

2014 CCCR national summit case studies

Conclusion

This project aimed at documenting regional and local context for building sustainable solutions. Framed on a partnership model, stakeholders were actively involved in designing solutions. This approach showed the potential to move forward collectively. Other watershed associations are now modeling their interventions based on this project.

An Analysis of Municipal Readiness for Socio-Economic Development Opportunities in the Isthmus of Avalon Region

Institution Memorial University and Office of Public Engagement, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Researchers Michelle Porter and Kelly Vodden, Memorial University with Chad Holloway, Discovery Regional Development Board; Colin Holloway, Rural Secretariat/Office of Public Engagement, Government of NL; and municipal representatives: Susan Khaladkar, Town of Sunnyside; Brenda Mulrooney, Town of Come By Chance; Joan Hickey, Town of Southern Harbour; Aiden Wadman, Town of Arnold's Cove; and Keith Rodway, Town of Clarenville.

Authors: Kelly Vodden, Joshua Barrett and Michelle Porter, Memorial University; Colin Holloway, Office of Public Engagement, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; Susan Khaladkar, Town of Sunnyside

Location Isthmus of Avalon Region

Dates 2011—2012

Partners Towns of Sunnyside, Come by Chance, Southern Harbour, Arnold's Cove, Clarenville; Discovery Regional Development Board; Rural Secretariat/Office of Public Engagement, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Funders Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency; Rural Secretariat-Executive Council, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; Department of Innovation, Business & Rural Development, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; the Discovery Regional Development Board; and participating municipalities

2014 CCCR national summit case studies

Introduction

Historically, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) has relied on natural resources and its mining, forestry, fishing, and oil and gas industries for economic opportunities. Recently, a new wave of resource-related “mega projects” has been introduced to the province, especially within the Isthmus of the Avalon region and Placentia Bay. These include the construction of infrastructure for the province’s fourth major offshore oil development (The Hebron Project), and a new nickel processing facility. The introduction of new large industries has had significant socio-economic implications for communities in the Isthmus region and across the province. The project An Analysis of Municipal Readiness for Socio-Economic Development Opportunities in the Isthmus of Avalon Region, undertaken by Memorial University researchers together with community and government partners, evaluated the level of community readiness to capitalize on the potential socio-economic benefits resulting from these industries and to manage and minimize the negative impacts of economic growth.

Background

In 2011-2012 five communities in the Isthmus region collaborated in this community-based research (CBR) project, including Sunnyside, Come by Chance, Southern Harbour, Arnold’s Cove, and Clarendville. This project evaluated how successful communities in the region, as well as others in similar circumstances, have been in negotiating benefits from large industries located in their region. Regional stakeholders, including representatives of all levels of government and a non-government economic development board initiated and funded the project. They formed a committee that met monthly with the Memorial researchers to share knowledge, to plan, and to direct the project. Research methods included a review of industrial benefits planning (IBP) literature; a review of relevant studies, plans and reports related to the region to identify strengths and weaknesses in municipal capacity; semi-structured interviews with 29 community members, benefits experts and industry representatives; and a public meeting to gather public input. The research team then conducted an assessment of the potential for regional collaboration among the participating towns in IBP and of areas where local benefits might be enhanced (using a regional strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis). Finally, the research team created a discussion paper to be used by policy makers, community practitioners and future researchers.

Research findings

Findings of the literature review portion of the study, including six identified case studies from across the country, suggested that communities can have an important influence on their experiences with industrial activity; however this influence is dependent on a number of community characteristics. These include: (1) experience with previous change; (2) its attitude toward further change; (3) the extent to which that community feels empowered to act on their own behalf and manage change; (4) collaboration and cooperation between impacted municipalities; and (5) the assistance of trusted professional advisors to assist in negotiations with companies.

The research team concluded that the communities in this region did not meet all of these requirements. While the communities have had experience with change and generally have a positive attitude toward future change, there is a feeling that local residents have limited power to act on their own behalf and manage change to their benefit (something the project itself was an attempt to help remedy). It was recognized that the communities of the region could gain power through collaborative efforts and that increased regional collaboration and cooperation was needed. As a result, next steps for moving forward with IBP recommended in the final report focused on building collaboration and cooperation around regional readiness and industrial benefits planning, as well as obtaining the professional support needed for these efforts.

The study also identified community priorities for seeking benefits in the future. Residents at the public meeting voted that housing was the most important priority for them personally but felt that their municipal councils’ top priority should be economic development (followed by recreation and health). Suggestions for seeking support included a regional Centre of Excellence for economic development, funding to support small recreational programming and facilities, support for physicians attraction of a range of health professionals, and investment in the local school. The establishment of a community development fund as a legacy of large industrial projects was also identified.

