PART III. NEW APPROACHES TO GOVERNANCE

Chapter 9

New Pathways to Effective Regional Governance: Canadian Reflections

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Across the globe, there is considerable interest in federated local government systems (Slack 2007; Fahim 2009). In the Canadian province of British Columbia (BC), institutions for federated regional governance – known as regional districts (RDs) – date back more than four decades. When established, RDs were not viewed as 'governments', but were heralded merely as forums to reduce the transaction costs of inter-local co-operation for mutual benefit in service delivery. This chapter initially examines these institutions, explaining why regional districts on the whole have been successful with their service delivery mission.

Some regional districts in BC have sought to build on their success with service delivery to take on more of a governance orientation (while still maintaining their service mission). For instance, using 1995 legislation, ten urbanised regions have developed 'regional growth strategies', policy documents that are negotiated in the context not of mutual benefit but of unequal implications for the localities affected. The experience of such regions – those attempting to migrate from the administration of services to the governance of issues with differential impacts – must be interpreted through a different lens.

Therefore, this chapter will secondly widen its focus and rise to a higher plane: it goes on to discuss what happens when matters requiring a regional response cannot be addressed purely on the basis of inter-local co-operation for mutual benefit. Such matters may cut across numerous localities, diverging interests, multiple institutions and a complex regional geography. New pathways are presented that, if implemented, might enable jurisdictions to more successfully tackle regional issues that are contested and political – issues often verging on irresolvable when approached using customary governance techniques. On this higher plane, regional governance is invariably polycentric, such that the quest for good governance must move beyond co-operation for mutual benefit to the quest for acceptable decision outcomes, even when local interests are unaligned and no single institution is, or can ever be, 'in charge' (Torfing et al. 2012).

9.1 British Columbia's layered system for local governance

Canada is a federal state with ten provinces and three province-like territories. Provinces have exclusive jurisdiction for the varying architecture of the local government systems within their boundaries, and there is no national statute for local government per se. However, the federal government has an interest in urban (as opposed to strictly municipal) issues and has used its considerable spending power

over the past two decades to address local government infrastructure challenges in fields such as environmental and energy sustainability, water and air quality, and transportation (Berdahl 2006).

In most parts of Canada local governments have similar roles in providing core community services, including transportation and communications, water/wastewater, refuse collection/disposal, recreation and culture, land use planning and building regulation. Fire and police protection are local responsibilities, although in most provinces a national police force is available to provide local policing by contract. Local government spending on health, education and social services is minimal, as these services have, with the exception of Ontario, been taken over by provinces (Commonwealth Local Government Forum [CLGF] 2009; Kitchen and Slack 2006; Kitchen 2002).[2]

9.1.1 Creating British Columbia's regional districts

British Columbia, on Canada's west coast, is large and mountainous. Only a small fraction of the land mass is suitable for settlement. About three-quarters of BC's 4.5 million residents are concentrated into three urbanised territories: the Vancouver area, known as the Lower Mainland; the area around the provincial capital, Victoria, on Vancouver Island; and the Okanagan Valley in the south-central interior. Elsewhere, municipalities and rural communities are scattered mostly along the river valleys that carve through the province. The typical municipality is small, the median population among the roughly 160 municipalities being a mere 5,000 persons.

After a comprehensive, decade-long search for a politically palatable regional governance system, legislation to establish a federated framework for regional service delivery was adopted in 1965 (Brown 1968; Collier 1972; Tennant and Zirnhelt 1972, 1973; Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development [MCD] 2010). Through a series of intergovernmental negotiations in the late 1960s, each region was established with local consent (Local Government Knowledge Partnership [LGKP] 2009). Expressly designed for BC, the legislation relied on local choice not only for establishing individual RDs, but also for determining their functions thereafter. The philosophy of the system required that there be little in the way of mandated service responsibilities. Rather the legislative framework would embody a 'strategy of gentle imposition': it would enable regions to tailor functions to their own evolving needs (Tennant and Zirnhelt 1973; MCD 2010). Today, through incremental decisions based on a region's unique characteristics and service needs, each RD has been able to develop a distinct service personality.

9.1.2 Attributes of British Columbia's regional districts

More than 40 years on, much of the philosophy that guided the creation of RDs remains relevant, and they have become integral to BC's local government landscape. Nevertheless, the RD system is misunderstood by many and is underappreciated for the role it plays in arranging solutions to what had been troubling gaps in service provision. Bish (2002, 2006) points out that, while the system is difficult to fit into the standard lexicon of regional governance, its capacity to provide any service, at any

scale, using any mode of provision, offers a practical set of institutional arrangements for dealing with a variety of boundary issues. He judges the system to have fostered fiscal equivalence, lowered inter-local co-operation costs and improved the overall performance of BC's local government system.

Except for the remote north, 27 regional districts blanket the province, layered over the pre-existing system of municipalities. All municipalities are now federated within one of these regions. RDs serve three hybrid purposes. First, they provide a region-wide forum for members to discuss issues while capturing scale economies by delivering large-scale services. Second, they provide the principal framework for inter-local service delivery in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Third, they provide democratic representation and local community services for populations residing outside municipalities (MCD 2006).

Like municipal governments, RDs provide a range of services including utilities and other infrastructure, recreation and culture, and regulatory services (Bish and Clemens 2008). An essential element of the RD model is that different services may have different boundaries, which also act as financial and decision-making boundaries, helping minimise 'free-rider' problems. Each service is independent and there is no cross-subsidisation; service areas are tantamount to 'special districts' (Phares 2009). However, all such 'special districts' inside any particular RD are managed by a common board of directors, thus also minimising problems of political fragmentation.

As federations, regional district boards (known collectively as 'directors') are composed of councillors appointed from member municipalities plus directly elected representatives from unincorporated members outside municipalities. To ensure municipal and non-municipal members are fairly represented in regional decision-making, the number of directors is made roughly proportional to each member's population, and then multiple votes are assigned to directors from the more populous members to better reflect population differences. System-wide legislation prescribes how unweighted votes and weighted votes (used primarily for money matters) are employed.

Despite sharing a common legislative foundation, the 27 RDs are far from homogeneous. In land area, they vary in size from around 2,000 to about 120,000 km^2. They range in population up to 2.4 million for the Greater Vancouver Regional District;[3] five other RDs have populations exceeding 100,000. Together, the six most populous RDs contained 77 per cent of the total BC population in 2012. By contrast, the ten least populous RDs are each 40,000 or fewer in population and together account for just 6 per cent of the BC total population.

