the partner organizations highlights the advantages of this structure:

“The City didn’t ask the partners to share in every priority, it allowed partners to identify where they had the most control, the most opportunity for change ... there are some things we can’t handle right now, but if we know that it’s an objective of the greater region, we can plan for it...”

Jim Nicell, Associate Vice-Principal (University Services), McGill University, Montreal

In summary, this case presents the perceived advantages and disadvantages if the formal implementation structure in the Montreal case³.

Hamilton’s Vision 2020

Hamilton’s Vision 2020 has had three distinct structures at different periods in time. The strategic plan formulation was led by a multi-stakeholder committee and involved a formal process which was designed and led locally and which resulted in a 28-year CCSS. In terms of implementation, during the 1992-1998 and 2003-2009 time periods, Vision 2020 implementation was led by the local authority, while implementation during the 1999-2003 time period was led by an NGO created by the local authority and other organizations specifically for this purpose. The first time period saw the local authority leading the implementation, with help from the Citizens Steering Committee and informal interactions with a larger number of organizations at the annual Sustainable Community Day. During this time period, the local authority initiated a number of joint projects to complement its own internal activities. Decision-making about Vision 2020 implementation actions, communication about Vision 2020, and monitoring of community sustainability on Vision 2020 themes remained centralized with the local authority.

By the second time period, Action 2020 (the NGO) led the CCSS implementation in close collaboration with the local authority (which also had more than one seat on the Board of Action 2020). Action 2020 initiated a process to engage a large number of partners in issue-based task forces, with the intention that each organization would implement its portion of the thematic Action Plans. During this time period, decision-making about actions to implement Vision 2020 and communication about Vision 2020 were centralized with Action 2020 (and its task forces) and could be termed ‘collaborative’ in the sense that they were multi-organizational, although this led to tension with the local authority, and the monitoring (i.e. reporting) and renewal remained with the local authority. By the third time period, Action 2020 was disbanded, and processes were once again centralized with the local authority and the loosely affiliated

³ For more information about Montreal’s implementation structure, see Clarke (2012).

joint projects in which the local authority was involved. The structure in place during the second time-frame is similar to that of Whistler2020.

Hamilton interviewees identified the main advantages and disadvantages of their implementation structure as it relates to their time involved with the CCSS. See Table 3 for the summary.

Table 3: Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages for Hamilton

| | Perceived Advantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) | Perceived Disadvantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) |
|--|---|--|
| 1992-1998 (Local authority led) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diversity of organizations involved • A replicable and ongoing structure • An alignment of organizational, joint project, and collaborative strategies • An opportunity for organizations to network & share resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of sufficient impact / progress on sustainability |
| 1999-2003 (NGO led) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diversity of organizations involved • An ownership of the CCSS by the organizational partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles not clearly defined • A broad coverage of topics so lack of consensus & vulnerable to shifts in opinion • A lack of ownership by organizations |
| 2004-2009 (Local authority led) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An alignment of organizational, joint project, and collaborative strategies • A replicable and ongoing process • A diversity of organizations involved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broad coverage of topics so lack of consensus & vulnerable to shifts in opinion • A lack of continuity / freshness • A lack of sufficient ongoing engagement, networking & sharing of resources • A lack of resources |

The advantages mentioned in the first time period were the main reasons that Hamilton won so many awards for their CCSS in the 1990s. The indicators, which were mentioned in only one comment, in particular were very innovative for the time. In Hamilton, the time period of 1999-2003, included the creation and dissolution of the NGO Action 2020. The interviewees commented that the main advantage of the structure during that timeframe was Action 2020’s task forces – in particular because they enabled a diversity of organizations to be involved and they provided the opportunity for the CCSS to be owned by many organizational partners. This was not fully implemented before the NGO was dissolved, so the lack of continuity also appears as a disadvantage (in that organizations could not have ongoing ownership of the CCSS). It is interesting to note that the two advantages identified for Hamilton’s Action 2020 time period are also reflected in Whistler interviewees’ comments; thus this is likely attributable to the structure itself. A disadvantage during this time period was that roles were not clearly defined between the NGO and the local authority; specifically the decision-making process created unresolved tensions. In addition, a problem which perhaps existed from the start emerged during this time period; the broad coverage of topics in Vision 2020 meant that there was a lack of consensus as to what sustainable development really meant, and so implementation was vulnerable to conflicting opinions. The key trade-off identified was the balance between the funders’ wishes for the NGO, and the NGO’s desire to play a watchdog role.

