THE HARRIS
CENTRE
Memorial University

WHERE DO YOU DRAW THE LINE?
Regionalization in Newfoundland and Labrador

A comparative synopsis of selected stakeholders' input

Where do you draw the line?
Regionalization in Newfoundland and Labrador

A comparative synopsis of selected stakeholders' input

Researched and written by Wade Kearley, BFA
For the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Jan. 25, 2008

Table of Contents

Figures and Tables

Executive Summary

This report is based on the theory that research, analysis, engagement, and communication can lead to improved public policy and practices. In this case the theory is applied to the field of regionalization in four distinct policy fields or "silos" in Newfoundland and Labrador:

1. Health care;
2. Education;
3. Municipal government; and
4. Economic development.

As illustrated in Table 2 below, the initial phase of this process began with the Harris Centre's awarding of funding to Dr. Steve Tomblin and Jeff Braun-Jackson, of Memorial University's Political Science Department, to conduct the research and analysis on these policy fields. Their final report: "Managing Change through Regionalization: Lessons from Newfoundland and Labrador," reached a series of insights and conclusions about how successive provincial governments have managed political, social, and economic change through regionalization in the four fields.

In order to present these findings to stakeholders, the Harris Centre initiated a process of engagement. They invited 14 stakeholders from across the province in the relevant policy silos to:

➢ Review a synopsis of the Tomblin report;
➢ Share their conclusions and perspectives; and
➢ Participate in the debate.

While many of the conclusions in "Managing Change" were accepted by the stakeholders, there were instances where they took issue, including the definition of "regionalization."

"Managing Change" holds that regionalization is a legitimate challenge to existing power structures in a time of crisis. However, stakeholders defined regionalization as a practical means of preserving the existing power structure while consolidating regional services under an optimal number of regional boards.

In "Managing Change," the authors examined each of the policy fields separately. And they drew separate conclusions about the direction and impacts of regionalization in each one. The first half of this report follows that model, summarizing Tomblin's and Braun-Jackson's conclusions with regard to one field and then presenting the views and conclusions of the participating stakeholders for that field.

Beginning with **regionalization in health care**, the authors of "Managing Change" maintain that the provincial government has transferred responsibility for health care delivery to the boards, but continues to monopolize policy making, and to control—to varying degrees—board budgets and appointments. However, according to Tomblin and Braun-Jackson, this field remains as a silo where doctors and drug companies dominate the process, enjoying much autonomy and independence.

From the stakeholders' perspective, the Williams government's creation of four Regional Integrated Health Authorities was driven by a political need to reduce the cost of health delivery. They maintain that this was the primary motivation of previous regionalization initiatives in health care as well. And, the stakeholders say, this has yet to be realized by any administration—although there may have been a slowing of the rate of increase. (No figures were put forward to support this.)

Despite this political motivation for cost savings, there is a high level of support among many stakeholders for the current health care model. They maintain this current model is driven, at least in part, by champions at senior levels whose focus is on a regional life-style-based continuum of health care. This vision, they say, has over the long term informed policies and programs and shaped the province's evolving plan. Other stakeholders maintain that regionalization of health care services was not as organized or focused as it appears in retrospect.

On **regionalization in economic development**, Tomblin and Braun-Jackson found that Newfoundland and Labrador is hampered by a tradition of community rivalry and by a population suspicious of solutions introduced from outside. And this economic xenophobia is compounded by often contradictory support and direction from government. For example, they created the regional economic development boards but then failed to give those boards either the power or the resources to do what needs to be done for co-ordinated economic development.

Among stakeholders who participated in this process, there was unanimous agreement that the bottom line for economic development in rural Newfoundland and Labrador is sustainability. The uncertainty arises as to whether regionalization is the answer or simply one tool among many. How do regions adapt to the changing social and economic picture to achieve a fluid state of sustainability? Most stakeholders felt that the important work of the strategic social plan from the mid- to late-1990s ought to be used strategically to inform developments in this policy silo.

There is considerable debate even among the most informed stakeholders as to the "right number" of regions for the province given its size, population density, and resources. Is it 20 regions or something less? How much investment in a region is enough when it comes to support for the Regional Economic Development Boards (REDBs)? Is there a measure of success? That seems to depend on who

you talk to. For some stakeholders too much has already been invested, for others too little.

As far as the Rural Secretariat (RS) regions defined by the Williams government are concerned, support among stakeholders is mixed. Proponents maintained that the REDB model is dated and out of tune with the current realities. Detractors maintain that the RS regions are too large and their councils meet too infrequently to have any real understanding of, or impact on, the issues of their respective regions.

In the policy "silo" of **municipal government**, according to Tomblin and Braun-Jackson, regionalization is virtually non-existent. They found that no model proposed thus far has a solution for creating a shared regional identity. They also found that, as in economic development, a locally focussed, and isolationist orientation blocks regional initiatives proposed to provide and co-ordinate service delivery.

The authors of "Managing Change" did find that voluntary co-ordination is beginning to emerge on issues such as waste management. In addition, they proposed that the co-ordination of the activities of municipalities with those of the REDBs offers compelling advantages for an elected and accountable model of regional governance.

The stakeholders' experience of regionalization contradicts many of Tomblin and Braun-Jackson's findings. Among the evidence was a 2002 survey conducted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Municipalities (NLFM) which found:

> ➤ 51 per cent of all the province's municipalities are involved in service sharing; and
> ➤ 17 joint councils in operation across the province shared various levels of service and facilities.

In addition, stakeholders pointed out that, as of April 2007, the Department of Municipal Affairs had 11 active files representing 47 communities. These were communities that proactively approached the department looking to merge or regionalize services to a greater or lesser extent.

Among the challenges to regionalization singled out by stakeholders are the Local Service Districts (LSDs) where 11 per cent of the population now lives. Municipalities are clamouring to expand their boundaries to take in LSDs and unincorporated areas in their regions. According to stakeholders, the perception is that the people in these communities pay nothing for services such as snow clearing (provided by the province) and garbage collection, yet they have the same access to public/municipal facilities as do the taxpayers of incorporated towns.

In **education**, Tomblin and Braun-Jackson found that the population has a high rate of illiteracy and a high drop-out rate despite ongoing regional reform. This reform has been politically driven by secularization and economics. "Managing Change" confirms that closure and consolidation of primary and secondary schools in rural and remote areas of the province are seen locally as a loss of public service, not as an effort to improve education. The authors claim that none of the reforms have occurred within a model that considers the educational, social, and economic impacts on a community caused by closing the local school.

The stakeholders for education felt changes in the primary and secondary school system in Newfoundland and Labrador are more indicative of centralization than regionalization. The overall impact on people in the regions is a perceived loss of power and control to central, and heavily bureaucratic, authority that delivers its decisions through politicized school boards.

The primary and secondary system today, from the description of stakeholders, exists in a state of siege, with a pervasive silo mentality, not only for the sector as a whole, but also within the sector, where boards, divisions within those boards, and divisions within the government department, are resistant to collaborative change or even to co-operation.

Comparing Input across Policy Silos

The second half of this report dispenses with the separate field approach and instead looks across the silos to discuss shared experiences identified by stakeholders, regardless of their field of expertise or professional affiliation. The common issues that emerged in the interviews with stakeholders can be grouped under three major headings:

1. Human resources issues;
2. Fiscal issues; and
3. Policy issues.

On analysis, each of these issues could be further subdivided into strengths and weaknesses of the current regionalization initiatives.

In **human resources**, for those regions hit hard by outmigration and volunteer burn-out, one of the greatest strengths of regionalization is that it eliminates the need for redundant positions in community committees and volunteer groups. This helps to attract and build strong community volunteer leadership and to foster knowledge and resource sharing.

Among the weaknesses in human resources is the erosion of management ranks. Another weakness is the difficulty of mobilizing citizens to become knowledgeable about the issues and to participate in informed decision making.

When it comes to **fiscal issues**, the stakeholders felt one of the strengths of regionalization is that governments are more likely to respond to requests from community clusters or regional groups than they are to requests from single communities or single-issue groups. This gives merged communities, and regionally representative groups, bargaining power and access to funding for regional needs.

This enhanced access to funding was also considered a weakness by some stakeholders. For example, in economic development, how do you know when enough money has been invested to make a community sustainable? How can you tell whether an approach is succeeding or failing? As one interviewee put it, the system is weakened by the "lack of a reward/punish mechanism for performance."

Regionalization offers **policy** strengths to both central and regional governments. Viewed from the centre, regionalization offers a means to exert greater control and to standardize service delivery, thereby creating greater consistency and faster implementation of policies and programs throughout the province.

The strength, from the regional perspective, is that communities have more weight as a group to influence government to recognize in their policy development that one size does not fit all.

One of the most vexing weaknesses of regionalization, in terms of policy issues, is common to all the stakeholders: the difficulty of engaging the public in meaningful discussions (as contrasted with the over-exposure of single-issue lobbying). According to stakeholders, public consultation is a cornerstone of regionalization, yet all stakeholders pointed to a lack of educational initiatives by their respective fields, and most lamented persistent public misconceptions that confound advances.

Given these strengths and weaknesses, stakeholders identified key factors that can influence the success or failure of regionalization including:

➢ The number and size of the regions;
➢ Regional governance (i.e. elected or appointed);
➢ The autonomy and accountability necessary for regional governance; and
➢ A means of measuring the success or failure of these regional bodies in meeting regional needs.

Based on their insights and shared understanding, stakeholders identified the way ahead for each of the policy silos.

In **health care** there was a strong consensus that the Primary Health Care model is a reliable vision for the future. However, in order for the system to begin to function at full capacity, long-term stability is needed. To ensure proper allocation

of resources, this process must be driven by enhanced planning capabilities for all regions—including standardized planning cycles, tools and processes, none of which are yet completely in place.

To advance **economic development**, regardless of the number of regions, stakeholders were convinced that consensus on boundaries is crucial. They agreed that citizens in each region need to understand the challenges and the opportunities; they should be informed about the potential impacts of various choices for their region; and they should be informed of the alternatives for how best to move ahead. A majority of stakeholders felt that boards and government must do a better job of reaching citizens in more and varied organizations, and in ensuring that as many citizens as possible have the information necessary to participate in an informed regional discussion.