9.2 Inside three regional districts

Looking in depth at regional districts is the best way to understand the differences in their character and the manner in which they have implemented their power of self-organisation. Three RDs of varying size and with distinctive service personalities are discussed in detail this section: Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD), Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD), and Capital Regional District (CapRD) (Tables 9.1 and 9.2).

Table 9.1 Comparison of selected RDs: Columbia Shuswap (CSRD), Thompson Nicola (TNRD), Capital (CapRD)

	CSRD	TNRD	CapRD
Location	**Southeastern interior**	**Central interior**	**Southern tip of Vancouver Island**
Geography	• Crosses three spectacular mountain ranges • Shuswap Lake dominates the region's western half • Hot summers, cold winters	• Vast, sparsely populated rural area anchored by a large city • Rugged mountains, rolling grasslands and forests • Hot summers, cold winters	• Coastal geography/climate • Contains the southern Gulf Islands – but the population is mostly settled on mainland Vancouver Island
Land area (comparator)	29,004 km^2 (similar to Lesotho)	45,279 km^2 (smaller than Sri Lanka)	2,367 km^2 (larger than Mauritius)
Pop. 2012	53,600 (rank 16 of 27)	132,450 (rank 6 of 27)	376,400 (rank 2 of 27)
Rural/urban mix	Large rural population; only 60 % resident in municipalities	About one-third resident in small towns or rural areas; two-thirds in Kamloops	Small rural population – only 7 %; four core cities contain 62 % of total population
Municipal members	• 4 municipalities • 5 directors and up to 14 votes	• 11 municipalities • 15 directors and up to 37 votes (incl. Kamloops: 5 directors/25 votes)	• 13 municipalities • 20 directors and up to 70 votes (incl. core: 11 directors/46 votes)
Rural members	• 6 rural members • 6 directors and up to 12 votes	• 10 rural members • 10 directors and up to 11 votes	• 3 rural (or island) members • 3 directors and up to 6 votes
Expenditure (C$/2009)	• $23 million ($451/person) • About 44 % of total local government spending in RD	• $37 million ($304/person) • About 22 % of total local government spending in RD	• $128 million ($370/person) • About 27% of total local government spending in RD
Staff size	45	120	750

Table 9.2 Comparison of selected RDs: examples of self-organised services, 2010

	CSRD	TNRD	CapRD
Services (#)	**95**	**115**	**200**
Drivers of service personality	• Geography: large area, divided by mountain ranges • Small population in subregional clusters • **Result**: focus on subregions	• One dominant municipal member (two-thirds of population) • Large number of smaller urban and rural members • **Result**: 'service bureau' approach primarily aimed at smaller members	• Small territory, concentrated and relatively large metro population • Surrounded by several, small rural or island communities • **Result**: service focus for rural/island communities • **Result**: strategic focus for metro subregion, focus on regional planning and scale economies
Water	• Community systems (rural) • Strategy for takeover of additional systems	• Community systems (11, rural)	• Bulk supply (region-wide) • Distribution (non-core cities) • Community systems (11, rural)
Sewerage	• Planning, liquid waste (rural, inter-local) • Community systems, liquid (2)	• Community systems (2, rural)	• Trunk, treatment, planning (regional) • Community systems (subregional)
Parks	• Parks, trails (30, regional) • Community parks (subregional)	• n/a	• Parks (30), trails (3) (regional) • Recreation complex (subregional) • Parks, recreation (islands)
Solid waste and recycling	• Solid waste planning (regional) • Landfills (subregional) • Recycling depot (regional)	• Solid waste planning (regional) • Garbage collection (inter-local) • Recycling (regional) • Landfills/transfer depots (regional)	• Solid waste services (regional) • Landfill (regional) • Residential recycling (regional)
Emergency services	• Emergency phone (regional) • Emergency services (local)	• Emergency phone (regional) • Volunteer fire support (rural)	• Emergency dispatch (subregional) • Emergency planning (regional)

(continued)

Table 9.2 Comparison of selected RDs: examples of self-organised services, 2010 (continued)

	CSRD	TNRD	CapRD
Services (#)	**95**	**115**	**200**
Library and culture	• Film commission (regional)	• Film commission (regional) • Library (regional)	• Arts grants, theatre (inter-local) • Museum (funding, inter-local) • Community library (rural, local)
Planning and Development	• Community planning (rural) • Building inspection (rural)	• Growth strategy (regional) • Building inspection (contract) • Planning (contract, rural)	• Growth strategy (regional) • Transportation planning (regional) • Building inspection (rural)
Other services	• Economic development (subregional) • Mosquito control (rural) • Airport (subregional)	• Economic development (subregional) • Pest/weed management (inter-local)	• Climate action (regional) • Housing trust + corporation (regional)

9.2.1 Geography, demographics and corporate composition

CSRD crosses three mountain ranges, making it a region of subregions. Its large rural population is clustered mainly around four non-contiguous municipalities. Each subregion is centred on a municipality, but no municipality is a dominant political actor in the region as a whole: the board is well balanced between municipal and rural members in terms of the number of directors and their respective voting power. CSRD accounts for about 44 per cent of all local government spending in this region (in Canadian currency, about C$451/person).

By land size, TNRD is the largest of the three regional districts discussed here. Its population is split among 10 rural members and 11 non-contiguous municipalities – with Kamloops accounting for about two thirds of the TNRD total. In contrast, all but one of the remaining municipalities has a population of less than 5,000. Reflecting the uneven population distribution, Kamloops alone appoints 20 per cent of the 25-member TNRD board and its representatives together control more than 50 per cent of weighted votes. TNRD accounts for about 22 per cent of all local government spending in this region (C$304/person).

CapRD is a mid-sized metropolis with an overwhelmingly urban population of 354,000 on a land area just 5 per cent that of TNRD. The populations of its 13 contiguous municipalities range from fewer than 2,500 to more than 110,000. Its central city, Victoria, is the capital of British Columbia. CapRD can be imagined as three concentric rings, resulting in a divided service personality. Four larger municipalities form an urban core wielding a majority of weighted votes. A surrounding suburban ring consists of nine smaller municipalities, casting about a third of weighted votes. Finally, there is an outer ring of rural and island communities. CapRD accounts for about 27 per cent of all local government spending within this region (about C$370/person). Its staff total of 750 far exceeds that of the other two regions profiled here. One idiosyncrasy is that the urban core municipalities have a long history of co-operation on certain joint services that were not folded into CapRD upon its creation, and these continue to operate without RD participation.