For the 2004- 2009 time period, the disadvantage mentioned about the lack of sufficient ongoing engagement, networking and sharing of resources was in particular because the Sustainable Community Day from the first time period and Action 2020 from the second time period no longer existed. The

ongoing implementation by the local authority was identified as having both strengths and weaknesses; the triple bottom line decision-making had been institutionalized, but it is not taken as seriously as some would like. Other comments were also made about the fact that joint projects are now completely decoupled from Vision 2020, and the process is no longer collaborative; the trade-off in these comments is that while the local authority has maintained control of Vision 2020 and ensured the continuity of the initiative, other institutions, organizations and companies in the community no longer had ownership of the Vision or its implementation, which results in some issues not being implemented.

This quotation summarizes one of the main advantages of Vision 2020, the ongoing process.

“There is a fairly good awareness of what Vision 2020 is, and what sustainability is; it’s truly part of the culture ... it has truly engaged the community ... the fact that it still has resonance is fairly powerful.”

Heather Donison, Current Vision 2020 Coordinator, City of Hamilton

In summary, this case presents the perceived advantages and disadvantages if the implementation structure in the Hamilton case⁴.

Greater Vancouver cities^{PLUS}

Greater Vancouver’s cities^{PLUS} had a structure which is predominately informal. It was initiated by a small multi-sector group of organizations who launched a formal process but without a formally constituted entity at the full partnership level to formulate the strategy. It engaged numerous other organizations in the formulation process through formal consultation events and information gathering activities. The efforts resulted in a CCSS with a 100-year time horizon. No formalized implementation effort was ever planned; rather, it was intended that individual organizations would act upon the concepts in the CCSS on their own accord and independently. So organizations made their own decisions about which actions to pursue, and if relevant, conducted their own organizational-level sustainability reporting. Some of the partners continued to informally interact and communicate about implementation through two newsletters, sustainability breakfasts, the PLUS Network, Metro Vancouver’s dialogues, QUEST, and the myriad of other sustainability initiatives in Greater Vancouver. No monitoring system was created for cities^{PLUS}, and no renewal was planned. Many legacies have resulted from cities^{PLUS}, most of which were not deliberate.

Greater Vancouver’s cities^{PLUS}’s implementation structure also had its advantages and disadvantages, as outlined in Table 4.

⁴ For more information about Hamilton’s implementation structure, see Clarke (2012).

Table 4: Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages for Greater Vancouver

| Perceived Advantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) | Perceived Disadvantages (mentioned by more than one interviewee) |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A long-term time horizon • A diversity of organizations involved • An opportunity for organizations to network & share resources • An achievement of organizational-level progress on sustainability • An opportunity for individuals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles not clearly defined and no collaborative structure • A lack of mechanism to engage new organizations • A perception that it is only a local authority project (not multi-organizational) • A lack of focus by some local authority departments & politicians • A broad coverage of topics so lack of consensus & vulnerable to shifts in opinion • A timeframe too long for implementation / Vision not action |

Interviewees focused the majority of their comments on the formulation phase as that was the only formal component. In particular, the 100-year timeframe was identified as an advantage for visioning and creativity, but comments were also made that the long time frame was not ideal for facilitating implementation. There was a perception by some that it was the local authority’s responsibility to implement, yet the mixed convenor approach meant that the local authority did not have ownership over the plan, and the implementation by local authority was vulnerable to shifts in local political will. Without the local authority leading implementation, the consulting firm and the NGO lead organizations were unable to maintain this role as they are both limited by project-based funding. The individual partner implementation and the complementary decentralized decision-making (i.e., decisions made within each organization on what and how they will continue working towards the collaborative strategy’s vision) were seen as being a trade-off; while control remained in the individual organizations enabling them to implement within their mandate, this also limited the issues implemented and the oversight of implementation efforts.

