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Bringing Place-Based Tools to Policy

Connecting Information, Knowledge, and
Decision-Making in the Federal Government

Workshop Report

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Workshop Report

Bringing Place-Based Tools to Policy: Connecting Information, Knowledge, and Decision-Making in the Federal Government

Workshop held February 2010 in Ottawa

Introduction

The federal government's knowledge role within place-based approaches has been identified by federal civil servants as an opportunity to improve the co-ordination of federal departments and the compatibility of inter-jurisdictional policies in Canada. To further explore this opportunity, the Government of Canada's Policy Research Initiative (now Policy Horizons Canada) and its partners held a workshop¹ on the federal knowledge role within place-based initiatives.

"Place-based approaches are off and galloping. We have to find a way to integrate with them or they will gallop away."

- Workshop participant

Tools to Policy Workshop

The two-day workshop, called Bringing Place-Based Tools to Policy: Connecting Information, Knowledge, and Decision-Making in the Federal Government, explored visions of how the federal government's place-based knowledge role can work towards federal strategic goals for sustainable development,² in areas that include natural systems, communities, and overall well-being. More than 90 participants, mostly federal public servants working on place-based initiatives from a range of federal departments, participated in the event.

The workshop included formal panel presentations by speakers from the United States and New Zealand on emerging place-based processes in those countries, as well as federal government and regional representatives providing highlights of current projects and practices within Canada. Much of the conference was devoted to group discussion focused on the federal government's knowledge role within place-based approaches³ and how to achieve more effective policy development processes. The workshop agenda and list of participants can be viewed in Appendix 1.

¹ This workshop was held February 22-23, 2010 at the Sheraton Hotel, Ottawa, Canada. It was hosted by Environment Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs, Natural Resources Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, and the Policy Research Initiative.

² Sustainable development is the integrated consideration in decision-making of economic, social, and environmental issues in a longer-term perspective. Here we highlight the inclusion of communities and well-being to emphasize the inclusion of human elements along with the natural environment.

³ Place-based approaches are multi-stakeholder processes – community or government led, and often collaborative in nature – that develop out of the need to address persistent socio-economic and environmental policy issues, the interactions of which are experienced in a definable place and require a high level of collaboration to resolve.

Participants observed that place-based approaches are critical for addressing federal horizontal and inter-jurisdictional issues, but the federal government's approach is ad hoc and in need of clearer policy direction. Participants expressed a need for senior leadership to set a vision for a federal place-based approach. They presented some possible visions for the federal government's place-based knowledge role specifically and explored means to achieve them.

Policy silos and differences in language presented some challenges in the workshop discussions. While the term "sustainable development" includes environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions, some participants felt it is often equated with the natural environment.

A second, closely linked conversation was held by PRI and the Regulatory Governance Initiative (RGI) at Carleton University, which addressed the top priorities of the federal government in place-based initiatives from a senior strategic perspective. A full report on this event can be accessed on the Policy Horizons Canada web site.

This report will outline the visions presented throughout the Bringing Place-Based Tools to Policy workshop, expressed in six thematic areas: embracing place-based integration; organizing the federal knowledge role; learning from past successes and evaluating outcomes; presence in the regions; generating collaborative knowledge and analytical tools; and a "decloaking" policy. Each theme is contextualized with the findings from Policy Horizons Canada's on-going research and departmental outreach activities, and followed by items for action as suggested by workshop participants.

Background

Since 2004, PRI (now Policy Horizons Canada) has been researching integrated management issues, including integrated water management, integrated land management, and federal place-based approaches more generally. Recently this work yielded an issue of PRI's flagship journal *Horizons: Sustainable Places*, which focused on the federal role within place-based initiatives.