9.2.2 Self-organised service profiles

Table 9.2 shows that the service profiles of the three regions reflect incremental choices made in response to differing circumstances. CSRD's service personality is explained largely by its geography and subregional population clusters. It has a strong rural services role in both land-use planning and regulation, while also being instrumental in the provision of basic local services such as water supply. At a subregional level, CSRD delivers services such as recreation and fire protection.

Being composed of one large regional centre and many small towns and rural communities, TNRD tends to be focused on the issues faced by its smaller jurisdictions, which have challenges achieving scale economies and attracting technical staff in areas such as planning and engineering. The region aspires to be a 'regional service bureau' for its smaller members. At the same time, TNRD performs important region-wide roles such as operating the regional library system and having responsibility for the regional growth strategy.

As might be expected the CapRD narrative is rather complex, given that it faces the need to intervene in service provision and issue management in both rural and metropolitan domains (Capital Regional District 2012). Region-wide, members expect strategic leadership from CapRD and have given it responsibility for a robust set of key region-shaping services, including regional land-use and transportation planning, regional water supply and sewage treatment. While benefiting from these region-wide activities, the suburban ring has additionally defined a clear inter-local role for the RD, for example, providing recreation facilities and household water and sewerage services. Finally, within the outer ring of small or island communities, CapRD has assumed an important role in arranging local or rural services, such as water, sewerage and fire protection.

9.3 Responding to place, need and scale

There are 27 different stories about BC regional districts – and, since those districts continue to evolve, the stories are not final. Across BC, more than 3,000 local and partnership services have been formed, operating at different scales and employing different modes of provision.

The RD system's characteristic flexibility has been achieved through enabling rather than prescriptive legislation. As shown in Table 9.3, RDs employ a structured decision methodology when establishing a new local or partnership service. The first step is to define the service and service component of interest: they have discretion not only to choose the service spheres in which they will be active, but also to select the precise components of a service that will be produced or provided. For example, in the case of fire services the distinct components of the service include administration, procurement, regulation, inspection, prevention, investigation, training and suppression – any combination of which could be regionalised.

The second and third steps in the methodology involve defining service scale and service mode respectively. Services may be established at a local or rural scale, serving single communities, or at an inter-local or regional scale, serving multiple communities. More rarely, services can be created at a multi-RD scale if warranted by circumstances. In terms of service mode, alternative service delivery methods include direct production, public–public or public–private contracting, and production through an autonomous entity with an arm's-length relationship to the RD.

Table 9.3 also presents a selection of individual service arrangements from across BC revealing scale differences, differences in mode or services not typically associated with local governments. The examples were chosen from regions with vastly different characteristics. The self-organising behaviour of individual regional districts is apparent. One example is the case of fire services provided by the Columbia Shuswap Regional District; this shows how individual RDs have handled different components of the same service using different scales and modes. A second example contrasts transit services in the RDs serving the Central Okanagan and Nanaimo regions respectively; this shows that the same service may be delivered in different ways depending on regional circumstances.

Table 9.3 Self-organised service examples from across BC

Step 1: Choose service component (all or part of a service)		Step 3: Choose service mode…			
		Direct production	Public/public contracting	Public/private contracting	Autonomous corporation or entity
Step 2: Choose service area…	**Local or rural**	• CSRD rural fire • TNRD water (Sorrento)	• CSRD suburban fire • TNRD small town building regulation	• KBRD (Big White) recycling and garbage	• CRD (Saturna Is.) fire protection–funding
	Inter-local	• CSRD fire co-ordination • TNRD rural building regulation • CapRD water delivery	• CapRD town and fringe recreation (*two cases*) • CORD suburban transit	• CapRD town and fringe recreation (*one case*) • NRD waste collection • South CapRD airport	• CapRD theatres • BV-EDA (economic development)
	Regional	• CapRD bulk water • NRD transit • NRD landfill • TNRD regional library	• CORD landfill • PRRD solid waste disposal	• GVRD waste-to-energy • NRD composting	• NRD recycling (public education) • CapRD housing
	Multi-regional	• Lower Mainland (GVRD) regional parks	• NI-911 service contracts	• Lower Mainland (GVRD) regional parks	• NI-911 management of service contracts

Legend:		**Population ('000)**	**Central city**
CORD	Regional district: Central Okanagan	185	Kelowna
CapRD	Regional district: Capital	372	Victoria
CarRD	Regional district: Cariboo	65	n/a (3 centres)
CSRD	Regional district: Columbia Shuswap	54	Salmon Arm
GVRD	Regional district: Greater Vancouver	2,375	Vancouver
KBRD	Regional district: Kootenay Boundary	32	n/a (2 centres)
NRD	Regional district: Nanaimo	150	Nanaimo
PRRD	Regional district: Powell River	20	Powell River
TNRD	Regional district: Thompson Nicola	132	Kamloops
BV-EDA	Autonomous entity: Bulkley Valley Economic Development Association	n/a	n/a
NI-911	Subsidiary corporation to six RDs: North Island 911	n/a	n/a

9.4 Coping with complex, divisive issues at a regional scale

The institutional architecture of the BC regional district system has had its greatest success in the service delivery sphere (MCD 2010). However it was inevitable that some RDs, especially the more urbanised, would eventually encounter the need or opportunity to face issues more conflicted or inherently political in nature. These are issues where benefits and costs are not equally distributed among localities. Examples from BC include the development and implementation of regional growth strategies, regional transportation planning, affordable housing and economic development. Entry into these conflicted, more political spheres of activity has proved challenging. Such challenges are commonplace across the globe – examples abound of inter-institutional rivalries and contested decision-making in the regional domain. Thus the remainder of this chapter widens its focus beyond regional service delivery to regional governance. Governance requirements are reconsidered in the case where regional issues cannot be handled on the basis of inter-local co-operation to achieve mutual benefit, and nor can they be addressed by any single institution.