This quotation highlights an advantage of being a partner in cities^{PLUS}.

“The initiatives at BC Hydro were supported by a very vibrant network in Vancouver which included ICSC and many others. The network supported each other and was a critical element in raising the sustainability profile of Vancouver and BC at the time.”

Bruce Sampson, former VP Sustainability, BC Hydro

In summary, this case presents the perceived advantages and disadvantages if the informal implementation structure in the Greater Vancouver case.

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

This section shows the clustered findings from the empirical study about perceived advantages and disadvantages, regardless of implementation structure (i.e., by combining the results from all four cases).

Perceived Advantages

Clustering the perceived advantages, 15 different categories emerged. These are related to specific implementation structure components (partners, framework and processes). These perceived advantages are detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Perceived Advantages of Interviewee's Collaborative Implementation Structure

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| <p>Partners (and Individuals):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A diversity of organizations involved2. A local authority in the leadership role3. An opportunity for individuals <p>Implementation Framework:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. An opportunity for organizations to network & share of resources5. An alignment of organizational, joint projects and collaborative strategies6. An achievement of organizational-level progress on sustainability7. A cost effective structure <p>Processes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. An ongoing autonomy of organizational decision-making9. A collaborative communication mechanism10. A community with an ability to monitor progress on sustainability11. A flexible process12. A replicable and ongoing structure <p>Other:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">13. A broad coverage of sustainability topics14. A long-term time horizon15. An ownership of the CCSS by the organizational partners |
|---|

Perceived Disadvantages

Clustering the perceived disadvantages, 15 different categories emerged. Again these can be related to the implementation structure. The perceived disadvantages are detailed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Perceived Disadvantages of Interviewee's Collaborative Implementation Structure

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| <p>Partners (and Citizens):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. An inadequacy of involvement of economic organizations in implementation2. A perception that it is only a local authority project (not multi-organizational)3. A lack of focus by some local authority departments & politicians4. A lack of understanding by citizens <p>Implementation Framework:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. A lack of sufficient ongoing engagement, networking & sharing of resources6. A lack of alignment of organizational , joint project and collaborative strategies7. Roles are not clearly defined or no collaborative structure <p>Processes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. An evaluation process which is difficult9. A lack of sufficient impact / progress on sustainability10. A lack of continuity / freshness11. A lack of a mechanism to engage new organizations <p>Other:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">12. A broad coverage of topics so lack of consensus & vulnerable to shifts in opinion13. A timeframe too long for implementation / vision not action / pace too slow14. An increase of costs & workload / A lack of resources15. A lack of ownership by organizations |
|--|

COMPARING THE FOUR IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

Whistler has the most opportunity for interorganizational interaction of any of the structures due to the joint projects (i.e., task forces), so provides an opportunity for partner organizations to build relationships, gain knowledge, and access marketing opportunities. Both Whistler and Montreal feature implementation by individual organizations, and monitor on their implementation, so are likely to result in partner actions. It was only in the Whistler case that partners complained about increased demand on their scarce resources, and this likely reflects the situation that task forces requires partners to commit the time and effort of human resources to participate in meetings. All the structures enable partners to gain knowledge from their involvement in the CCSS and all also enable partners to make progress on issues related to sustainability (i.e., their sustainability goals). This does not mean they are all equally effective at realizing all collaborative goals, quite the contrary. In Hamilton and Greater Vancouver, progress is only made on the issues that the partners are engaged in, and there are a smaller number of partners in these cases.