To date, research, workshops, and publications have included these focus areas:

- place-based approaches to horizontal management and policy integration
- geospatial information networks
- integrated water management principles and integrated land management modelling
- performance-based regulatory frameworks

During this process an ad hoc interdepartmental group began to coalesce to discuss common issues, create spaces for broader federal government discussion, and collaborate on future directions. These discussions identified the potential of the federal government's knowledge role within place-based approaches as a theme for discussion.

For further information about Policy Horizons Canada's place-based work or the interdepartmental working group, contact Jean Kunz at Jean.Kunz@horizons.gc.ca or Teresa Bellefontaine at Teresa.Bellefontaine@horizons.gc.ca.

Horizons and PRI's other place-based publications can be found on Policy Horizons Canada's [website](#).

Themes

1. Embracing Place-Based Integration

Vision

Participants envisioned an integrated approach to the federal government's knowledge role in order to contribute to an ultimate outcome of sustainable development, including natural systems, communities, and well-being. This entailed a collective interdepartmental embracing of social, economic, cultural, and environmental connections, which should be reflected in our data platforms, approaches, and language. Accepting the need for longer timeframes was also seen as part of this process, and consistent with place-based approaches and sustainable development. Partnerships were seen as an essential way to achieve policy integration across silos within the federal government and with other levels of government.

Context

Across Canada there is increasing momentum toward integrated approaches provincially and municipally, reflecting a demand for more integrated service delivery, which was noted by the Auditor General's Report in 2005 (Ch. 4, p. 3). Alberta's Land Use Framework and the City of Ottawa's Neighbourhood Planning Initiative are examples of the types of initiatives growing out of an increased sense of community ownership of places. These networked governance processes have expectations of comprehensive partnerships and are increasingly looking for ways to facilitate federal government involvement. Federal government departments are finding it necessary to have a better understanding of how to interact with these processes.

Workshop participants were inspired by the New Zealand and American approaches. In New Zealand, an approach to sustainability has developed that engages residents using a sophisticated spatial decision-support tool. The process enables interdisciplinary analysis and supports different decision-making styles. It also allows the community to participate in determining objectives and trade-offs, and to develop solutions where everyone shares in the cost associated with change. While this approach is not unique, it has been very effective and demonstrates the ability for such initiatives to have deep impacts.

In the US, the Administration is making an ambitious investment in place-based approaches that represents a refocusing of the federal framework to identify program priorities. This place-based approach encompasses seven federal departments and is addressing economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, community health, access to opportunity, safety, and security issues. There is also an attempt to develop regional economies using integrated approaches that acknowledge the interdependence of urban and rural communities.

Looking Forward

While most federal departments nominally accept the principles of integration and sustainable development, there continue to be challenges in addressing the complexity and interdepartmental co-ordination these would require. Participants identified a need for informal mechanisms to allow departments to interact and address issues of language and philosophy, and to find common ground. Formal mechanisms were also seen as important to enable the co-ordination of action. Participants suggested there was a need for frameworks from the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Suggestions for action included:

- establish a mechanism for informal interdepartmental discussions
- establish formal co-ordination mechanisms
- develop Treasury Board Secretariat frameworks

2. Organizing the Federal Inter-departmental Knowledge Role

Vision

Participants felt strongly that the federal government needs to determine how it should organize itself to address complex inter-jurisdictional issues with multi-sectoral partnerships. The knowledge role of the federal government was envisioned as functioning effectively and openly within the federal government. This entailed clearly defining policy goals, coming to an interdepartmental understanding of place-based initiatives and the federal government's role within them, as well as operating with long-term commitments.

Context

Departmental actors have identified the lack of a formal process to engage other departments in horizontal initiatives, with current approaches relying primarily on informal personal networks. The need for a framework or formal mechanism to outline the relationship between the federal government and its partners was also identified. A framework, it was suggested, would help determine when the federal government will collaborate in partnership, what it should achieve within these partnerships, enable an understanding of expectations and roles, and align authority with responsibility. Critical to this determination is whether the federal government has the capacity to engage and whether it can bring added value to the process. Any framework must also incorporate the need for flexibility and adaptive learning.