There was no explicit agreement on how that ought to be accomplished, but implicit in the discussion was the fact that discussions must be locally-driven with consultative engagement at the community level.

For stakeholders the way ahead in **municipal government** requires a thorough study of what constitutes a sustainable community. There are approximately 282 municipalities in the province and many LSDs. How many of these are sustainable as they are? How many are sustainable under some other model? One community may not be sustainable on its own but together with others as a cluster—whether that is amalgamated or merged under some other model—the communities may be sustainable. Stakeholders in this sector are convinced that the provincial government needs to be more active in encouraging co-operation to support sustainable services that individual municipalities can't provide.

In discussions of the way ahead for **education**, there was general agreement among stakeholders that the education system is worse, not better, than it was under the 10-board system. It was the opinion of one stakeholder that, due to the "oil money" many now believe that the potential for growth in education is high and that "the expectations of everyone at this point in time are very high." Measurable indicators of improvement would include:

> ➢ Students who are better off—resources, student/teacher ratios;
> ➢ Teachers who are better off—teaching resources, teacher/student ratios, support for teaching;
> ➢ District staff who are better off—manageable work load and better working conditions; and
> ➢ Administration and maintenance staff who are better off—fair work load, better working conditions.

However any improvements, at least in the short term, will have to be made within the existing structure, as any change to the latest re-configuration of school boards is unlikely, under the current administration.

Regionalization in Newfoundland and Labrador

Sector	Health	Education	Municipal Government	Economic Development	Strategic Social Plan
Current number of regions and date created	**Four New Regional Integrated Health Authorities** (2004): **Eastern:** 295,000 **Central:** 100,926 **Western**: 82,034 **Labrador**: 40,516	**Five Districts 2004--2005 Labrador**: 4,505 Stdts; 343.3 Tchrs **Western**: 14,742 Stdts; 1,159.1 Tchrs **Nova Central**: 75 Schls; 14,741 Stdts; 1,099.5 Tchrs **Eastern**: 5,258 Stdts; 3,000.7 Tchrs **Conseil scolaire francophone**: 193 Stdts; 31.8 Tchrs	**282 Municipalities** 17 Joint Councils	**20 REDBs (1995)** **Nine Rural Secretariat Regional Councils** (2004/5)	**Six SSP Regions (1998)** North East Avalon Avalon Eastern Central Cormack-Grenfell Labrador
Previous number of regions	Amalgamation of health boards and other related organizations	11 in1995 down from 27 denominational boards	Sliding scale depending on the year in question	59 Rural Development Associations	N/A
Stated purpose of change	"Creating fewer, more accountable health authorities is a necessary step in renewing our health and community services system and meeting client needs. Integrated boards focus on the full continuum of care resulting in better service for clients." *(Sept10/04 Gov. release)*	"Though pupil enrolment numbers have been declining, the number of school board districts and administration staff has remained constant. We will reduce the number of school boards by September of this year from eleven to five, for an anticipated savings of about $6 million annually (Budget 2004)."	Striving to maintain level of services by sharing on a regional basis: amalgamation by another name	**REDBs** --Strategic economic planning --Co-ordinating business support --Supporting communities and organizations --Co-ordinating social and economic initiatives --Public education and participation **Rural Secretariat** --Focal point for partnerships with government --Support for communities and regions -Regional approach that links *economic, social, cultural and environmental* issues.	Co-ordinated approach to *social and economic development* building and supporting community involvement, action and partnerships input into policy and decision-making
Dominant view of impact	Too early to tell. Need time to assess the current model and its effectiveness.	Erosion of services & loss of professionals has eroded primary and secondary education.	Grass roots progress of shared services is ahead of government's capacity or ability to respond	REDBs helped break down community rivalry and enhanced economic opportunity but lack of government support contributing to significant volunteer burnout.	Government needs to revive & integrate SSP recommendations into all regional development initiatives.

Table 1 - The evolution of regionalization in Newfoundland and Labrador

A comparative synopsis of stakeholders' input: Final report.   7
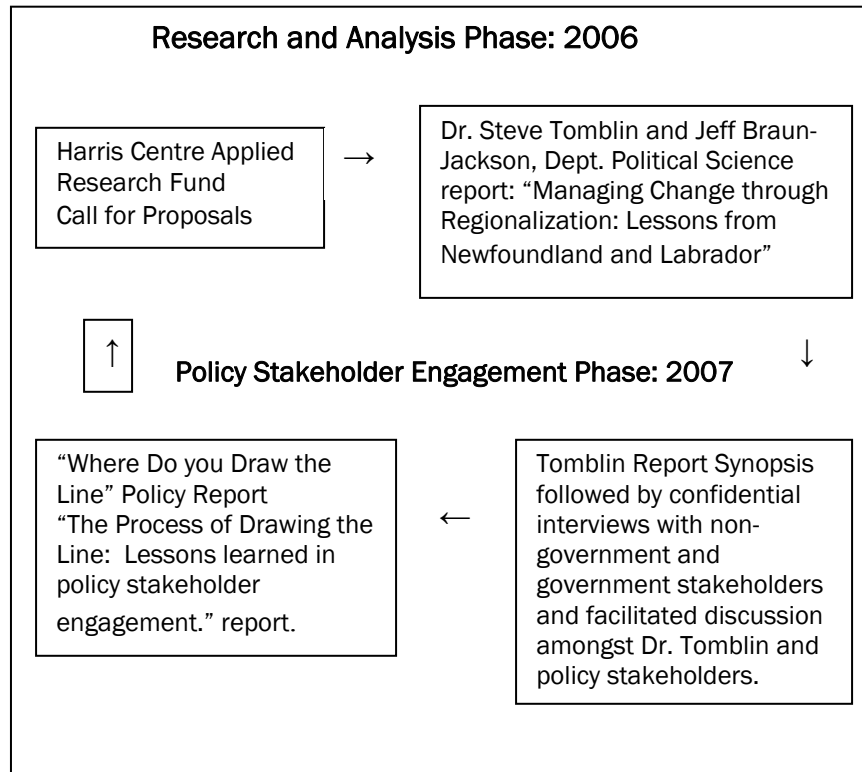
1 Process

Table 2 - Flow chart of facilitated development process

The methodology described in this report is part of the overarching strategy of the Harris Centre to engage policy researchers, policy developers and the general public in a development loop that involves research, analysis, strategy, engagement and communication that leads to new dialogue and improved public policy and practices.

1.1 Phase 1: Research and Analysis

With support from the Harris Centre Applied Research Fund, Dr. Stephen Tomblin and Jeff Braun-Jackson, both of the Department of Political Science at Memorial University, researched and wrote "Managing Change Through Regionalization: Lessons from Newfoundland and Labrador." This 47-page report, submitted to the Harris Centre in late 2006, outlines and evaluates how successive provincial governments in Newfoundland and Labrador have managed political, social and economic change through the use of regionalization in four policy fields: economic development; education; health care and municipal government (see www.mun.ca/harriscentre).

A key conclusion coming of that report is that social and economic development would be more effective and efficient across all four sectors if each of the four "policy silos" were to develop cross-linkages with the other sectors to learn, share experiences, and develop regionally informed policies and programs that support the needs and aspirations of the citizens.

At a time when the province's population is declining and the need to rationalize services is growing, this conclusion – that cross-sectoral linkages could help improve the quality and level of services in the regions – could not be ignored. The Harris Centre made the decision to test the strength of this conclusion by using it as the basis to initiate an innovative process of policy analysis. This new approach is designed to engage policy stakeholders with policy researchers, to share knowledge and perspectives and to produce a documentation that reflects this dialogue.

In this particular instance, the initiative's aim includes engaging key government and non-government leaders in a cross-sectoral dialogue to identify best practises, foster cross linkages and stimulate ongoing dialogue.

1.2 Phase 2: Engagement

The Harris Centre issued invitations to fourteen key stakeholders across the province – including at least three stakeholders for each "policy silo" or policy field or sector – to engage in this initiative by participating in individual interviews and a post interview workshop.

Concurrent with the issuing of the invitations was the development of a Tomblin Report synopsis. The executive summary of this synopsis was forwarded to the interviewees prior to the actual interviews.

The interviews, conducted during February and early March, 2007 were designed to collect insights and perspectives on regionalization from leaders within each policy field.

At the confidential interviews the interviewees were asked a series of 15 questions, focusing on their own view of regionalization within their sector (See Appendix 1). One of the 15 questions sought each stakeholder's assessment of:
  ➢ The analysis and conclusions set forth in the Tomblin Report; and,
  ➢ Those views expressed when the group came together for the working session, March 23, 2007.

The stakeholders were given the opportunity to review the recorded observations from the interviews to check for accuracy. These notes remained confidential. However the content of each was compared and contrasted with the approved content from the other interviews conducted within and across sectors. These were then integrated and updated to include stakeholder input from a group

working session. It is a summary of all that information which makes up the body of this report.

1.3 Phase 3: Communication

In order to encourage dialogue and the broadest possible distribution of the results from the previous two phases, phase three involves the drafting of two separate final documents including: this report which aims to capture the lessons learned from government and non-government stakeholders for facilitating good practise in regionalization; and a second document entitled "Lessons from Drawing the Line." The latter captures lessons learned from this process that may help to structure future initiatives aimed at bringing together policy stakeholders with policy researchers to share knowledge and the challenges of practical application.

All the non-confidential documentation from this process will be available online from the Harris Centre website including:
- ➢ Tomblin Report,
- ➢ Tomblin Report Summary,
- ➢ Interview questions,
- ➢ "How do you draw the line" report, and
- ➢ "The Process of Drawing the Line" report.

2 Regionalization Defined

In the Tomblin report regionalization is presented as a concept with three different but definable theoretical models that all speak to regionalization as a legitimate challenge in times of crisis to the existing power structure. The definition according to the interviewees is one of a more practical nature.

2.1 Definition from the Tomblin Report

Regionalization is transformation by reform or replacement of embedded ideas, processes, interests and institutions.

2.2 Definition Constructed from Stakeholders' Input

Regionalization is a loosely structured process aimed at achieving efficiencies through the effective delivery of shared or common services on a geographical regional basis to better meet the region's common needs and to foster sustainability.

2.3 Centralization or Decentralization

Another difference between the theoretical concept and the practical definition as compiled from the provincial stakeholders is noteworthy.