9.4.1 How polycentricity and rivalry affects decision-making

Decision-makers struggle when the incentive of mutual benefit cannot overcome the barrier of legitimate differences in interests – as so often happens regionally. In such cases, questions of 'who gets, who pays and who decides' might well provoke intense inter-local rivalries and disagreements, potentially leading to decision-making stalemate and perceived failures in regional governance.[4] Further, there is an especially complex mix of interests and institutions, both public and private, with a stake in decision outcomes. 'The basic point is that no single actor can alone account for contemporary governance' (Torfing et al. 2012: 5).

A region is an elastic concept that is always in flux. Any given region takes meaning from context and circumstance, and therefore has different meanings at particular times and for certain purposes. Political boundaries seldom coincide with those of social, economic and environmental territories. Governance systems must therefore cope with many 'regions', which co-exist, overlap and at times even collide (Seltzer and Carbonell 2011).

Regional governance is always a problem regardless of how responsibilities are divided among public institutions, either *de jure* or *de facto*. Many of the most challenging issues on the domestic agenda play out in the regional space – not locally within individual municipalities or at the territorial span of central governments. Such issues typically include heavy infrastructure for water and sewage treatment; transit and arterial transportation; aspects of protective services; environment, conservation and farmland preservation; competitiveness and economic development planning; affordable housing; and hospitals, health and social service systems. Major regional issues of this kind tend to present themselves in different ways to the multiple local communities of interest that together form a region. Such issues have differential implications across space. Since costs and benefits are seldom distributed in a perfectly even fashion, regional decisions tend to create area-based winners and losers. Thus the issues are inherently tough or 'wicked' and, when problems arise, are difficult to resolve.

9.4.2 How polycentricity and rivalry affects system architecture

The example of Canada illustrates a common occurrence – that the regional level is typically the most weakly developed and variable component of the governance apparatus (Sancton 2009). Canadians seem not to have settled how they want their regions to be governed: each province differs in the allocation of provincial and local responsibilities. Where they exist, the form of regional institutions varies; a considerable amount of experimentation in regional governance continues (while experimentation in relation to municipal governance is comparatively rare); and, finally, individual provincial governments play a highly variable role in regional decision-making.

Although this seldom seems to be fully appreciated, architects of regional governance systems almost always face three quite distinct problems:

- establishing institutions capable of delivering physical services at an economic scale larger than municipalities;
- designing regional institutions capable of resolving major boundary-crossing problems in a legitimate and democratic manner; and
- where the nature of their issues causes them to intersect, linking various institutions operating in the same regional space to achieve joined-up governance horizontally and vertically.

In our experience as public officials, it is clear that the first and easiest of these challenges tends to receive the most emphasis. The two latter challenges, however, need more focused attention.

Writing on how metropolitan areas blend into mega-regions, Innes et al. observed that, despite their many linkages and interdependencies, mega-regions are poorly linked in terms of governance:

> Hundreds of jurisdictions, federal and state sectoral agencies, and regulatory bodies make independent and conflicting decisions. The result is a complex system without a government or public agency that focuses on the metropolitan region's overall welfare much less on that of a mega-region. Instead the policy decisions of one agency or jurisdiction often push their problems onto others. In addition a myriad of public and private players whose actions have large and small impacts on the region have no incentive to work together to address shared problems. The result is a region that is unable to adapt to changing conditions in a productive way and unable to be resilient in the face of stressors (2009: 2).

Virtually all regional territories to some degree share the governance attributes Innes and colleagues described.

The extent of the natural, inevitable fracturing of regional space is easy to illustrate with Canadian examples. At some point over the past half-century, initiatives have been taken in most Canadian provinces to rationalise or consolidate regional governance (Sancton 1993, 2011; Lightbody 2006). As heroic as such efforts may be, they inevitably address only a fraction of the institutions engaged in making the most significant regional decisions.

One example is from Ontario, where Toronto is the major city. The modern City of Toronto was consolidated in 1998 by the legislated merger of all municipalities in the former federated regional organisation. However, recent data shows that the consolidated city now represents less than half the population of the Toronto census metropolitan area, and less than a third of the population covered by the Ontario government's growth plan for the wider Toronto region. A multitude of institutions still vie for influence within southern Ontario.

In a second example, a tally of local governance institutions was undertaken in two economic regions in BC. Both the Lower Mainland (anchored by Vancouver) and the Thompson-Okanagan (anchored by Kelowna and Kamloops) have a complex organisation of regional space. A range of entities has been identified covering the spectrum from municipal governments with a full suite of responsibilities to numerous functional or subregional institutions having a single role. There are at least 75 relatively autonomous bodies contributing to governance in each of the two regions.[5]

Such examples suggest that the notion of all key regional-scale decisions flowing through a single, overarching political forum is simply unreal. Regional space is inevitably carved up by a plethora of institutions, large or small, multi-functional or uni-functional, democratic or otherwise. Horizontal and vertical bonds between institutions are often weak and usually fragile – and, if reliance is placed solely on traditional governance techniques, these bonds are subject to degradation or failure at any time and for any number of reasons.

9.4.3 Regions as 'arenas of contention'

It will by now be clear that polycentric regional governance unfolds in 'arenas of contention'. Decision-making in the context of complex, divisive regional issues is one of the hardest things asked of our domestic political system. The governance requirements for an arena of contention can be described generically. A governance architecture is needed that copes with at least these requirements:

- the motivation (either 'natural' or 'manufactured') to coalesce;
- an inter-institutional forum: a place for regional dialogue and decision-making based on balancing contending institutional and area-based interests in the context of regional strategies;
- a 'brain' to undertake situational assessments and planning, and to communicate visions, issues, threats, opportunities and accomplishments;
- provision (possibly vicarious) for implementation capacity;
- the 'glue' to hold the regional coalition together in the face of contention and stress of implementation; and
- the capacity over time to adapt to new circumstances and regenerate.

These criteria presuppose neither a particular governance strategy nor any fixed structural solution.

In British Columbia, several RDs have been building their regional governance capacity, even while perpetuating their responsibilities for regional service delivery. As one example, 10 of the 13 RDs in the most heavily urbanised parts of BC, representing 83 per cent of the total provincial population, have adopted regional growth strategies. Those strategies link the planning interests of municipalities with larger regional and provincial interests. The legislation establishes RD boards as forums for cross-region dialogue and decision-making, while avoiding traditional hierarchical relationships between regional and municipal governments. It has not always been 'plain sailing' for regional districts: some growth-related issues have naturally triggered inter-local disputes. These have been addressed with 'soft-power' tools such as facilitation and mediation, plus 'harder' tools such as arbitration. Participants have been able to enact growth strategies and complementary local plans, even in a divisive setting.