Looking Forward

A business case was seen as necessary to achieve a common sense of direction for the federal government's role in place-based approaches. Interdepartmental links such as on-going horizontal meetings were put forward as an important way to achieve integration, as were the identification of shared accountabilities among departments, and the implementation of horizontal reporting tools. To be successful, this needs to be actively co-ordinated by replacing disincentives to building partnerships with incentives, such as modified work plans, shared accountability, and by creating knowledge exchange positions within organizations.

One approach that was put forward was the creation of interdepartmental place-based policy clusters to facilitate co-ordination and shared understanding of related policy areas with regular opportunities to bridge between clusters. A federal community of practice that could host a system for sharing information and introduce common standards and language was also encouraged, and could fulfil this bridging role. Mechanisms for better communication included strengthening horizontal platforms such as GCpedia and the Government Electronic Directory Services (GEDS).

Suggestions for action included:

- establish interdepartmental links, e.g., horizontal meetings
- identify shared departmental responsibilities
- implement shared reporting tools
- address disincentives and incentives for partnerships and shared accountability, e.g., work plans
- create knowledge exchange positions within organizations
- explore a policy cluster and bridging approach to enabling horizontal integration
- establish a place-based community of practice
- strengthen horizontal platforms, e.g., GCpedia and GEDS

3. Learning from Past Successes and Evaluating Outcomes

Vision

Participants envisioned a federal government that has the ability to learn from current and past initiatives and to integrate this learning into future approaches. Data integration and evaluation –both formal and informal – were seen as critical in achieving a learning organization. Participants also identified the need to provide local empowerment, with place-based delivery measured by place-based performance criteria and indicators.

"Evaluation and performance measurement have never been more important."

- Charles Fluharty, Rural Policy Research Institute, Missouri

Tools to Policy Workshop

Context

Both Canadian and American practitioners are stressing the need for reliable performance measures and evaluation as a critical next step in documenting the effectiveness of place-based approaches, particularly given anticipated fiscal constraints. Canada has extensive experience with many types of place-based approaches, but comprehensive evaluations are still in the nascent stages and, where they do exist, lack of communication interdepartmentally is limiting learning opportunities. This is partially an issue of the wide variety of approaches and the context-specific nature of place-based initiatives, which makes comparisons across projects difficult. Federally, a pilot project approach has lacked continuity and strategic direction, with lessons learned being lost as a consequence.

Traditional evaluations have also been seen as inadequate in assessing iterative participatory processes because specific outcomes are not pre-determined at the outset of the initiative. However, new tools and approaches have been developed to evaluate place-based processes, and to achieve a balance of qualitative and quantitative analysis needed to represent the holistic nature of place-based approaches.

Looking Forward

Participants observed that steps should be taken to formalize our understanding of the effectiveness of place-based approaches. This would entail developing an inventory of successful (and unsuccessful) place-based approaches, and sharing this knowledge interdepartmentally by creating a space to share tools for evaluation and communicate lessons learned. Evaluation relies on the availability of data, so there is a need to address data transparency issues and the lack of social data.

Suggestions for action included:

- develop an inventory of federal place-based approaches
- create a space to share tools to communicate lessons learned
- address data gaps, particularly in the social policy field

4. Presence in the Regions

Vision

A vision of a decentralized knowledge role was also articulated that would capitalize on federal resources in the regions. This varied from greater utilization of regional staff to a place-based role for the Regional Federal Councils. Both of these options were seen as offering more transparent and effective relationships that would facilitate coordination of the federal government's knowledge role and link policy development at the federal and regional levels.

"It's time to drop the jurisdictional gloves."

- Bev Yee, Assistant Deputy Minister of Environmental Stewardship, Province of Alberta

RGI Critical Conversation

In working with provincial counterparts, participants emphasized open and authentic behaviour, and an approach that could be described as “policy with” rather than “policy to,” with communities extensively engaged in priority-setting and outcomes. The principle of equity underpinned visions of a central framework with flexible policies capable of adapting to local realities.