In the Tomblin Report the authors felt it necessary to emphasise that "the terms regionalization and decentralization are often used in the literature to describe the panoply of reforms occurring within Canadian provinces. However, these terms do not mean the same thing. Decentralization is the dispersion of power and authority in public planning, management and decision-making from higher to lower levels of government…. Regionalization is related to decentralization in that the former involves the adaptation of a provincial government's plans or policies for a geographically defined region." The implication being that in this model regionalization is seen as a method of preserving central authority through a distilled regional structure.

Interestingly, more than one stakeholder interviewed in each of the four sectors pointed out that regionalization in their respective sectors "is not centralization." Those stakeholders believe the current process of regionalization in Newfoundland and Labrador is incorrectly perceived as accrual of power to the central authority at the expense of the region. This misperception, according to them, is evident to varying degrees in each of the four sectors, but particularly in health and education where the provincial government's financial obligations are large and exposed. But, according to other stakeholders, it is in these latter two sectors where recent regional re-organization appears to be driven more by political pressures than by regional consultation. Is that regionalization or centralization? There was no definitive answer. It seems to fit within the loose parameters of the stakeholders' definition of regionalization, but seems to be outside the Tomblin Report's more refined definition.

Status of Regionalization in Four Sectors

3 Regionalization in Health Care

3.1 Summary: Tomblin Report on Health Care

Regionalization of health care in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), between 1994 and 2005, reflects a shift in rhetoric from a health system focusing on acute conditions to one focused on prevention, promotion of lifestyle change and participation. However the main driver behind regionalization has been reining in spending without disrupting basic service delivery.

After more than a decade, regionalized health care has not reduced health spending. According to Tomblin, much of the battle was about finding ways to challenge the dominance of the bio-medical model, and the power and autonomy of the doctors and drug companies who benefit most from the status quo. But there was limited opportunity to contest the power of the system at the margins, or mobilize a powerful coalition capable of institutionalizing new health reforms.

In response, Government has transferred responsibility for health care delivery to the boards but continues to monopolize policy making, and to control—to varying degrees—board budgets and appointments. However, according to Tomblin, it remains as a system where doctors and drug companies continue to dominate the process and enjoy much autonomy and independence. Regionalization has not influenced their activities and has become an instrument of government for other policy purposes (again driving home the point that regionalization in this sector is not decentralization.)

3.2 Stakeholders' Views on Regionalization of Health Care

The following section presents a synopsis, cross-reference and interpretation of comments from senior level stakeholders in the health care sector. It does not represent the opinion of any single stakeholder and should not be read as such. This section is an extrapolation of the current status of the health care sector based on a reading of the Tomblin Report, the interviews, the feedback at the follow-up workshop and subsequent analysis of all the materials, looking for common themes, for contradictions, for gaps and for other significant points arising.

The reader should note that research for this report was confined to interviews and therefore, each statement of fact represents the contention of one or more of the interviewees/stakeholders. And in some cases such contentions may be questioned by one or more of the other interviewees/stakeholders. Any objections expressed explicitly during the research process are noted. However, any conclusions drawn, unless otherwise stated, are based on the author's interpretation of the stakeholder's contentions.

3.2.1 The Drivers of Change

Changes aimed at regionalizing the delivery of health care over the past 15+ years in NL were made in a climate of crisis where it was obvious that the status quo would not do.

The Williams government's most recent rejigging of the health care system—with the creation of four Regional Integrated Health Authorities—was driven on the political side by a fiscal need to reduce the cost of health delivery. This holds true for previous regionalization initiatives as well.

Support for the health care model as it currently exits was however, also driven, at least in part, by champions at senior levels across the system who had fundamental beliefs about the right way to deliver health care. According to the stakeholders, the vision of these champions for a life-style-based continuum of service, and their determination and expertise in creating that model regardless of political demands, enabled the development of regionally informed policies and programs and the implementation of a long-term plan. *(Note: within the system a view persists that the regionalization of services was not as organized or focused as it appears in retrospect.)*

3.2.2 Model for Change

The impact of regionalization on cost appears to have been more of a slowing of the rate of increase rather than any actual reduction. The number of variables and the frequency of regionalization initiatives make this observation difficult to verify. A period of six to seven years is necessary to fully implement and assess the cost benefits of improving the quality and accessibility of regionalized health care services.

The Primary Health Care (PHC) model is an integration of three levels of care—acute care, long-term care, and community services—into a client/patient service continuum that has the potential for systemic improvements. With a reduction in the number of boards reporting to government there are improvements in two-way communications at the most senior levels, helping to ensure that the department is informed on new and evolving regional issues as the regions strive for consistency in policy application and program delivery across the province. This helps to ensure on the other end that all the boards are better able to co-ordinate and to implement policy.

Regionalization is allowing more flexibility in terms of each region's ability to move resources within the system to where they are most needed. For example, in palliative care the shifting of more resources into home-based care has reduced the number of terminal patients in hospitals where the same care costs up to four times as much as home-based care.

There is strong support among all the stakeholders for increasing effectiveness and efficiency, but there is no consensus on whether cost should be the main driver, or whether this process is in fact actually regionalization. There was agreement however that whatever is done to improve the system must have a regional focus.

Within the sector there appears to be a high level of satisfaction with the degree to which services have been integrated and also in the improved level of intra-sectoral communication. There is still some distance to go to realize the fully integrated PHC model, for example, but progress is being made at overcoming weaknesses. For example, for years other parts of rural Canada enjoyed the benefits of Memorial's exceptional rural health training for doctors. Despite the development of this expertise in professional training, there was no strategy to keep those rural doctors in this province after graduation. That has begun to change and the retention level of rural doctors is improving.

Another benefit of this integration has been a slow but strategic partnering among professional silos for the delivery of complementary services. The example cited for this is in the management of child welfare. Social workers, educators, nurses and physicians are beginning to work together across program lines to achieve the best outcomes for the children and their families.

However this regionally focused model is still not implemented in every instance of service delivery. For example, the re-organization of obstetrics services as recommended by the Hay Report seems to have as an underlying assumption that one size fits all. The implementation of this report, with a predetermined objective of centralizing services, resulted in a system where peripheral resources were lost without a compensating mechanism in place.

3.2.3 The Professional Impact

Regionalization and the subsequent integration of health units to help strengthen frontline services do have a human cost—the impact of which may not be fully appreciated at this time. The loss of managers and supervisors, due to redundancies created by mergers within the sector, has dire implications for succession planning. Many of these health sector managers have left the province for employment elsewhere. Under the current circumstances it will be difficult to entice them back since many have found employment elsewhere that pays more for less of a workload, than they would face in a similar position in Newfoundland and Labrador.

A secondary but important human cost is a decline in morale caused by the loss of organizations, such as the Grace Hospital, in which the employees had invested a great deal of personal pride. Significant work is required within the system to rebuild and re-integrate these people into a system in which they can once again take pride.

3.2.4 Community Interaction

Consultation with citizens is a primary issue in this sector that still has the leaders grappling for solutions. For regionalization of health care to work over the long term, consultation is essential. All are agreed on that point. But, how deep do you go and how hard do you try? Interviewees expressed exasperation with how difficult, frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful their efforts can be to draw out not only the citizens but also community leaders to regional and sub-regional consultation sessions. Even personally-addressed and personally-signed letters failed to elicit replies, let alone boost attendance at regional consultation meetings. The source of this non-engagement is undetermined but speculation singled out cynicism, volunteer burnout, poor timing or some other reason or combination of reasons.

As part of this general discussion it was pointed out that policy development generally meets with relatively little opposition. It is the introduction of programs, based on these policies, that gets the most resistance. It is worth noting that there are no initiatives to ensure that the public is better informed about issues in the lead up to consultation for policy development. Therefore, even where there is engagement, how can citizens offer informed opinions?

There is also a need for effective communication with the general public to overcome the apathy and cynicism in this "post closed-door era" of health-care delivery. There is also a need for strong and effective communication within the health care sector as loyalties are rebuilt and the system has a chance to take stock of where it is and where it is going.

At the provincial government level there is a belief that consultation within health is not a democratic process. With the huge fiscal commitments at stake, this is a sector where ministers come and go based on their management of particular issues. Every attempt is made to bring people on side, but if, in the end, a decision has to be taken due to government policy or political pressure, which is contrary to the expressed views from within the region, that decision will nevertheless be implemented—though not perhaps in an election year.

Policy development and regionalization ought to be informed by the Strategic Social Plan, but there is concern that the validity of this seminal document is lost on the current administration.

The transparency and accountability legislation introduced in 2005 and proclaimed in late 2006 is expected to have a positive impact on the evolution of social services including health care. This latter policy compels government bodies and authorities such as Regional Integrated Health Authorities (RIHAs) to submit a strategic plan and annual reports that include public consultation, and strategic and measurable goals in line with government policy.

4 Regionalization in Economic Development

4.1 Summary: Tomblin Report on Economic Development

Regional economic development in NL is hampered by the inertia created by a tradition of community rivalry and a population suspicious of solutions introduced from outside. It does not help that government, at both the political and bureaucratic levels, has been contradictory in its support and direction, creating the means for economic development—zones and REDBs—but failing to give those boards either the power or the resources to do what needs to be done. The policy field today faces at least five major challenges:
1. Community rivalries within regions;
2. The fall-out of the federal government handling of the cod crises;
3. The increase in the rate of outmigration;
4. The lack of investment funds for REDBs; and
5. Mobilization of grass-roots support for regional economic development.

4.2 Stakeholders' Views on Regionalization of Economic Development

The following section presents a synopsis, cross-reference and interpretation of comments from senior level stakeholders in the economic development sector. It does not represent the opinion of any single stakeholder and should not be read as such. This section is an extrapolation of the current status of the economic development sector based on a reading of the Tomblin Report, the interviews, the feedback at the follow-up workshop and subsequent analysis of all the materials, looking for common themes, for contradictions, for gaps and for other significant points arising.

The reader should note that research for this report was confined to interviews and therefore, each statement of fact represents the contention of one or more of the interviewees/stakeholders. And in some cases such contentions may be questioned by one or more of the other interviewees/stakeholders. Any objections expressed explicitly during the research process are noted. However, any conclusions drawn, unless otherwise stated, are based on the author's interpretation of the stakeholder's contentions.