Like Whistler, Hamilton has the potential for joint projects so also provides an opportunity for those involved to build relationships. As the joint projects are initiated by the focal organization (e.g., the local authority) in Hamilton, there is less opportunity to access marketing opportunities, i.e., less opportunity to promote their organization, gain visibility and get recognition for their initiatives. Based on interviewee comments, Greater Vancouver is the only one which emphasizes business opportunities as an inherent goal. Partners are informally involved in the implementation in ways that match their mandates, and make progress towards their organizational goals, so it appears they engage in the CCSS implementation when it is also an opportunity to promote their programming or company; thus accessing business and marketing opportunities are a key part of this initiative.

Based on the five criteria developed by Clarke (2011), Table 5 demonstrates the comparison of each of the four cases.

Table 5: Comparison of the Implementation Structures of the Four Cases

| Criteria (Clarke, 2011: 165) | Whistler | Montreal | Hamilton | Greater Vancouver |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Engages key organizations from different sectors, and/or has a mechanism to identify them and to add them | Engages key organizations and has a mechanism identify and add more. | Organizations can self-engage, invitations can be sent, and new partners can be added. There is no collaborative process to identify missing key partners. | Joint Projects can engage key organizations, but do not exist for all issues. | The lead organizations are cross-sector, but there is no mechanism to identify or engage more. |
| Has collaborative form(s) to oversee the implementation, and identify issue-based short-term actions, and also allows for networking between organizations | The issue-based joint projects (task forces) serve this purpose. | The framework at the full partnership level and also the joint project(s) oversee the process and allow networking, but do not identify short-term actions. It depends on the timeframe of the strategy itself. | Joint projects allow for networking, action identification and issue-based oversight where they exist. | The informal interactions allow for networking, but not oversight nor action identification. |
| Has individual organizations implementing within | Yes. | Yes. | No, except for the local authority and perhaps also partners | Yes. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| their own organizations | | | engaged in a joint project. | |
| Has a communication system that exists to further networking and to reach citizens | Yes. | Yes. | Generally only reporting on local authority initiatives and perhaps joint projects, where they exist. | No communication system exists. |
| Has a monitoring system that exists, including both state and action indicators, which also allows for adjustments to be made to the implementation actions, and renewal to be made to the collaborative strategic plan | Yes, there is a monitoring system on both indicator types, a mechanism to adjust actions annually, and a renewal process. | Yes, there is a monitoring system on both indicator types and a renewal process that also adjusts actions. There are less frequent adjustments than in Whistler. | Yes, a monitoring system exists that monitors state indicators, particularly in relation to the local authority's jurisdiction. No actions are set, so no adjustment is possible. There may be a renewal process. | Monitoring is conducted by individual partners about their own implementation. Emergent solutions are possible, but no adjustments or renewal of the formal CCSS is possible. |

Clarke's (2011) five criteria clearly show in Table 5 (above) the advantages and disadvantages of each structure for achieving CCSS goals. A practical consideration that was raised during the interviews is particularly important; the commitment of partner organizations to the CCSS (i.e., ownership).

Ownership

In terms of "ownership" (i.e., the commitment of organizations to the CCSS), this was an underlying theme throughout the interviews in all four communities. Whistler struggles with a perception by some that their CCSS is a plan of the local authority; this was one of the motivations for creating the Whistler Centre for Sustainability as the new home. Hamilton also struggled with ownership issues near the end of the time period 1992-1998, which was one of the reasons Action 2020 was created; in order to attempt to share ownership. Hamilton in the time periods 1992-1999 and 2003-2009 places ownership with only the local authority; the disadvantage of this being that without commitment to the CCSS the other potential partners have no implementation responsibility. Greater Vancouver had the opposite challenge from Hamilton in terms of the local authority's role; with the CCSS not being viewed as a plan of just the local authority, and with no ongoing formal arrangements at the full partnership level, some felt there was not enough ownership by the local authority (or any of the other partners). In Montreal, having placed the CCSS within one department, there were challenges of ownership by the other parts of local authority, though due to the shared leadership by three lead organizations, there was ownership by these three organizations. In Montreal, those partners more removed from the steering committee still viewed the CCSS as a plan of the local authority as much of the communication and monitoring is centred there. Ultimately, from a local authority perspective, the structures in Whistler, Montreal and Hamilton provide the most ownership, but from the other partners' perspective, Whistler's structure, followed by Montreal's structure, allow for the most ownership. Greater Vancouver's structure also allows for ownership by partners, but does not ensure ownership by any organization.