Context

Increasingly, federal departments are seeing local processes as a way to integrate policy areas, and address complex federal mandates and inter-jurisdictional issues, because communities are where the unexpected effects of interacting policies are experienced. For the federal government, these processes create an opportunity to address cumulative and sometimes conflicting effects of policies, but also to proactively address emerging issues. Regional federal actors are often partners in these processes and have established relationships with local stakeholders. For instance, during the development of Alberta’s new Land Use Framework (LUF), the Regional Federal Council acted as a point of first contact to engage in discussions. The Alberta Government has since indicated an intention to include federal government representatives on each of the LUF’s seven regional councils. This succeeded in large part due to the pre-existing relationship, which provided an atmosphere of trust and a readily identified point of contact.

Looking Forward

Participants suggested that a place-based mandate for the Regional Federal Councils should be explored to provide a framework within which the federal government can apply an approach that is tailored to the needs of each province and territory. Empowering local federal actors is seen as the best way to put federal government decision-making processes in touch with regional realities. This echoes earlier calls to build a steady, long-term federal presence in the regions as a way to develop greater capacity and achieve shared goals with local stakeholders (Public Policy Forum and PRI, 2008). It was also suggested that previous federal experience with extension programs had been successful in some departments and that replicating this would build on past success.

Suggestions for action included:

- explore a place-based mandate for the Regional Federal Councils
- empower local federal actors
- explore the role of extension programs

5. Generating Collaborative Knowledge and Analytical Tools

Vision

Knowledge creation was depicted as a collaborative process both at the project and national levels. In this vision, the government’s knowledge role is not just as a creator of data and infrastructure needed to transmit information. Rather, knowledge generation

is a collaborative endeavour that integrates multiple perspectives and areas of expertise in a value-added process. Linking data and information from different sectoral and policy domains across jurisdictional boundaries was seen as a way to streamline resources and identify synergies. The creation of centralized platforms for accessing multi-disciplinary information and providing analytical tools was a complementary thread of discussion. The recognition of the value of local and traditional information was viewed as critical to developing productive approaches.

Context

The bottleneck for information integration is the transfer of knowledge across sectoral, jurisdictional, and disciplinary boundaries (Waldick, 2010, p. 74).

As a result, no single body has the capacity to manage the necessary co-ordination and integration to facilitate collaborative knowledge generation and dissemination. The federal government may be ideally situated to facilitate a collaborative approach, since the scope and magnitude of this cross-jurisdictional work lies outside the authority and capacity of other stakeholders. The evolution of internet-based tools has dramatically changed what is possible; however, processes are needed to develop and sustain partnerships. In particular, persistent challenges to integrating traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge into policy-making processes have been identified.

Looking Forward

Suggestions for facilitating access to value-added collaborative knowledge on a national basis included a knowledge commons, a network, or a network of networks. The concept of a virtual knowledge commons implies collective ownership of information; collective stewardship to ensure information is openly available and is not lost; empowerment tools; and systems to support stakeholder participation and performance measurement. A network could entail an active national organization to support stakeholder systems, while a network of networks would imply a national co-ordination and convening role of regional practitioner networks that could serve to identify synergies and conflicting mandates. These options also require stakeholder and federal capacity to actively engage and to use the knowledge that is created by others.

Suggestions for action included:

- explore the feasibility of a knowledge commons, a network, or a network of networks that would provide knowledge-sharing opportunities between federal, regional, and local place-based processes

6. “Decloaking” Policy

Vision

Inspired by the US and New Zealand examples of more open access to information, participants articulated a vision of standardized and available

“Local solutions are often denied access because they do not fit with bureaucratic decision-making structures.”