4.2.1 The Drivers for Change

The bottom line for economic development in rural Newfoundland and Labrador is sustainability. That is certain. The uncertainty arises in how to achieve it. Regionalization is one tool among many. The current debate seems to be whether or not the Regional Economic Development Board (REDB) structure and the current level of funding, from both the federal and provincial governments, are

sufficient to develop the tools and expertise to build and maintain that sustainability. This debate is further complicated by the changes to the REDBs' mandate under the current administration, which according to one stakeholder included the removal of education and heath care sector representation from the boards and the implementation of the Rural Secretariat's regional boards.

How do regions adapt to the changing social and economic picture to achieve a fluid state of sustainability? What is the right number of regions? Is it 20 or something less? How much is enough when it comes to support for the Regional Economic Development Boards? What is the evidence of success? Depending on who you talk to, either too much or too little has been invested to date.

4.2.2 How much input is enough

The need for public consultation is touted as a primary objective along the path to achieving regional economic development and sustainability. Yet there is also wariness for a number of reasons:

> Regional consultation, to a greater or lesser degree, is recognized as important in order to ensure local buy-in to policies that are informed by the perceived needs of citizens in the region;

> Ironically there is no mechanism to ensure that citizens have the expertise and the tools to participate in a meaningful way in this process of policy development and implementation;

> The system, as it now exists, is a closed loop and people who want to get involved as volunteers in economic development have difficulty in breaking into the system;

> There is a concern that such consultations create expectations that cannot or will not be realized and, as a result, over the long term, undermine the legitimacy of and create suspicion around the process of regionalization;

> Not enough effort has been placed on drawing non-traditional groups (such as church and educational volunteer groups for example) into the exchange;

> There is a perception that the bureaucratic will is there to make the changes but the political will is lacking; and

> The media is viewed by some as a hindrance to advancing regionalization. Coverage of politically sensitive issues such as amalgamation, growth centres, withdrawal or relocation of services, etc. triggers political interference for short-term political gain.

As a result, particularly at the bureaucratic level, open dialogue on issues related to economic development is restricted. In part this is to limit the risk of political interference for short-term gain. The reasoning being that this will lessen the damage from any political hijacking of long-term sustainable-development initiatives.

4.2.3 Four Ounces of Water

> *"Here is a glass of water. You may see it as half full or half empty. But we come at it as four ounces of water that we have to work with. Now what do you want to do with it?"*

Like every sector that strives for successful regionalization, this sector struggles with the question: "What is the right number of regions?" With economic development the answer, on the surface, is simple—sustainability. If the residents in a given region share reasonably equitable access to the services they need to maintain or build a sustainable regional economy, then that is the right number.

But the deeper you dive into sustainability, the murkier the waters become. There is a significant amount of uncertainty, even among the government and the community leaders, about whether 20 regions or nine regions or some other number is right. That is compounded by uncertainty over the relationship between Regional Economic Development Boards and the Rural Secretariat's regional councils. Are they complementary or at odds with each other?

The REDB model continues to garner positive recognition in the regions, and—even internationally—as a model for economic development. Within the system, there is a sense that the boards have been valuable in providing a way to get past the traditional insular town hall identity (with a few high-profile exceptions). The emerging ties with the municipal governments have made those elected bodies, with their tax base and comparatively strong infrastructure, invaluable partners for the regional boards. The municipal partners give the REDBs access to expertise for community and regional planning that they lack.

But, despite these new and strong alliances, there is a frustration over a lack of government support that has in effect "robbed the boards" of their effectiveness. Their credibility is further undermined when REDBs must "take the flak" over economic issues and serve as a buffer between elected politicians and the citizens in each region. Further challenges in addition to the lack of consistent, long-term funding, include a shifting and "downgraded" mandate, and poor access to solid data for strategic planning.

All these factors plus "poor transportation and a lack of infrastructure" are posited as an explanation for why many boards have not achieved all that was envisioned in their original mandate. In this climate, understandably, among many who

favour the REDB model, the level of frustration with the provincial government is high. Some argue the model would be more successful if there was some mechanism to reward success and withhold funding from the less successful. But how is that success to be measured? By whom?

One suggested measure of success of the REDB model is the growing level of regional co-operation at the municipal level. The rapid and widespread formation of joint councils is attributed, in part, to the structure of the regional zones which, through an imposed process "forced integration to an unprecedented degree and thereby created a mechanism to initiate regionally relevant initiatives." Or as one interviewee put it, "When you bring community groups together to talk about larger regional issues, it is easier to find common ground and begin to identify with the other point of view. Then, after that, at side tables, the deals on tough issues like amalgamation begin to come together." Another suggested measure of REDB model's success at fostering sustainability is "a marked improvement in business development and in the quality of businesses coming forward [for support] in the regions."

Sustainability, depending on the mandate of the supporting agency, can be approached from a macro- or a micro-level. For example, from the federal perspective Atlantic Canada is 4½ regions (with Cape Breton being the ½) and even this is open for discussion with regard to sustainability. The entire region represents 40 per cent of the provinces and just 10 per cent of the population. Even St. John's, under the federal criteria is "rural." (This shines a new light on Tomblin's identification of the urban-rural divide as the fault line in regionalization for Newfoundland and Labrador.) At the other extreme, on the micro level, there is recognition of the need to: "allow for the possibility of regions within regions as with the revived RDA (Rural Development Association)-type organization on Fogo Island."

Another interesting spin on defining sustainable regions, or regions within regions, was raised in the context of enhanced infrastructure, communications and relationships that have allowed the creation of virtual regions where those communities with common interests—for example in mining or aquaculture or adjacent to a large, shared geographic feature like the Humber River—can come together to share resources and access funding and other support in a way similar to a regional cluster of communities or even an industry association.

The Rural Secretariat's (RS) approach to defining sustainable regions has been referred to, perhaps somewhat prejudicially, as the Wal-Mart approach because similar samples of statistical and demographic information were used to define these regions as are used by the retail giant in determining the locations of their outlets. (All but one of the nine regions—the Northern Peninsula excepted—have at least one Wal-Mart). The RS approach also considers social, environmental and cultural factors in the sustainability equation, with an objective to build a sustainable future rather than a sustainable economy. This is posited as the difference between this and the REDB model, the latter of which is "limited by its

economic focus to the exclusion of other concerns such as: where do people shop?
Where do they naturally go for health services?"

Rural Secretariat proponents maintain that the REDB model is dated and out of
tune with the current realities of the day in NL. Detractors maintain that the RS
regions are too large and their councils meet too infrequently to have any real
understanding of or impact on the issues of their respective regions. "Some
members of the Secretariat's councils feel as though they've been sent up in a
political trial balloon." So, even as the old adversarial relationships between
communities are becoming a thing of the past, there is emerging between
supporters and detractors of the two current regional models a new adversarial
climate.

5 Regionalization in Municipal Government

5.1 Summary: Tomblin Report on Municipal Government

Regionalization of municipal government structures, except of the most fundamental kind, is non-existent in NL. Several models have been proposed since the 1990s but such recommendations have no solution for overcoming the initial difficulty of creating a shared regional identity. Among the main reasons for this difficulty are the lack of a strong tradition of local government in NL; an unwillingness to surrender power to neighbouring communities; and suspicion of yet another level of government. This locally focussed, and isolated orientation is a barrier to creating regional institutions designed to provide and co-ordinate service delivery.

However, some voluntary co-ordination is evident, especially in the area of waste management, where broad public consensus has been achieved. In addition, co-ordination of the activities of municipalities with those of the REDBs offers compelling advantages for an elected and accountable model of regional governance.

5.2 Stakeholders' Views on Regionalization in Municipal Government

The following section presents a synopsis, cross-reference and interpretation of comments from senior level stakeholders in the municipal government sector. It does not represent the opinion of any single stakeholder and should not be read as such. This section is an extrapolation of the current status of the municipal government sector based on a reading of the Tomblin Report, the interviews, the feedback at the follow-up workshop and subsequent analysis of all the materials, looking for common themes, for contradictions, for gaps and for other significant points arising.

The reader should note that research for this report was confined to interviews and therefore, each statement of fact represents the contention of one or more of the interviewees/stakeholders. And in some cases such contentions may be questioned by one or more of the other interviewees/stakeholders. Any objections expressed explicitly during the research process are noted. However, any conclusions drawn, unless otherwise stated, are based on the author's interpretation of the stakeholder's contentions.

5.2.1 From the Ground Up

In 2002 the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Municipalities (NLFM) under then-president Randy Simms, conducted research into the levels of service sharing and co-operation among adjacent communities. The impetus for the study was the contention by the provincial government that municipalities would not work together. Among the NLFM's findings: 51 per cent of all municipalities in the province were involved in some sort of service sharing. Even more surprising for the Federation was the number of joint councils that existed unknown to them.

By definition, joint councils are informal, self-created unfunded associations of elected community officials from adjacent communities or communities from the same geographic area, who share information, discuss common concerns and sometimes share services. According to the NLFM's files, there were seven joint councils in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2002. But their research showed there were a total of 17 active joint councils.

The Department of Municipal Affairs is today witnessing a similar trend with a ground swell of popular support for shared services. In fact, as of April 2007, the department had 11 active files representing 47 communities who have approached the department looking to merge or regionalize services to a greater or lesser extent.

The question becomes: "What brought about this positive shift in the attitude towards shared regional services?" Just over a decade ago, attempts to drive the process from the top down contributed to the defeat of the provincial Liberals. And now communities are turning to government to access expertise for regionalizing their services.

The opinion of community representatives within the municipal sector is that the discovery of common interests and concerns among representatives of various communities has been key to the shift towards a positive attitude towards sharing services and even to amalgamation. More on this in the next section.

There seems to be no question within the sector that the attempts to impose amalgamation were a setback, the implications of which are still felt today. There are those within the sector who believe the process of regionalized services is at least a decade behind where it should be, largely as a result of amalgamation efforts in the1990s. Others believe the process is much further ahead but, because the amalgamation issue has become so politically sensitized, it has to be managed very carefully to ensure that initiatives to encourage shared services do not become a political football.