Another example is an issue that cuts across social, economic and environmental sectors and political boundaries: affordable housing. Inherently regional in scope, the issue intersects with regional planning, job location, public transit, transportation and greenhouse gas emissions. In BC, however, the issue comes into focus primarily at a local rather than regional level. The issue can be divisive: suburban municipalities tend to favour sprawling, low-density residential and commercial development patterns yielding good property tax returns, while central cities face high land costs, densification pressures and, increasingly, the effects of poverty and homelessness. Meanwhile, dispersal of jobs and houses puts tremendous pressure on transportation and transit. Although local interests are not harmonious, the Capital Regional District has achieved a measure of success in addressing housing regionally. It has tackled this issue by establishing a 'housing trust', which redistributes capital resources contributed by members to the most needy municipalities, and by ensuring that regional land-use, transportation and social policy are integrated with housing solutions.

9.5 New pathways for regional governance

The literature on governance of complex systems (Innes et al. 2009: 13–18) and interactive governance (Torfing et al. 2012) is growing. Around the globe, much attention is being given to designing effective regional governance arrangements. However, genuine success stories are comparatively rare (Sancton 2008).[6]

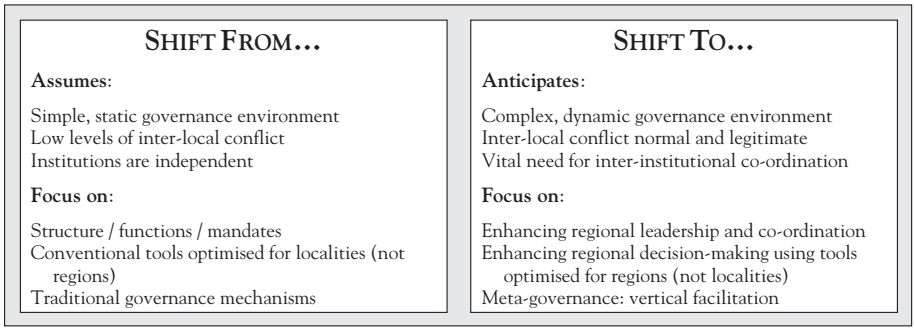
A feature of complex regions is the inability of any single institution to successfully act unilaterally – none has the requisite span of control and all are subject to vital interdependencies. As the complexity of regional decision-making environments increases and the relative influence of individual institutions declines, the more likely it is that decisions will actually emerge from self-organising networks of institutions. According to Innes and colleagues, such networks are fluid in terms of space, time and membership. When simple, traditional governance processes fail, networks are needed to strengthen linkages between people, ideas and knowledge. 'These linkages facilitate the self-organisation of nodes of interaction, dialogue and collaboration to address emerging problems or crises' (2009: 14).

Network linkages must be established and sustained in both horizontal and vertical planes. Respecting vertical linkages, Innes, Torfing and their respective colleagues both cite the need for central government to play new roles (Innes et al. 2009: 16–17; Torfing et al. 2012: 122–44). Central governments must adopt a meta-governance paradigm in their interactions with regions, seeking influence without reverting to traditional statist forms of top-down control and command (Sørensen and Torfing 2012: 9). In this context, 'meta-governance' refers to the orchestration of complexity and plurality, that is, co-ordinated actions to encourage self-organisation and build capacity. Primary capacity-building mechanisms include such things as offering incentives for co-operation, creating forums for dialogue on multi-party issues, and establishing visions and expectations for regional development. Torfing et al. refer to this as the 'art of governing interactive governance' (2012: 122).

Confronting wicked issues in the regional space is unlikely to be successful if action is predicated on the governance environment being simple and static. Rudimentary remedies are often attempted involving such things as changing governance structures, adjusting the allocation of functions and powers among the various orders of government, and redefining the service mandates of different institutions. These are conventional or 'hard-power' solutions. Such measures have met with a degree of success since, it is true, dysfunctional structures and illogical allocations of functions must indeed be addressed. However, merely rearranging institutions or resorting mandates will not ordinarily change the character of underlying issues. As shown in Figure 9.1, it is more realistic to view the regional space as a complex and dynamic governance arena compartmentalised by legitimate differences in interests. In a complex arena, the need for high levels of vertical and horizontal co-ordination must be anticipated. In arenas of contention, governance approaches must move beyond conventional 'hard-power' remedies and toward issue-focused 'soft-power' solutions. New pathways to effective regional governance must enhance leadership and co-ordination, expand the regional decision toolkit and enable meta-governance.

Aware of the challenges of importing solutions from abroad – generally only the kernel of an idea is transportable, a kernel that will require moulding for the culture and circumstances of any adopting jurisdiction – a set of case studies is presented below, designed to suggest ways forward. The case studies are brief. They sketch the

Figure 9.1 Making the shift: governance in arenas of contention



relevant issue or problem, identify the need for a new approach, and paint a picture of new pathways in action, together with pointers to further information. The case studies explore a number of ideas, principally that regions need:

- more astute regional leadership and improved mechanisms for co-ordinating decisions, both horizontally and vertically;
- 'smart' incentives and 'smart' procedures designed to make decisions for regional betterment more feasible and realistic for those asked to make tough choices or resolve issues at the regional level; and
- deft, enabling and supportive interventions by central governments.

9.5.1 Enhancing regional leadership and co-ordination

Leadership

The complex, conflict-ridden problems facing regions demand an understanding of polycentricity. Leadership training must emphasise horizontal relationships, influence management, and processes of negotiation and mediation (Innes and Booher 2010). Canadian elected officials get scant training of this sort; for non-elected officials, leadership training generally focuses merely on the needs of unitary organisations and emphasises hierarchy, central planning, control and direction.

Thomas, Foster and Siegel[7] have complementary ideas about the skills for working or forging agreements in polycentric regional governance settings. Thomas argues for a curriculum emphasising the smart use of power, relations between elected and non-elected officials, and horizontal governance. Foster seeks proficiency in crossing jurisdictional, functional and sectoral borders. Siegel emphasises the importance of moving past the traditional notion of 'leading downward': leaders must now add 'leading upward' and 'outward' to their repertoire.