- Ian Shugart, Deputy Minister of Environment
Canada

RGI Critical Conversation

information. This meant information would be accessible to federal departments and also to local processes. The federal government's role was seen as setting standards, creating spaces (both real and virtual), and removing barriers to information sharing. There was a call for more open access to Statistics Canada data and a change in culture around information transparency.

It was suggested that finding platforms to share information that allow partner organizations to maintain control of their data (as demonstrated by GeoConnections) is an enabling approach.

Context

Federal departments experience several challenges in data-sharing related to cost, sensitivity of data, and departmental policies that limit data-sharing. In particular, privacy legislation, copyright, and cost-recovery policies limit the ability of federal departments to share data. There was concern expressed that GeoConnections, which has successfully developed data-sharing based on an open access business model, may be sunsetting. Data that are available to federal departments are often not available externally to stakeholder groups, reducing the effectiveness of place-based approaches. In other cases, data collected by one organization do not match the needs of its partners due to scale, compatibility, quality, and currency of data. In the social field, gaps in data collection have been identified as a challenge, whereas some environmental science practitioners note that information is often readily available, but the means to integrate it into decision-making processes is not always effective. For some departments, contact with external organizations and transparency of information are seen as risks rather than opportunities.

In response to some of these challenges, stakeholders are forming partnerships to buy data collectively, which can create the nexus for further collaboration. Technology is also enabling ways to partner and provide access to information. Tools, such as remote sensing, geo-spatial data, and web 2.0, are putting powerful data and analytical tools in the hands of organizational stakeholders and Canadians. Some, such as Google Maps and Streetview, are resulting in privacy trade-offs.

Looking Forward

The federal government was encouraged to focus on its strengths in providing data and information as well as creating spaces to generate and share knowledge to support place-based processes. Other suggestions for future action included fostering a culture of transparency of information and addressing cost-recovery barriers to data-sharing within government.

Suggestions for action included:

- provide space to generate and share information
- foster a federal culture of transparency of information

- remove barriers to data-sharing such as cost-recovery policies

Conclusion

Past research has identified a lack of space for would-be partners to be brought into contact with government in ways that could produce non-hierarchical partnerships. These partnerships are seen as important ways to address unexpected interactions of policies, create value-added collaborative knowledge, and address emerging issues within the federal government's mandate. The interdepartmental workshop, *Bringing Place-Based Tools to Policy*, underscored the need for senior direction to facilitate strategic momentum on the federal government's role within place-based initiatives. Participants in the workshop supported the conclusion that the federal government has an important knowledge contribution to make to place-based initiatives.

Key suggestions for moving forward included:

- establish a national platform for place-based initiatives, e.g., a network, network of networks, or a knowledge commons (including interdisciplinary data, geospatial information, analytical tools, and place-based best practices)
- establish a federal place-based community of practice
- establish an inventory of federal place-based processes and lessons learned
- choose an interdepartmental issue to run and test horizontal processes that could be adopted into federal approaches
- create a business case for place-based policy within the federal government
- investigate the possibility of a place-based mandate for the Regional Federal Council

References

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Office of the Auditor General. 2005. 2005 November Report of the Auditor General. Ottawa: Author.

Waldick, Ruth. 2010. "The Role of Institutions in Integrated Management" Horizons: Sustainable Places 10, no. 4: 74-80.

Appendix 1



Bringing Placed-Based Tools to Policy Development in the Federal Government Connecting Knowledge, Analysis and Decision Making

Workshop Agenda – February 22-23, 2010
Sheraton Hotel, 150 Albert Street, 2nd Floor, Rideau Room - Ottawa, Ontario

Purpose of the Workshop: Questions for exploration

1. How can the federal government best generate, share and integrate place-based knowledge to support place-based initiatives?
2. What processes need to be encouraged so that place-based knowledge informs policy development and decision-making?
3. What are the (short- and medium-term) actions required to develop a more co-ordinated knowledge role at the federal level?