One area where this is particularly prevalent today is with regard to the Local Service Districts (LSDs) and their merger with regional municipalities. Eleven per

cent of the population lives in LSDs and unincorporated areas. Municipalities are clamouring to expand their boundaries to take in these unincorporated communities that they perceive as getting services, such as snow clearing, for free. Those citizens also have equal access to public/municipal facilities in incorporated towns. On the other hand, despite the convincing case of the municipalities, the citizens in LSDs appear not to want such mergers. Therefore, MHAs with a large number of constituents in LSDs, and who want to be re-elected, are reluctant to pursue such mergers.

5.2.2 Through the Back Door

Those sensitivities, undoubtedly, inform the Department of Municipal Affairs' support for regionalization initiatives. Provincial funding for infrastructure support and solid waste management encourages communities to approach the department as a group. And municipal governments recognize this preference.

The formation of the Community Cooperative Resource Centre (CCRC) within the NLFM, and its support by government, underscore the broad commitment to this approach. The mandate of the CCRC is to research the state of the municipal sector, to promote regionalization in various regions by making it easier for the municipalities to work together, and to encourage greater regional co-operation as a means of making municipal governments more economically viable. In May of 2006, Minister Jack Byrne in the lead up to the NLFM symposium, announced $75,000 annually to help support the CCRC. In the words of Minister Byrne, at the time the new funds were announced, the CCRC has "undertaken many worthwhile endeavours including municipal planning and sustainability; formalizing regional co-operation; and understanding and acting on the needs of ever-changing municipalities province-wide." Is this amalgamation?

The CCRC is seen as implementing regionalization of services from the bottom up. In the first two months of 2007 they had requests from four municipal clusters to help facilitate a local process of regionalization. The Labrador Straits region from Red Bay to L'Anse au Clair is a good example. The six communities in that region are looking to come together with a joint council to work on issues including waste management, economic development and lobbying.

However there are those who still question how "bottom up" the process really is. For example, once the provincial government opens a file for a community cluster, it is the government that issues a tender call and hires a consultant for the feasibility study. Under the direction of the department, the consultant analyzes the situation and delivers a report... to the minister. The joint councils for the communities are the clients but they are not actively involved in or control the process.

Notwithstanding the case for expert input in the development of a feasibility plan, there is an opinion that this approach to regionalization should change. One model

proposed is aimed at fostering local expertise and engaging the council members as active players in the development of the plan. In this model the CCRC, for example, would deliver a series of workshops to the councillors. They would work through the issues and do the analysis. Then, instead of a consultant saying: "Here's what you should do," the council would agree on what they think they should do, and communicate those recommendations to the citizens.

The stakeholders pointed out that the rationale for this new approach, at least in part, is that it recognizes a very real problem in the municipal and regional government process: often when plans are introduced the community is relatively quiet. But when the changes are implemented the unanticipated problems emerge and begin to affect the everyday life of citizens. But, by changing the process so that the councils have time to work through the objections, meeting several times and debating the issues, they can build a firm ground-up consensus. They are then better able to communicate the reasons behind decisions and to promote the long-term benefits. Stakeholders believe this may help rebuild credibility of municipal government.

The results of the last municipal elections suggest that among the problems faced by municipal governments is a lack of credibility, not only with the voters but also with those who would be leaders. Out of 283 municipalities in the last election 136 of them didn't even hold elections because they did not have a full slate of people standing for council. And 15 of that 136 had no one step forward for council. Stakeholders believed that many serving on councils today see their role as just one more volunteer position.

While the provincial government has found a relatively nonpolitical way to encourage these mergers, it has also contributed to the fiscal challenges for the expansion and development of municipalities. For example, the municipal operating grant has shrunk from a high of $53 million in the mid-1990s to $16 million in 2007.

The lack of co-ordination between other government departments and municipal governments also has negative impacts. For example, the provincial regulations for cabin development in areas just outside municipal boundaries do not prevent substandard, haphazard construction. In the view of stakeholders it is far more expensive for municipalities who take over these areas to introduce services after the fact, than it would be if the provincial government worked with adjacent municipalities, before approving any construction, to control development with municipally acceptable standards.

5.2.3 Trading Perceived Power For Real Strength

There is unanimous agreement among the leaders interviewed within and outside government, that the Regional Economic Development Boards helped community leaders see the wisdom of mergers and shared services. This process really began to gather momentum in 1996, after the zonal boards brought people together in a

forum where they could discover shared concerns and see that their economic health was interdependent. While controversial issues such as amalgamation could not be broached formally at the board table, the board members now had shared concerns that allowed them to discuss the hot issues "at side tables."

There is, among the long-time volunteers, and among those town councils seeking to improve services in a fiscally responsible manner, recognition that the perceived strength of individual communities, at least in today's environment, is a myth. Real power, when it comes to accessing funding and to making real changes lies not in the status quo, but in finding ways to share services and to make decisions across boundaries. "What is good for the region may also be good for the community," giving access to expertise in areas such as town planning and human resource management, and lending a more convincing voice to discussions with other levels of government.

Another spin-off benefit of the REDBs is a broadening recognition that economic development and municipal government need a much closer working relationship. One of the major recommendations of a recent ministerial committee report on the Regional Economic Development Boards was that municipalities must be more involved with economic development. The report recommended a maximum board of 14 seats with five of those filled by municipal or Local Service District representatives.

The final issue that needs to be considered in the current status of regionalization within the municipal government sector is the Rural Secretariat and the implications of the nine RS regions and the respective regional councils. While government sources express confidence in the new division and its new approach to regionalization, there is more suspicion than confidence outside government where for the most part the RS regions are seen as "too big and too neat" to really show what is happening at the ground level in the regions. According to some interviewees, a significant number of the RS's regional councillors believe they have been "sent up in a trial balloon for government" and that government is really not interested in seeking regional input.

There is at every level a degree of willingness to reconsider the REDBs and the municipalities of the regions, to see if, given the current realities of the demographics, the growing regional awareness and economic activity of the province, there might be a better way to organize the regions for sustainable growth and development.

6 Regionalization in Education

6.1 Summary: Tomblin Report on Education

While the province's education system model has undergone reform since confederation, the population has a high rate of illiteracy and a high drop-out rate.[1] Reform has been driven by the forces of secularization and economics. But closure and consolidation of primary and secondary schools in rural and remote areas of the province are seen by those living in the regions as attacks on a way of life, not an effort to improve the quality of education. Policy conflicts arise over the difficulties of bridging the urban-rural divide. None[2] of the reforms have occurred within a model that considers the educational, social and economic impacts on a community caused by closing the community school

6.2 Stakeholders' Views on Regionalization of Education

The following section presents a synopsis, cross-reference and interpretation of comments from senior level stakeholders in the education sector. It does not represent the opinion of any single stakeholder and should not be read as such. This section is an extrapolation of the current status of the education sector based on a reading of the Tomblin Report, the interviews, the feedback at the follow-up workshop and subsequent analysis of all the materials, looking for common themes, for contradictions, for gaps and for other significant points arising. The discussion is centred on primary and secondary education.

The reader should note that research for this report was confined to interviews and therefore, each statement of fact represents the contention of one or more of the interviewees/stakeholders. And in some cases such contentions may be questioned by one or more of the other interviewees/stakeholders. Any objections expressed explicitly during the research process are noted. However, any conclusions drawn, unless otherwise stated, are based on the author's interpretation of the stakeholder's contentions.

---

[1] It was noted by stakeholders that the facts on these rates should be checked. Illiteracy and dropout rates are high in some regions of the province and low in other areas. Stakeholders suggest that as of fall 2007, the drop out rate is less than 10 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador which they maintain is better than in many other provinces of Canada.

[2] This is disputed by stakeholders who maintain that many of the reforms did in fact occur within a model that considers the educational, social and economic impacts on a community caused by closing the community school

6.2.1 Drivers for Change

The stakeholders for education made a convincing case that the changes in this sector—that is the primary and secondary school system—are more indicative of centralization than regionalization. The overall impact on those people within the sector is a loss of power and control to central and heavily bureaucratic authority, the decisions of which are delivered through highly-politicized school boards.

The primary drivers for change from the traditional system include:

> ➢ The secularization of the denominational system;
> ➢ The introduction and fastidious adherence to the mantra of, "Learn to do more with less," (despite evidence that the changes were not achieving predicted cost savings); and
> ➢ Political commitments (without consultation) to change.

One of the questions raised with regard to the changes was: "Did there actually exist, within the system, at the time of transition from denominational boards to secular boards, the expertise to actually build and manage the new school system?" The point being, the majority of administrators, and indeed teachers, had developed their skills within the denominational system. Perhaps it was not enough to assume that a secular system could be built on the bones of the old denominational system.

The current primary and secondary system, from the description of stakeholders, seems to exist in a state of siege, with a pervasive silo mentality, not only for the sector as a whole, but also within the sector, where boards, divisions within those boards and indeed divisions within the government department are resistant to collaborative change or to co-operation.

There is among certain stakeholders, a bitterness and sense of betrayal that goes far beyond that encountered in any of the other sectors (with the exception of certain interests within economic development). This alienation is attributed to the massive changes to the system in less than two decades: going from 22 denominational school boards to a secular system of ten and most recently to five including the francophone school board. According to the stakeholders the most recent change was implemented without consultation. To quote one stakeholder, "It is almost as if people have the attitude, 'How much more can I give and still have enough pieces to hold it together?'"

6.2.2 Myths, Realities and Opportunities

In his presentation one of the interviewees reckoned that for reform to really take advantage of opportunities in education it is necessary to separate myths from reality. Among the myths that have taken education to where it is today is the belief that big is better when it comes to school boards. And related to this is the

myth that more efficient equals more effective—particularly when the end product is a quality education. Also the belief that it is possible to downsize to prosperity is as much of a myth as saying that it's possible to do more with less.

The reality of education in Newfoundland and Labrador today is that the province has for some time been in an era of fiscal restraint that is governed from the top down. During this era there has been a dramatic loss of professional capacity in the boards and in the communities where those professionals once lived and volunteered. And while rationalization makes sense on paper it is not always the best model for an education system.

Given the current realities of the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador there are several actions or opportunities that can begin to help bring the system back on course. A new model of governance is essential to establish a more equitable balance between board size and level of professionalization within the system. And, that rehiring and placement of professionals is just one part of the process to adequately resource the system so that educators can begin to do more with more. But by far the most essential part of that process is to re-engage and involve the community, not just in the school concerts and on parent-teacher night, but to re-engage people in ensuring that the schools and school boards and district offices, and the people who work there, represent values of that community, that they support the community and its social infrastructure, and that they do this is a way that says we are in this for the long term, what we do in our schools matters and ultimately does as much as anything else to contribute to the sustainability of their community, of that region and of this province.