Both Georgia and British Columbia provide complementary illustrations.[8] The Regional Leadership Institute is mandated to reach beyond elected officials to include Atlanta's business, education and social sectors. The curriculum combines training in leadership skills, application to concrete regional problems, and developing regional awareness. BC's Local Government Leadership Academy has a specific mandate to cultivate the leadership competencies of elected and senior non-elected officials. Developing skills in intergovernmental relations and in negotiation and conflict management are emphasised.

Co-operation

Regions usually must fend for themselves in their efforts to forge viable internal and external relationships. Lack of co-ordination vertically with central governments, and horizontally among local governments and between sectors, prevents regions from reaching their full potential.

Effective management of issues in the regional space requires 'joined-up governance'. Without intergovernmental and cross-sector involvement, regions are severely limited in their ability to develop and implement viable plans. Horizontal and vertical

co-ordination is needed. Central governments in particular must focus on improving both intergovernmental and inter-ministry co-ordination practices to help make 'joined-up governance' a reality.

Illustrating this approach, Québec brings provincial, regional and local elected officials together to achieve 'joined-up' decision-making in its regions and at the centre. Regional co-ordination occurs through 21 regional conferences of elected officers – which may also include delegates from the economic, culture, education and science sectors. In addition, an oversight body has been created, the Table Québec-régions (TQR), formed by the presidents of the regional conferences and Québec's local government minister.[9]

Articulation of regional interests

With their passion and commitment, local officials are often 'local patriots', assiduously defending the interests of their community. Local patriotism is a healthy, natural phenomenon unless it manifests as parochialism or complete insensitivity toward broader regional interests. However, there is often another factor at play: what if nobody has the opportunity or responsibility to articulate regional interests?

Regions are complex spaces where communities, institutions, interests and governments interact. Amid such complexity, it is often difficult (even where formal regional governance mechanisms do exist) to clearly articulate regional interests. McDavid and Vakil[10] ask probing questions about one region endowed with formal institutions: Greater Vancouver. In regions without the benefit of formal institutions, the challenge of articulating regional interests escalates. The architecture of regional governance systems must somehow enable regional interests to be heard amid the cacophony of locally oriented demands and ambitions.

Illustrating the capacity to span multiple local and regional institutions, the Columbia Basin Trust has oversight in a territory heavily impacted by hydroelectric infrastructure. In practice, the governance model effectively balances local interests in the context of regional strategies.[11] According to Travers,[12] the Greater London Authority (GLA) shows the pivotal role of regional strategies. Boroughs retain local service responsibility, yet the GLA has vital responsibilities to articulate region-wide strategies for the environment, planning, transport, economic development and culture. This model appears to enable articulation of regional interests better than most.

9.5.2 Enhancing regional decision-making

Challenge grants and rewards for results

In contentious policy arenas, decisions protecting local interests more often than not win out over regional betterment. A second problem is that regional decisions are often unrewarding or politically punishing to the officials who make them: the benefits from a 'tough' regional choice may be enjoyed in windfall fashion in other jurisdictions or by other orders of government.

Regions need mechanisms to reliably capture benefits derived from their decisions. They also need incentives designed to support regional betterment and thus make

it feasible for decision-makers to set aside their natural inclination toward local protectionism. Challenge grants have this purpose and thus have preconditions attached to them: grants are issued on a competitive basis only to those localities able to 'join-up' and demonstrate they possess a common vision and have agreed on objectives, co-ordinating mechanisms and implementation plans.

The UK and US governments show how regional decision-making can be enhanced in this way. The UK government is concluding City Deals[13] with the largest and fastest-growing regional centres in England. The objectives are to accelerate the pace of decentralisation and unlock new and innovative ways to drive growth. Avoiding top-down imposition, each deal is customised and could represent a genuine transaction – with 'asks' and 'offers' from both sides. Significantly, the City Deal for Greater Manchester includes an earn-back or 'rewards-for-results' model – the region will capture tax receipts from the added economic activity resulting from its actions. Meanwhile, the US government's Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge[14] seeks to stimulate collaborative, cluster-based regional growth. To win a subsidy, applicants must be self-organised and present a 'united front'. They must also articulate a clear plan and measurable outcomes.

Dispute resolution and streamlining co-operation

With ever-changing demographics, service economics, institutions and politics, self-organisation of working relationships in regional environments sometimes needs a boost. Once relationships are established, relentless change is likely. Lacking the requisite resilience, bitter conflicts can ensue within and between institutions. The absence of formal procedures can make it difficult to resolve such differences.

Formal dispute resolution systems can aid in 'manufacturing' agreement, despite differences in narrow, local interests. In order to sweep away barriers to co-operation, the root of the obstacle must first be identified. Only after understanding a barrier can it be matched with a specific remedy. For example, legal obstacles may come to light only as a result of failed attempts at solving a problem. In such cases, legislative amendments may be required. However, addressing capacity issues may also include incentives for neighbouring communities or municipalities to team up.

Supported by provincial advice and subsidies, British Columbia uses alternative dispute resolution (ADR) to resolve differences in developing, implementing and updating regional growth strategies and in operating regional services.[15] As another example, arcane federal regulations or an inability to contact the right people were found to create barriers for US city halls when accessing federal support. The Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) initiative is designed to streamline co-operation in six economically struggling cities. SC2 also seeks to help the cities create and maintain critical regional partnerships.[16]

Mandates, structures, functions

Central governments often resort to such 'hard-power' solutions, such as imposing spending mandates or forcing reform of structures and allocation of functions – often

with disappointing results. Regional issues tend to be too complex to be addressed with simplistic, directive interventions.

Nevertheless, regional officials may sometimes recognise circumstances where central government leadership via imposed mandates can be beneficial. The recognition is, however, circumscribed. Typically, mandates are viewed positively only where the matter is of genuine strategic importance, is accompanied by provisions addressing resource impacts, and leaves regions with some flexibility to manage implementation. Similarly, central leadership in structural or functional realignment, while not seen as a panacea, can facilitate (rather than force) agreement on difficult structural issues.