2014 CCCR national summit case studies

Domains of research excellence

This research project reflects each of the four domains of excellence in CBR (community relevance; equitable participation; action and change; and research design) to varying extents.

Community relevance and research design

The project had particular strengths in research design and community relevance. The project was initiated by municipal and regional representatives and was highly relevant during a time of major growth in industrial activity, with related concerns about the impacts and potential lost benefits from this economic development. The strengths of the project's research design include its multidimensional and collaborative nature. A project advisory committee comprised of partner representatives provided input on all aspects of the research design (e.g. proposed overall approach, interview questions, organization of the community meeting) as well as on the emerging findings, the draft report and recommendations.

Action and change

The project was also intended to foster action and change, although the extent to which the project influenced change in community-industry relationships and ultimately regional well-being is difficult to evaluate. The project was only part of what is and must be a longer term effort to maximize local benefits and minimize the costs of industrial development in the face of powerful economic and political actors.

Through the process key informants and participating community representatives also realized the need to advance IBP with industry, and to collaborate with other communities in this process. Since the study was completed three of five participating communities have joined with other neighbouring communities to form the Small Towns Big Industry Initiative, working together to conduct further research (e.g. continued examination of best practices from elsewhere), share information, and advocate for increased local benefits. The group's next step is to meet with senior executives from the industries in their midst. The towns of the region also continue to meet as the Isthmus Regional Committee, with a current focus on developing regional fire services. Industry has

acknowledged that housing issues are a "downside of development" and community leaders have suggested the region be allotted a small proportion of oil revenue for infrastructure and to create an opportunity fund that would assist the region in the development of businesses that support industry. Nalcor, owner of the Bull Arm site where the Hebron project is taking place, meets with the towns a couple of times each year to report on the project and is currently developing a strategy for 2015 to attract new projects to the site. One municipal representative observed that a major industrial player recently seemed surprised to learn that the towns are also developing their own strategies to prepare for future projects. This indicates that municipal readiness for socio-economic development has increased through the Analysis of Municipal Readiness project and other continuing collaborative regional efforts.

Equitable participation

While the team strove for equitable participation within the research process constraints of time limited the number of interviews and meetings that could be held. Further, the partners felt that Memorial University researchers should take a lead role to enhance the credibility of the research in the eyes of policymakers. More broadly, the project also helped to ensure community voices were heard in decision-making processes discussed further below.

Additional indicators of success

Two key indicators of success in this project are: 1) increased voice provided to communities and their concerns in important decision-making processes, and 2) continued collaboration and efforts that build on and use knowledge from the CBR project for community change. In 2011 the Hebron Public Review Commission was tasked with conducting an assessment and review of the Hebron Project Development Application. Project partners presented the results of the Municipal Readiness study to the Commission. As a result, the Commissioner's Report (2012, p. 186) cited the project findings, calling for greater socio-economic research and understanding of local impacts and benefits. The Commission recommended that the Proponent strive "to make the Hebron project an exemplar for corporate/ community partnership" and develop strategies

2014 CCCR national summit case studies

to reduce the inflationary impact on housing, a topic of particular concern raised in the study.

Lessons-learned

Lessons learned from the project include, first, the value of CBR in bringing people together, helping to foster not just community-university relationships but also relationships between communities. While it is important that communities come together and develop regional approaches to gain strength and negotiating capacity, research has shown that this rarely occurs. CBR can provide a platform for recognizing and discussing common interests, or, alternatively, for identifying working relationships that are not appropriate at a given point in time (e.g. due to lack of sufficient common interest or will to work together).

In addition, CBR can assist in addressing unequal power relationships. Prior to the CBR project, these communities considered themselves at a disadvantage (unequal balance of power) when it came to negotiating benefits from large industrial development (Hibernia and White Rose). The CBR project helped community leaders build their internal capacity, leading to an effort to gain a balance of power when it came to negotiating benefits for their respective communities. This was exemplified in the increased level of respect industry and government had for these community leaders.

Major challenges remain in community-industry relations in the region. Community members continue to feel that the "legacy" they hoped for from major industrial projects in their area has not occurred. Industrial proponents want high profile, safe investments, leading to investments in institutions such as Memorial University or regional hospitals rather than the kinds of projects desired by members of the public and municipal representatives and identified in the Analysis of Municipal Readiness project. CBR has provided a tool, however, for these communities in seeking a more equitable approach to IBP that provides greater opportunity for their voices and concerns to be heard and their needs to be met.

Links

<http://ruralresilience.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/MunicipalReadinessforSocioEconomicOpportunities-2012.pdf>