6.2.3 The Cost of Merging

> *"When regionalization began in 1996, it was done under the pretext that it would make things better. In the ten years since then I have not spoken to one person who believes things are better. Not one teacher. Not one parent. Not one member of the administration. Not one board member. Not a secretary and not a janitor. Not one of them says things are better now. They all say that the education system is worse now than before amalgamation began."*

"Learn to do more with less," was the often- repeated mantra during the secularization of the education system as the provincial government struggled to bring down the educational costs in the face of dramatic changes in school governance and in population shifts. The primary areas of change over the past decade include secularization, human resource allocation and infrastructure management.

The urban/rural divide, as referenced in the Tomblin Report, at least in the short term, favours rural areas <u>in some respects</u>. The rural schools are, generally, in better condition and less crowded than those in St. John's. For example there was a suggestion that the new school under construction in Mobile will have more classrooms then can be justified by current population projections but this was questioned by others. Stakeholders maintain that urban schools, particularly on the Avalon, are overcrowded and in disrepair. Because of the small class sizes in many rural areas, the number of teaching units allocated has also tended to favour the rural areas at the expense of the urban areas.

But there is one area where changes in the primary and secondary education sector have negatively impacted rural areas. Cuts to school board and district offices and the subsequent outmigration of the displaced personnel eliminated valuable human resources from rural communities. A school board office in St. John's is much less significant to the local infrastructure than a similar board in Gander, Bay Robert's, or Flowers Cove. As one interviewee put it: "None of the reforms have been undertaken in an environmental model that considers the educational, social and economic impacts on a community caused by closing the local school or the district office."

Stakeholders contend that in the previous regional school board configurations, the school board personnel—both administrative and professional—were part of the social fabric of the community providing leadership and creative energy as volunteers contributing to other sectors including tourism, economic development, health, as well as education. For example, in Conception Bay North, it was school board staff who led the initiative to building the Business Development Partnership to take advantage of broadband fibre optics. They worked with Mariner Resource Opportunities Network to access $30,000 in funding to get the project in place. With the amalgamation and closure of board

and district offices these volunteers and their development experience is lost to the community.

"Once you lose those people, who replaces them? How can you replace them? And without them how do you expect a community to grow? Rural Newfoundland and Labrador is the loser in regionalization."

Within the education sector there are currently too many bureaucratic levels and the whole sector is due for a cultural shift, if the existing hegemony is to be overturned. The school councils as they are now composed have an opportunity to make changes but they must work with educational administrators who, according to stakeholders, currently function in a climate of misunderstanding. Currently boards and council members get no training on how policy decisions are made and how they can be shaped during development. What are the boards' responsibilities on this? What is the responsibility of the department? That has not been decided. For example, a senior education commission made a presentation to cabinet without a clear understanding of how the cabinet approval process works.

The irony, according to some stakeholders, is that the primary drivers behind the collapse of the 10 boards into five—salary reductions and other savings due to eliminating redundancies—have not been realized. And no one, these stakeholders maintain, seems to have a handle on what has happened to the travel costs as a result of board staff and teachers now having to travel more often and farther for work related meetings. Those within the sector believe those costs have gone up.
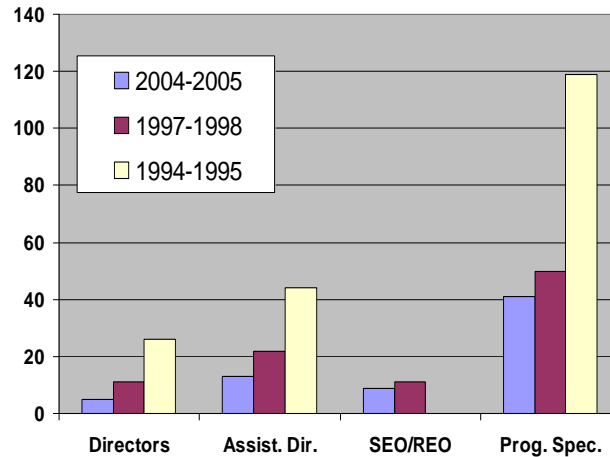
District Office Administration

Figure 1 - Changes in Regional School District Administrative staffing.

6.2.4 Has anything gone right

In an education system that is close to 200 years old, most stakeholders acknowledge that these changes are all relatively new and must be given time for their efficacy to be properly assessed. There may be other opportunities for cost savings over the long term. It is inevitable that small rural schools will lose resources—though most likely not in an election year. The changes could impact infrastructure in rural communities in three ways:

1. Integrating schools in a new way as a partner in community life—looking at ways to integrate a range of services into the physical structure such as a community library, child welfare, early learning, partnering with other health and community service deliverers, etc. The school in Mobile for instance with the extra new classrooms could look at centering other community services, such as speech pathology, in the building.
2. Integrating electronic educational services on an ongoing basis so that there is a potential to deliver effective educational and support services even where there is no educational infrastructure in the community.
3. Removing cross-sectoral redundancies, with co-operative initiatives to offer services, such as speech pathology, which is managed by both the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Community Services.

Among the positive developments is the recognition that one size does not fit all. For example, the Labrador School Board has an earlier start to the school year so that they can bring in the new teachers and train them for the remote school experience. Some stakeholders contend that the reduced numbers of CEOs and senior staff makes implementation of policy more consistent and there is by some accounts more sharing of knowledge and resources. However it should be noted that there are no examples provided for this contention and it was in fact questioned by others among the stakeholder group.

7   Analysis of Stakeholder Input

Each interviewee/stakeholder was asked to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of regionalization for their respective sectors. The following represents a merged synopsis of the views and opinions expressed.

Again, as in the above sections, all opinions and facts presented are those of the respective stakeholders and not the opinion of the author unless expressly identified.

7.1   Strengths and Weaknesses of Regionalization

There were several common issues related to regionalization in all four sectors that emerged in the interviews with stakeholders. These can, for the sake of discussion, be grouped under three major headings including human resource issues, fiscal issues, and policy issues. Each of these issues could be further subdivided into strengths and weaknesses of the current regionalization initiatives.

7.1.1 Strengths and Weaknesses in Human Resource Issues

7.1.1.1 Strengths in Human Resources

One of the most touted strengths of regionalization is the sense of larger community and common purpose that it can foster. "People begin to realize that what is good for the region is also good for the community." Once this begins to happen it appears to quickly dispel the myth of identity loss—old rivalries begin to break down. And even those communities outside the newly created entity can appreciate the benefits enough to seek a merger (as in the case of Catalina seeking—after the fact—to join in the amalgamated community of Trinity Bay North).

Regionalization, in most sectors, involves public consultation, a process that encourages citizens to take ownership of the process and of the results. In rural areas of the province, where outmigration and volunteer burn-out are very real, regionalization means that redundancies in community committees and volunteer groups is eliminated as regional bodies are set up. They can attract and build strong community volunteer leadership from a shrinking pool and foster knowledge and resources sharing.

Within the merged region, individual communities can focus more resources on delivering fewer, but more, high-quality services to residents of the region, with better planning and the most qualified staff available.

7.1.1.2 **Weaknesses in Human Resources**

Perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of regionalization is also one of its strengths: public consultation. How deep do you drill down when seeking public input? Do you deal with just the leaders? And, if so, from which groups? Do you go deeper than just the leaders? Do you throw it open to the public? That creates its own issues.

There is a general skepticism among the stakeholders that unless there is an issue where single interest groups can show up and wave placards it is difficult to mobilize citizen engagement. And where citizens become engaged it is often the "Open-line syndrome," where people with little or no training or education in the sector are the most vocal and it is those misinformed opinions that often herd public debate over the nearest cliff.

Despite the fact that misinformation of citizens is so ubiquitous, only one of the four sectors has a planned approach for raising public awareness on the benefits of regionalization. The one positive case is the NLFM's Community Cooperation Resource Centre or CCRC. Since 2003, it has been supporting "regional co-operation through education, advisory, facilitation, policy analysis, and development services".

The geographic size of the region can also have a negative influence on public debate due to the difficulties of bringing all the stakeholders together.

Of course not all the issues are at the community or regional level. There are weaknesses too inside the bureaucracy of the four sectors. Many of these centre on human resource management.

For example, the creation of regional governing bodies or boards comes with its own set of challenges including deciding how the representatives are selected and managing the political tensions at that level. (More on this below.)

At the employee level there is the challenge of facilitating cultural shift within the sector, for example the shift in the health care sector from acute care to primary health care. And even as this shift is occurring there is loss of professional pride and deflated sense of common purpose among members of a sector as, for example, when school board offices are merged.

These mergers also have a weakness that will emerge over the longer-term. As redundancies are created through mergers mid- and senior-level management and staff are displaced. They often leave the region or even the province and thus succession planning is impeded due to this loss of experienced managers.

As with the citizens, geography can also exert a negative influence on professionals within the region. Larger distances can limit professional development and debate and drive up costs for travel and communication.

Another weakness in regionalization in Newfoundland and Labrador is a lack of a means and the expertise to communicate good practice across geographic and professional boundaries. And while some sectors have a greater ability than others to communicate at some levels, this is very uneven and generally unreliable.

7.1.2 Strengths and Weaknesses in Fiscal Issues

7.1.2.1 Fiscal Strengths

Governments are more likely to respond to requests from clusters of communities, or regionally-representative groups than they are to respond to a request from a single community. This gives merged communities bargaining power and a greater likelihood of accessing funding to meet the expectations of citizens on a regional level.

7.1.2.2 Fiscal Weaknesses

There is no high water mark to determine how much is enough when investing in regionalization. Part of the problem is determining what one is getting for the investment. How do you measure stronger entrepreneurial skills? What is the best way to quantify greater literacy skills? How is improved community health to be demonstrated in the short-term? How do you demonstrate that a sector like health is actually saving money when there are so many variables?

And, if you cannot tell whether an approach is succeeding or failing, how can you develop a system that recognizes successes and discourages failure? As one interviewee put it the system is weakened by the "lack of a reward/punish mechanism for performance."

The merger of existing services and the subsequent closure of community centres, such as school district offices, often cause a loss of community leaders as the displaced professionals leave the community for other employment.