Monday, February 22

8:30 Registration

A. CONTEXT

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| 9:00 | Welcome and Purpose | Judy Watling, PRI |
| | Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agenda and approach | Facilitator: Frank VanGool
Intersol |
| 9:10 | Setting the Stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustainability, Place-based Initiatives and Knowledge | Bernard Cantin, PRI |
| 9:20 | Partners Panel and Open Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain intention questions & why we are addressing the knowledge role and respond to questions/discussion | Federal Planning
Committee |
| 9:30 | Discussion one – Framing the Debate <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Roundtable Introductions: Where does your work fit in the spectrum of place-based federal activities? 2. In what ways does the federal government need to improve how it generates, shares and integrates place-based knowledge? Why? 3. What are your expectations for this meeting? | |

B. PLACE-BASED KNOWLEDGE – WHAT’S HAPPENING TODAY

- | | | |
|-------|--|---|
| 10:00 | Short Presentations – Case Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ From across government policy areas | Ann Martin, GeoConnections
Kate Humpage, HRSDC |
|-------|--|---|

- Speak to the federal government's knowledge role and observations/lessons learned regarding informing the policy process with place-based knowledge.

Roland Cormier, DFO
Sonia Talwar, NRCan

10:45 Health Break

11:00 Questions

- 11:15 Discussion two – Other Perspectives & Experiences
1. What successes has your department experienced in feeding place-based knowledge into the policy process?
 2. How could the federal government be using its knowledge role to better support place-based initiatives?
 3. Looking within the federal government, what opportunities do you see to strengthen the tie between knowledge and policy processes?

12:15 Lunch

C. USING PLACE-BASED KNOWLEDGE TO INFORM POLICY DEVELOPMENT – WHAT COULD BE?

13:15 The U.S. Experience

Charles Fluharty, Rural Policy Research Institute, Missouri and Chris Fulcher,, Center Applied Research and Environmental Systems

Open Forum Discussion

1. Questions of clarification?
2. Key messages – ideas to leverage in Canada?

14:15 Health Break

- 14:30 Discussion three: A Federal Vision
1. Its 2015 and the federal government has successful outcomes for its knowledge role in place-based initiatives: describe these successful outcomes?
 2. Table top exercise: drawing the policy process that successfully incorporates place-based knowledge

16:00 Report to Plenary

16:30 Networking and Marketplace

18:30 End Day 1

Tuesday, February 23

D. PROCESS IMPLICATION & ACTION		
9:00	Recap Day One	
9:10	The New Zealand Experience	Beat Huser, Creating Futures Project, Environment Waikato
9:50	Open Forum Discussion 1. Questions of clarification? 2. Key messages – ideas to leverage in Canada?	Plenary
10:15	Health Break	
10:30	Discussion four 1. What processes need to be encouraged to enable place-based knowledge to inform policy development and decision-making? 2. How can we organize ourselves to make our vision happen?	Roundtable
11:50	Report to Plenary	Facilitator
12:30	Lunch	
E. BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES		
13:30	Testing the National Network Idea – The Imagine Canada Experience Regional perspectives on federal roles Capacity for Place-based management	Ruth Waldick, EC
13:45	Panel: Reflections on the federal role	Ruth Waldick, EC
	Alberta	Aniko Parnell, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
	Nova Scotia	David Duggan, DFO
	Ontario	Silvia Strobl, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
	Geoconnections	Evert Kenk, Holonics

- 14:45 Questions
- 15:00 Health Break
- 15:15 Discussion five
1. What principles should guide the way the federal government works in partnerships? (e.g. provinces, municipalities, NGOs, others)
Given these principles, would you make any changes to your suggestions about how we organize ourselves?
 2. What do you see as important next steps to move forward?
- 16:10 Report to Plenary
- 16:25 Closing Statement Judy Watling, PRI
- 16:30 Networking and Marketplace
- 18:30 End of Day 2