Related to ownership, was the desire for organizations to retain authority over decisions they believed to be under their jurisdiction. For example, the Board of the local authority for Greater Vancouver was challenged by the partnership committee, and the purpose of that entity, given that decision-making on

the local authority's sustainability programs was the responsibility of the Board. This ultimately led to the creation of dialogues instead of a cross-sector decision-making entity.

CONCLUSION

This chapter details the role and design of cross-sector social partnerships at the local level. In terms of the role, this chapter provides examples of the emergence of local cross-sector social partnerships and collaborative strategies. While the focus is on collaborative community sustainability strategies, the phenomenon of social partnerships also exists for other complex local issues such as economic development, crime prevention, and health services (Dienhart and Ludescher 2010, Geddes 2008, Huxham and Vangen 2005). While collaborative governance is increasingly being used at the local level, in practice, the Local Agenda 21 survey (ICLEI 2002a) and CCSSs in Canada (Clarke and Erfan 2007) show that sometimes the same collaborative strategy is formulated and implemented by switching between partnership and participation approaches. The tensions that drive this shift from public to shared authority and back are exemplified through the case studies considered in this chapter, and are also explored in other chapters in Part A of this book. This is also related to the discussion in this chapter about 'ownership' of the CCSS by the partners. The tension between autonomy and accountability is inherent in collaborations (Bowen et al. 2010, Huxham 1996) and these cases help us further how design might help alleviate some of those tensions by providing explicit options.

In terms of the design of CSSPs at the local level, this chapter details four different CCSS implementation structures in order to highlight the management and governance challenges faced by social partnerships. In all of these cases, there were a large number of partners (as many as 180 in the Montreal case). In general, the CSSP literature has been predominantly focused on two or three organization partners, though some more recent studies have considered some large CSSPs (e.g., Babiak and Thibault 2009, Geddes 2008, Huxham and Vangen 2005). There are a number of design implications of these larger CSSPs, including the number of levels of action-taking expanding from just the partnership level and the individual organization level to also include a joint project level (Clarke and Fuller 2011, Huxham and Vangen 2005). The Clarke (2011) five criteria were useful in highlighting the different structural features in the four CSSP designs. Having a formal structure with these five features is critical for achieving the goals outlined in the collaborative strategy (Clarke 2011). Design features in general will determine what value is created for partners and for the society (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, Elbers and Schulpen 2011). The interviewee perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of their own CCSS implementation structure were not as comprehensive and did not have the external perspective of using a framework for analysis (such as Clarke 2011). That said, it is these perceptions that influence a CSSPs ability to continue to engage the partners over time (Gazley 2010, Kitchen et al. 1997).

In regards to another focus of this book – partnerships as a means to engage responsible business – this chapter demonstrates that the design of the collaborative governance structure is important for enabling businesses to participate. For example, the structure provides opportunities for new partners to get involved, and it incentivizes engagement through opportunities for learning, marketing, and creating real progress on sustainability issues (Clarke and MacDonald 2012). This is particularly true for these long-term, large partnerships, as new partners can join the implementation efforts without having been a part of the founding efforts, and partners have differing degrees of engagement (Babiak and Thibault 2009). The design of the implementation structure creates specific advantages and disadvantages for partners. This empirical study found that it was not the organizational type that influenced what partners experienced, but instead the implementation structure. Thus large businesses in Whistler had more in common experiences with other organizations in Whistler, than with large businesses in the other three cases. That said, for the large corporations, one advantage that was consistent across cases was that getting involved in implementing a collaborative community sustainability strategy is an excellent means of conducting community engagement without having to lead the larger process.