And, while regionalization allows for economies of scale, there may be a lack of expertise in the region for purchasing goods and services on a larger scale. So, although not insurmountable, there are challenges for regional service managers who must negotiate and oversee larger contracts than they may have at the community level.

7.1.3 Strengths and Weaknesses in Policy Issues

7.1.3.1 Policy Strengths

Regionalization is viewed from the centre as a way to exert greater control and standardize service delivery, creating greater consistency and faster implementation throughout the province.

From the regional perspective, communities have more weight as a group to influence other government policy development. They also have more momentum to overcome policy barriers to regional needs. This was frequently referred to during the interviews as "accommodating the reality that one size does not fit all." For example, as referenced above, in Labrador the teachers' school year starts earlier than in other regions of the province.

Regional services can be structured to foster existing community growth centres and reinforce sustainability by recognizing people's social and economic realities. For example, if the people of Eastport choose to go to Gander rather than Clarenville for their services, then the regional model can reflect this by ensuring that any regional division would include Eastport in the same region that includes Gander.

Even though municipal amalgamation was probably the right thing to do in the early 90s, the impetus did not come from the grassroots and it did not succeed. The subsequent regionalization of economic development encouraged citizens at the regional level and gave them the right forum to discover the benefits of mergers and shared services.

Regionalization, when implemented so that there is regional buy-in, has the additional strength of encouraging effective regional/strategic planning. This of course assumes that the support and expertise to develop and implement such planning exists or can be acquired by the region.

7.1.3.2 Policy Weaknesses

One of the greatest challenges for a board in a large region is to be relevant and to identify common concerns and provide community sensitive solutions. For example the Eastern School District Board has to identify and solve common concerns for communities as diverse and unrelated as St. Shotts and St. John's.

Once a board or other body has been appointed, elected or otherwise selected as the regional body, they are mandated with responsibility for a range of issues and held accountable for the success or failure. Yet on issues of funding and policy development, government retains all the control. In fact, politics and government policies can hinder locally-driven regionalization. For example, the negative connotations, with regard to re-election, surrounding

the concept of amalgamation has so hindered policy development in that area that even as communities begin to clamour for support in the merging of local services, the provincial government—at least on the surface—appears to be dragging its feet. And, the province is "ten years behind the rest of Canada" in municipal amalgamation.

Once shared services have been developed, there is competition to access those services. For example, once a cluster of communities has combined to share the costs of snow clearing, which community gets cleared first? This in turn leads to the possibility for strong communities to dominate weak ones—and that strength may be due to one or a number of factors including but not limited to size, resources, political connections, the experience of community leaders, etc..

Staying with amalgamation [for a moment], it provides the clearest case of resistance to a top-down approach which some consider to be a weakness of regionalization. The point being that those municipalities created through mergers initiated by government in the 1990s are now considered to be among the most sustainable communities in the province.

Another weakness, at least from the central perspective, is that policy interpretation varies from region to region, and from board to board within a region, over time. And, while those inside the provincial government believe there is more cross-sectoral communication than ever before, the picture of government from the outside remains one of "the left hand doesn't know what the right is doing."

One of the most vexing weaknesses of regionalization in terms of policy development, as discussed under human resource weaknesses, is the difficulty in engaging the public in meaningful discussions to move forward. Public consultation is a cornerstone of the process, yet a lack of educational initiatives and persistent misconceptions confound advances in all sectors. The work of the CCRC and the Harris Centre, in its regional forums, were the exceptions to this general rule.

7.2 How do you draw the line?

The interviews on regionalization included the sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit understanding that regionalization is one tool among any number that might be applied more or less effectively to manage the particular set of challenges faced by those citizens of the province who wish to maintain or build sustainable communities and regions—and by extension, a sustainable province—where they and subsequent generations can and will prosper.

However, what proved elusive was agreement on just where or how to draw the regional lines to achieve that goal. Should they be rigid in their definition of territory? Should the lines be fluid and ever shifting? And, how would that work? Should all four sectors be defined by the same geographic boundaries? Or is the overlapping patchwork that exists today the best way forward? What is the right number of regions? How big is too big? How much regional autonomy ought they to have? How much responsibility and how much accountability? How are the members of the governing body to be selected?

And, with changing communications technology and transportation, is it time to begin thinking about virtual regions based on common interests that go beyond simple adjacency? For example, communities with strengths in one of the new opportunities identified by the Economic Recovery Commission of the 1990s might work together as a virtual region (those strengths include: innovative technologies, information industries, manufacturing, health services and products, aquaculture, adventure tourism, and secondary food processing).

The maturation of regional development may need to include models that incorporate the other sectors and make allowances for sub-regions. As part of this maturation process some stakeholders believe that the consultation process need only involve community leaders. Other stakeholders held that the entire community must be consulted.

7.2.1 Number of Regions

The 20 regional economic zones were introduced to supersede the 59 Rural Development Associations, as the primary engine of economic development in the mid 1990s. The plan was for the zones to pursue a more professional and business-like approach to rural economic development, one aimed at establishing viable enterprises that would operate independent of government support in the long term.

Stakeholders observed that, while the zones' focus, seen in this light, was mainly economic, their Regional Economic Development Boards helped to foster a climate of co-operation across a number of sectors. They brought people from disparate groups together over shared concerns. However, there are stakeholders at senior levels who now question the continued efficacy of

an economically focused regional development agency. They observe that in the past decade, the fallout from the ground fish crises, the demographic changes, and the decline in federal transfers demand a re-examination of regional thinking. Is the regional model successful? Should the same number of regions be retained? Should there be more than twenty? Should there be less?

In health and education, according to stakeholders, the development of regions has been less about fostering independence and more about finding ways to cut costs and still deliver an acceptable level of service to citizens. The health care system seems to be on a path towards some success in the regionalization of services but the jury is still out. Education seems to have been stretched beyond the breaking point in a top-down reconfiguration that does not fit entirely within the definition of regionalization.

Certainly, mergers mean fewer regional entities to manage and fewer groups with whom each group must work to ensure the consistent implementation of policy and programs. But if the sectors are to truly be integrated into the regions they serve, surely there must also be cross-sectoral co-ordination. How is this to be developed, implemented and managed?

7.2.2 Size of Regions

Is the Rural Secretariat's "Wal-Mart" approach with larger regions better suited to new realities? If they are, the council and other stakeholders must overcome logistical challenges to fully understand, rationalize, and communicate the needs of the many communities, and to respond with meaningful policy and program development across all sectors.

Regional economic zones have proven to be a better size to give government a clear view of what is happening on the ground. But, as one stakeholder put it, "government doesn't always like what the REDBs are telling them."

Continuing waves of consolidation in size and number of health and education regions make the impact difficult to assess. Stakeholders maintain that, unless there is some way to remove these sectors from the vicarious changes related to political expediency, that situation is unlikely to change.

7.2.3 Function of Regions

When considering a region from the perspective of economic development the ultimate objective is clear: sustainability. This might also be said to hold true for municipal government too, except equal access to comparable services also figures in the picture here. And, from the stakeholder's point of view, the equal access to services is the primary consideration for regionalized health care and educational services… always with the *caveat* that one size does not fit all.

But how much autonomy and accountability should these regions have to be truly regionalized and not just a decentralized delivery tool for the central authority? And, how do we know when they are functioning properly?

Stakeholders proposed that the simplest answer is "when communities within a region, whatever the size, begin to take the lead in developing shared regional services, services that are a direct and appropriate response to the unique strengths and long-term needs of the region, then the region is functioning as it should regardless of the overarching model of regional development." For example, according to one interviewee, a measure of the success of the REDBs as a functioning model for regional development is "the marked increase in the number of aggressive and appropriate regionally-based initiatives" by local entrepreneurs.

7.2.4 Regional Governance

According to one interviewee with a great deal of experience in regional boards and other senior volunteer groups, governing board members include three types of people: altruistic, single issue lobbyists, and the politically ambitious. The mix of these types on any board impacts the ability of that group to fulfil its mandate. In addition, the method for selecting these regional representatives—by election or by appointment—impacts the group's credibility and effectiveness and the issues and their priority that they tackle during their time in office.

Another question that impacts both elected and appointed boards of volunteers is the level of training or education that they ought to receive or have access to as a result of taking a seat at the table of a regional governing body for any sector. And, in light of the desire to foster cross-sectoral linkages, the question also arises, "How much of that training ought to bring in cross-sectoral challenges and opportunities?"

7.2.4.1 Elected Governance of Regions

For elected officials there is also another issue to be considered and it relates particularly to joint municipal councils. Over time, elected councillors who work within the joint council framework discover common concerns with adjacent communities and become more amenable to the idea that "what makes sense for the region makes sense for the community". This helps advance shared service initiatives. But with each municipal election, "a slate of new councillors, many adhering to more traditional views of protecting the community identity, have to be introduced and acclimatized to the regional approach."

How much responsibility for decisions and outcomes actually rests in the hands of the elected members in the various sectors, particularly in education and health, when the purse strings and the power are retained by the provincial government? And, subsequently how accountable should these elected officials be?

One fact that renders regional sector elections less relevant is the general apathy among citizens. Ultimately, in a democratic system it is the citizens themselves that must take responsibility for voting. But, the question has been asked, "How much responsibility falls to government and leaders in the sector to promote and encourage people to participate?" The lack of people standing for council positions, and the low voter turnout at municipal and school board elections seem indicative of a deep disenfranchisement.

7.2.4.2 Appointed Governance of Regions

There was at least one argument presented by an interviewee on why, in some instances, electing members to a sector's regional board may actually be counter-production. The example given was in health care in British Columbia where one health authority trustee was elected as a single issue candidate and brought that prejudice to the board table, hijacking much of the board time debating that issue at the expense of the other concerns of the voting citizens and the diverse range of issues facing the board.

When board members are appointed the question becomes one of "Who do they actually represent? Who are her or his constituents - the appointing body; the people of the region they were chosen to represent?" And, what factors—other than representing the interest of the region's citizens—might influence her or his work on the board? How engaged are they individually and as a group in finding solutions that work for the region? Interviewees in several sectors pondered whether there ought to be clearly defined rewards or recognition appropriate to encouraging full engagement of appointees.