Revealing an instinct toward 'soft-power' intervention, the BC government resorted to strategic use of provincial mandates in the case of solid-waste planning. Initially controversial, opposition to compulsory planning was tempered by provincial incentives and technical assistance. Strategic restructuring has been used when existing structures are a clear barrier to performance. The Fraser Valley Regional District is the result of one such intervention. Service realignment is another, albeit rare, intervention strategy. Provincial leadership was instrumental when consolidating an old, independent water delivery agency with the Capital Regional District.[17]

9.5.3 Meta-governance role of central governments

Often regions are left on their own to deal with their polycentric, conflict-ridden decision-making setting. They lack the active support and engagement of a central order of government.

Resolution of the complex challenges facing regions requires deft, but not domineering, support and engagement from central government. Engagement must be enabling in nature and supportive of self-organisation at the regional level – what is termed 'meta-governance' or the governance of plurality and complexity (Innes et al. 2009: 16–18). Central governments can build regional capacity in a variety of ways including establishing a vision, setting targets and direction, providing incentives and creating forums for direct action.

As an example, Québec's flexible, leading-edge *Politique nationale de la ruralité* (rural strategy) began developing in 2002. Partnership-focused, it is designed to foster bottom-up innovation. The strategy models meta-governance: a provincial policy framework guides progress while maintaining a voluntary, democratic, facilitative approach. More than inspirational, the policy is backed up by customised institutional processes that seek to harness or 'join-up' energies across a broad spectrum of parties with a stake or interest in rural development.[18]

9.6 Effective regional governance for the twenty-first century

9.6.1 Reflections on effective regional service delivery

To deliver inter-local and regional services for mutual benefit among localities, the BC government created an innovative system of regional districts that has been relatively

successful in its service-oriented mission. RDs have resolved hundreds of inter-local servicing problems. This is a singular achievement in that, while often encouraged in local government systems worldwide, successful implementation of joint servicing schemes is comparatively rare. Based on the BC experience, we contend that an effective system for regionalised (inter-local) service delivery must be:

- **Self-organised** and **capable.** Top-down imposition of standardised service solutions will often fail to produce service schemes adapted to the widely varying circumstances encountered in different regions. A better approach revolves around self-organised solutions, where partnerships and financial/operational parameters are set by local participants. At the same time, self-organisation is a near insurmountable hurdle if it means every detail of each individual inter-local service must be negotiated from a zero-base; thus built-in measures are necessary to sharply reduce the cost of negotiation (e.g. templates for agreements).
- **Evolving** and **resilient.** The environment for regional service delivery is dynamic. Systems must be designed to enable regional servicing issues to be addressed as they arise, case-by-case, in a process of continuous, system-wide evolution. However, a solution once adopted also exists in a dynamic environment, and so over time, if conditions change sufficiently, service solutions may need adaptive rearrangement. Service systems therefore need to have learning capacity.
- **Sustainable.** Durable service partnerships will exist only if collective action is seen to be fair (successful service solutions are usually fiscally equivalent), rewarding (scale economies are captured) and accountable (to the partners).
- **Connected** and **intelligent.** An enormous challenge is to arrange for satisfactory co-ordination among individual joint servicing schemes – since one may affect others and excessive service fragmentation can itself become a problem. While many approaches are theoretically viable, BC's strategy of managing distinct individual services under a common board has proved to have merit: (a) as a means for accumulating collective regional intelligence; (b) by providing a political forum for issue identification and problem resolution among partners; (c) by acting as a channel for vertical co-ordination; and (d) by facilitating the provision of expert, professional administration of even the smallest individual services.

While the design objectives cited can be met by systems of near unlimited diversity, it nevertheless will be vital for adopting jurisdictions to carefully consider the extent of institutionalisation required for effective joint service provision. There are critical choices about the necessary degree (amount of structure) and nature (amount of hard power or authority) of institutionalisation. There are three generic approaches:

- **'Light' institutions – weak authority.** In the first case, central governments may use persuasion to bring about joint service delivery, but the local participants have only soft-power tools at their disposal. Some will overcome institutional limitations and, with sufficient entrepreneurial leadership, devise creative and practical ways to provide inter-local services. However, since this is an almost

purely *laissez-faire* strategy, regional partnerships will generally emerge only after protracted, sometimes fraught, negotiations – or will fail to emerge at all.

- **'Heavy' institutions – strong authority.** In the second case, joint service delivery may be strongly encouraged or even mandated by central government. The frameworks will generally be legislated, with regional service delivery institutions imbued with considerable statutory authority vis-à-vis localities. This is a challenging approach in jurisdictions with strong local self-rule traditions and, if attempted, a degree of instability must be anticipated due to incessant regional/local conflict of a type 'power' cannot resolve.
- **'Heavy' institutions – weak authority.** The third case is a consensus-based rather than power-based approach – effectively a middle path between the first and second cases. This is the path followed by British Columbia. It institutionalises inter-local service delivery at a regional scale, but through a loosely coupled, consensus-based federation of localities that is designed to deal with issues best managed co-operatively.

Success at regionalism does not necessarily depend on having a formal regional government structure. Many of the factors that make BC's regional districts successful could be replicated in the absence of formal regional institutions. A problem-by-problem, service-by-service, incremental approach can lead in effect to a 'virtual region' or 'regionalism without regions'. Derived from BC's experience and other Canadian-based research (Martin et al. 2012), practical suggestions for any lightly institutionalised strategy include the following:

- BC's approach substantially reduces the costs of negotiation by employing default 'templates' for joint service agreements, defined statutorily. If statutory mechanisms are impractical, 'implementation kits' and 'self-help guides' can be substituted, together with the provision of best practice advice through central governments and/or local government associations.
- Central government and local government associations can agree on a strategy of collaborative steering of joint service systems. Collaborative steering can speed innovation and enable efficient issue resolution. Ideally, a 'regionalism without regions' strategy will use incremental adaptation as a strategy for avoiding cataclysmic disruptions.
- Central government impetus and support in terms of direction can speed implementation. Well-thought-out and sensitively delivered mandates can accelerate inter-local collaboration. Well-designed incentives can make it feasible for local elected officials to represent regional betterment positively to sceptical local voters.