As the empirical cases are all related to local sustainable development, the collaborative strategies are long-term in nature, even if their time horizons vary; generally it will take between 20 to 100 years to really achieve the goals. The duration of the CSSP has implications on design; strategy adaptation and renewal opportunities, new partner engagement mechanisms, and avoiding partner fatigue are just a few of the design considerations to consider (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, Clarke 2011, Clarke and MacDonald 2012). Reporting and monitoring mechanisms are one of the key features for longer-term initiatives (Clarke 2011), yet these are underutilized in practice (Biermann et al. 2007a, Rein and Stott 2009), and have their challenges (Geddes 2008). The Greater Vancouver case detailed in this chapter shows how critical formal implementation structures are for ensuring ongoing efforts. This topic of design is also covered in some of the other chapters in this book, including the chapter on cross-sector governance (by Rufin and Rivera-Santos), and the one on future methods of design and decision-making for cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development (by Mangalagiu, Selsky and Wilkinson).

While this study helps contribute to the conversations about cross-sector social partnerships at the local level, collaborative strategy implementation, collaborative governance structures, and Local Agenda 21s, more research is needed in these areas. That said, it is perhaps time for the growing bodies of literature on collaborative governance, collaborative planning, cross-sector social partnerships, inter-organizational relations, cross-sector alliances, and collaborative public management to merge into one ‘collaboration theory’ that can be seen as a theoretical lens of its own with the main unit of analysis being the formal partnership.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON THIS CHAPTER

1. Reflect on a ‘partnership approach’ versus a ‘participation approach’ for tackling sustainability issues at the local level. We know that in theory, social problems that are too large for one organization are being increasingly addressed through cross-sector social partnerships, so why then are most local authorities still using a ‘participation approach’?
2. Reflect on ‘designing a CSSP’ in order to improve partner engagement. What are the most important structural features for ensuring partners have the opportunity and desire to engage in the collaborative strategy implementation? Why did you choose these features?
3. Reflect on ‘designing a CSSP’ in order to achieve the collaborative goals in the collaborative strategy (and thus help solve the social problem). What are the most important structural features for ensuring that there is a positive impact? Why did you choose these features?
4. What role should the local authority play in the CSSP? In Greater Vancouver, they did not play enough of a role and thus there was no ongoing buy in. In Whistler, it was decided to move the collaborative initiative into an NGO so as to increase the buy in from other partners. Hamilton experimented with the NGO model and instead decided to move all the decision-making back into the local authority (with no sharing with partners). In Montreal, there are three core partners sharing the decision-making, though the secretariat is housed in the local authority. What are the implications of these approaches and thus what role do you think the local authority should play?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON REIMAGINING PARTNERSHIPS

1. When is collaborative governance the right choice for addressing a social problem? In other words, when is it better for the public sector to initiate a CSSP instead of using command and control options, market-based instruments, or other governance mechanisms?
2. Reflect on the implications of the number of partners in a CSSP. What difference does it make if there are 100 partners versus two partners? Consider the role of the CSSP, the design implications, the potential impact of the CSSP, and the challenges this will create.
3. Reflect on the implications of the long-term nature of a social problem such as unsustainable development. What difference does it make if it is a complex problem that will take at least 30 years to solve? Consider the role of the CSSP in this context, the design implications, the potential to achieve change, and the challenges this might raise.
4. In CSSPs must there always be a balance between autonomy and accountability? Are there design features that can enable autonomy but also increase accountability, or will it always be a trade off?

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

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