9.6.2 Reflections on effective governance in arenas of contention

As noted earlier, some of the more urbanised regional districts in British Columbia have begun to migrate from their original mission, the administration of services, to a more challenging endeavour, regional governance. Not every regional matter

lends itself to resolution through co-operation for mutual benefit. When matters are controversial or costly, or when the impacts of decisions have important differential effects on localities, interests or people – thus creating 'winners' and 'losers' – problems can turn 'wicked' and become resistant to resolution. Such problems we find will stubbornly remain if any central, regional or local government relies exclusively on hard-power mechanisms to force desired outcomes.

Looking broadly at the experience of RDs throughout British Columbia, it is by no means clear that success in arranging for co-operative services will necessarily position regional institutions for success in regional governance. Regional governance is often fraught and, with the elastic boundaries of regions and the potential for clashing interests, is inherently difficult. The BC experience strongly suggests the journey toward regional governance is arduous – and will not be accomplished successfully without a fundamental rethinking of how regional governance might be approached.

In our estimation, success in regional governance demands a paradigm shift – reorienting the entire regional governance system to enable deft, astute and prolonged action toward region building.[19] This involves strengthening an element of the governance apparatus that, in Canada and perhaps elsewhere, has received far less attention than it deserves. Merely to construct institutions is insufficient. More importantly, institutions with a slice of regional decision-making authority must be able to continuously assemble, confront wicked issues and negotiate durable solutions. Region building means anticipating and taking action on the simultaneous need for vertical and horizontal co-ordination. It also means moving beyond conventional 'hard-power' remedies. Issue-focused 'soft-power' solutions must be advanced – i.e., solutions must be designed to coax better outcomes from regional decision-makers, without depriving them of the opportunity to be creative and without exhausting their local political capital. Solutions arrived at in this manner will have more chance of success than those imposed from above.

Thus while we have no clear blueprint for the future, our analysis suggests that future pathways to effective regional governance must focus on enhancing leadership and co-ordination, expanding the regional decision toolkit, and meta-governance or the orchestration of complexity and plurality. Unless governance systems improve along those three dimensions, struggles with regional decision-making will persist.

Notes

1 The views expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the Government of British Columbia or Ministry of Community, Sport & Cultural Development. The authors benefited and appropriated certain insights from two anonymous reviewers.

2 In Canada, school districts are treated as part of the system of local government for statistical and other purposes. In this chapter, 'local government' is used with only its municipal connotation.

3 The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) has in recent years operated under the brand name Metro Vancouver. The official corporate name for Metro Vancouver (metrovancouver.org) remains the GVRD.

4 An anonymous reviewer has pointed out that stalemate is not an unusual or remarkable outcome in a voluntary system in the absence of mutual benefits that create incentives to conclude agreements; nor is there empirical evidence that a stalemate may not be the best outcome. True as this is, a state

of government in apparent paralysis is in the authors' experience rarely an acceptable outcome in the partisan political environments that generally prevail. For this reason, government officials rarely have the luxury of defending stalemated decisions as being optimal purely in economic terms.

5 In the Lower Mainland: 30 municipal governments, 12 first-nation (aboriginal) governments, all or part of 3 regional districts, and 36 functional regional or subregional entities (such as regional hospital districts and other like service entities, council-controlled bodies, economic development entities, school districts and so forth). In the Thompson Okanagan: 23 municipal governments, 18 first-nation governments, all or part of 5 regional districts, and 29 functional regional or subregional entities.

6 However, both Sancton (2011) and Bish (2002, 2006) credit the BC system of regional districts as being comparatively successful in a Canadian or North American context.

7 Several sources for further information have been identified. See Paul Thomas, available at: www.ipac.ca/2008/docs/presentation/2608PM-Paul-Thomas-LeadingPublicSector.pdf (accessed February 2013). Kathryn Foster published 'A Region of One's Own' in *Regional Planning in America* by Seltzer and Carbonell (Eds. 2011). David Siegel's 'Leadership Role of the Municipal CAO' is in *Canadian Public Administration* Vol. 53 No. 2, 139–161, June 2010.

8 The training institutions discussed here have websites available at: rli.atlantaregional.com/rli and lgla.ca respectively (both accessed February 2013).

9 La Conférence de l'Outaouais, one specific example of a regional conference, is available at: www.cre-o.qc.ca/index.php. La Table Québec-régions (TQR) is at www.mamrot.gouv.qc.ca/ministere/table-quebec-regions (both accessed February 2013).

10 Regarding Greater Vancouver, Jim McDavid and Thea Vakil have an analysis of decision-making available at: www.uvic.ca/hsd/publicadmin/professionalDevelopment/home/localgovernment/Gov_conf2011.php (accessed February 2013).

11 For information about the Columbia Basin Trust, see: cbt.org (accessed February 2013).

12 An analysis of Greater London by Tony Travers is available at: http://78.41.128.130/dataoecd/52/63/35565616.pdf (accessed February 2013).

13 For information on City Deals, see: www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/wave-1-city-deals. From there, follow links to information on Wave 2 deals and other ancillary sources. On the Manchester 'earn-back' scheme, see: www.lgcplus.com/budget-2012-manchester-earn-back-details-emerge/5043169.article (all accessed February 2013).

14 The Centre for Cities, available at: www.centreforcities.org also has a wealth of relevant information. Information about the Accelerator Challenge is available at: www.eda.gov/challenges/jobsaccelerator (both accessed February 2013).

15 Dispute resolution is the subject of two publications from British Columbia: the first is available at: http://cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/Reaching_Agreement_Growth_Strategies.pdf; the second is available at: http://cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/Reaching_Agreement_Services_2005.pdf (both accessed February 2013).

16 For further information use the search term 'epa strong cities communities' in a search engine.

17 See: http://env.gov.bc.ca/epd/mun-waste/index.htm for an illustration of the strategic use of provincial mandates. For strategic use of restructuring, see: www.fvrd.bc.ca. Information about the strategic use of service realignment is available at: www.crd.bc.ca/water/index.htm (all accessed February 2013).

18 Use the search term 'quebec national policy rurality' in a search engine to access information on Québec's 2006 rural policy framework. A 2008 discussion of the policy framework will be found by navigating from: www.muniscope.ca/home/Symposium/index.php (accessed February 2013).

19 Katz (2009) suggests a similar strategy with reference to American metropolitan areas, inviting policy designers to imagine a reversal of federal interventions. Instead of operating traditional locality-focused and application-based programmes which overlook the regional nature of most challenges facing urban America, he proposes shifting federal interventions to a regionally focused and results-based strategy.

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