Then there is the case of the board of boards: in particular the REDBs. While each of their members may have been duly elected to their respective bodies, they are either appointed or elected to serve on the REDB by their special interest group. So the people at the board table are selected representatives from other interest groups. This is not to call into question the efficacy of the REDBs since they have been a cornerstone of most of the positive developments in regionalization since they were established.

8 Conclusion: Next Steps

In this section is a summary of the way ahead for each policy silo as seen through the eyes of the stakeholders who so generously gave of their time to participate in this process and share their valued insights. These are presented as the opinions of the stakeholders, but they are opinions developed through years of dedicated work as leading volunteers, as community workers, as public servants, and as municipal politicians.

8.1 The Way Ahead in Health Care

There was a strong consensus among stakeholders that the current philosophy of "healthy people, healthy community" which underscores the Primary Health Care model is a reliable vision. However, in order for the system to begin to function at full capacity, long-term stability is essential. "No more waves of change for the next 6-7 years as the system stabilizes and we have an opportunity to evaluate our progress and map out a strategic plan," was the way one stakeholder put it.

Part of that plan must include a comprehensive strategy to ensure that resources are "properly allocated." But for this to be effective, it has to be driven by enhanced planning capabilities for all regions —including standardized planning cycles, tools and processes, none of which are yet completely in place.

There appears to be, within government, a gradual move underway towards seeing themselves as part of the regional team so that they think in terms of "we" and not "they." In addition to corresponding "almost daily by email" the four CEOs and the DM of HCS now hold fortnightly teleconferences where they discuss current and anticipated issues.

Ongoing evaluation and accountability, in a transparent information environment, must come to the fore. It is anticipated that such evaluation will be much easier and accessible under the new legislation for transparency and accountability. Under such increased scrutiny measurable progress will likely become a higher priority.

8.2 The Way Ahead in Economic Development:

No other sector elicits more hand wringing over the right number of regions than economic development. On the one hand there is a convincing argument that the 20 zones have outlived their usefulness with too few returns for a great deal of investment. On there other hand, there is an equally convincing argument that the REDBs, despite being under-supported and out of favour politically, are at the core of a number of positive changes in business and in municipal government.

The argument for fewer regions includes the belief that there are too many regions. "This is a fact of current demographics and capacity compared to what might have seemed logical with the demographics and capacity of 15 years ago. The Zone boards don't reflect the reality of where we are today."

The implication being that the next step is greater consolidation than the current model because "zone boards did not get the job done." There was some suggestion that over the past 10-15 years the system has become institutionalized and "needs to be re-invigorated."

The arguments in favour of the current zonal approach come at the issue with the understanding that there is a continual evolution of people's understanding for and appreciation of the need for co-operation and communication. But committed long-term resources are needed for the zonal boards to do the work. "There is only so much a small, unresourced community can accomplish. There's been no eureka moment? There is not likely to be one." This lack of support in the past is credited with creating the current level of frustration so that there is a lot of "activity for the sake of activity".

The eroding mandate of the REDBs is also cited as an impediment to their success. For example, according to one stakeholder, due to changes in the constitution of the boards made by the current administration, health care and primary and secondary education no longer have a formal place at the table. Interviewees agreed that these players must have a voice on the regional board.

Regardless of the number of regions—whether it is 20 or four or some number in between—consensus on boundaries is crucial. "What are the natural regional boundaries based not only on economics and geography, but also on the historic regional preferences of people."

That means citizens in each the region need to understand the dynamics of what is happening in every sector, the implications for their region, and how best to move ahead in light of those facts. That means the boards and government have to do a better job of reaching citizens in more and varied organizations including those not usually included in the discussions (church groups and school groups for example) and in ensuring that they have the information necessary to participate

in an informed and strategic discussion of the relevant issues from the regional perspective.

There was no explicit agreement on how that ought to be done but implicit in the discussion was the fact that discussions need to be locally-driven with consultative engagement at the community level. This process, guided by living documents, ought to be aimed at planning how the communities and the citizens and the other stakeholders will work together. This needs to be backed up with the committed resources to help create and realize the regional vision. Provincial bureaucrats appear, largely, to agree with this principle but the politicians need to be on side as well.

8.3 The Way Ahead in Municipal Government

> *"The next step is to find a way to get people in LSDs to buy into the process of regionalization and get them to understand that, in the long term, unregulated development is more expensive—will cost more—than planned development."*

Sustainable communities are the key issue right now. There are approximately 282 municipalities in the province and many LSDs. How many are sustainable as they are? How many are sustainable under some other model? The question that needs to be answered according to many of the stakeholders is: "What constitutes a sustainable community?" One community may not be sustainable on its own but together as a cluster—whether that is amalgamated or merged under some other model—the communities may be sustainable.

Stakeholders in this sector are convinced that the provincial government needs to more actively encourage service sharing to support sustainable services that single municipalities can't provide on their own. This support should help reduce the costs of those services that are currently delivered by single municipalities or to divert those resources to fewer services so that the municipalities can deliver them with greater quality to more citizens in a shared services structure. This is happening now but will only go so far without good management. The expertise needs to be fostered and supported not only for establishing the new shared service structure, but also for deciding on how best to arrange governance of those shared services.

As mentioned above (Section 5.2.3), economic development and municipal government need a much closer working relationship. Interviewees were in general agreement that a good first step would be to follow the recommendations of the ministerial committee report that a minimum of five out of the 14 REDB seats in each zone are filled by municipal or LSD representatives.

To that end the provincial government needs to work with the NLFM and the REDBs to manage regionalization and allow municipalities to form new regional entities as they find a way to bring communities into clusters that create sustainability.

At the bureaucratic level the current government department seems to be aligning its services to support this development. Of the four goals in the Department of Municipal Affairs' strategic plan, two goals deal with the potential for regionalization.

One of the plan's goals is to pilot a Regional Service Board (RSB) on the Great Northern Peninsula. The department is in discussion with the communities to look at services best provided at the regional level that improve the type and quality of services. Currently they are looking at developing a shared solid waste

management plan and fire protection service but legislation still needs to be developed.

Under legislation, RSB members are appointed by the minister but in practise the members will be put forward by elected councils. So, if properly managed, the RSBs could become a tool for local government. If they were established across the province, RSBs could help, for example, to support the vision of the 2002 provincial solid waste management plan that identifies three major SWM sites with satellite recycling/ waste management sites.

The second goal of the department's strategic plan that officials believe will support greater sharing of services under the RSBs is a review of municipal co-operation initiatives. It would include an inventory of mechanisms for local services and a listing of the regulatory services that might fall under RSBs (such as land use and permits and approvals for distribution lines).

It is believed that regional servicing options can only be successful if they are built on a strong consensus among participating communities. There is no generic model to apply universally, but "sometimes regional servicing makes sense." Before the best servicing options can be developed, answers will be needed to essential questions like, "What mechanisms are in place if a local government cannot sustain itself financially, or cannot raise the volunteers it needs?" The objective of this initiative is to find out from communities what policies and programs the provincial government can provide for them to choose from in the event communities are faced with such difficulties. Then, based on feedback they will get any required legislation passed or have the appropriate policies put in place.

This goal is a difficult one to pursue because the department cannot be seen as anything more than a supporter. For communities to initiate a merger process, it has to be seen as grassroots. So, the department's position must remain one of providing the information for communities to develop this process while being careful not to raise any flags about forced options.

However, residues of paternalism persist in new policies as for example in the example mentioned above (Section 5.2.2) with regard to the way feasibility studies for community clusters are managed by the department where joint councils are the clients but are not actively involved in the feasibility study process. This needs to be re-examined and a new approach developed that makes the joint councils lead players in the feasibility studies.

8.4 The Way Ahead in Education

Regionalization is a long-term process, not a quick fix. As one interviewee put it: "Having borrowed from education for the past 40 years to build roads and other infrastructure, at the expense of every aspect of education, the province now needs to make systemic change and commit huge resources to upgrade this decrepit system."

There is general agreement among stakeholders that the education system as it is currently is worse, not better, than it was under the 10-board system. It was the opinion of one stakeholder that, due to the "oil money" many now believe that the potential for growth in education is high and that "the expectations of everyone at this point in time are very high." Measurable indicators of improvement would include:

- ➢ Students who are better off—resources, teacher/student ratios;
- ➢ Teachers who are better off—teaching resources, teacher/student ratios, support for teaching;
- ➢ District staff who are better off—manageable work load and better working conditions; and
- ➢ Administration and maintenance staff who are better off—fair work load, better working conditions.

However any improvements, at least in the short term, will have to be made within the existing structure, as any change to the latest re-configuration of school boards is unlikely, under the current administration.

But what can begin now is renewed dialogue among all the stakeholders. Among the people who must be consulted are directors, board members, school councils, parents and guardians, academics and bureaucrats. To get a clear overview of the current situation the starting point should be "a very frank discussion" inside government, with the board of directors, with staff, and with the school boards. The agenda should include, but not be limited to, the following items:

- ➢ Define clearly what constitutes a region;
- ➢ Set the right number and proper structure of boards;
- ➢ Assess where best to locate facilities;
- ➢ Decide how best to deliver the services and where they should be based;
- ➢ Identify the commonalities—citizens and communities must have similarities (for example, what do Lamaline and St. John's have in common?);
- ➢ Define evolving role of schools in their communities;
- ➢ Envision what the education system will look like in ten years;
- ➢ Create a more equitable distribution of resources (for example, overcrowding in metro area while in the rural areas new schools have too many classrooms); and

➢ Determine how to broaden the physical use of schools (such as community libraries, distance education and certain social services) and deal with the liability issues and financing for the necessary insurance;

Part of this process should include an environmental scan to see what is happening in other jurisdictions, what models of education are succeeding and what models are failing. A search of school district sizes in North America by one of the stakeholders provided proof that district numbers averaged between 8,000 and 15,000. (This matched the provincial student populations under the 10-district model and matches all but the Eastern School Board today. However the latter is three to five times too large based on those numbers).

APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

Interview Questions
These were posed to participants during March and early April
2007

1. **How do you define regionalization within [XXXXX]?**

2. **Is regionalization as you understand it, an effective mechanism for strengthening the delivery of services and improving government response to the needs of the region?**

3. **What have been the impacts of regionalization on [XXXXX]?**

4. **How do you measure the success of regionalization?**

5. **What are the strengths of regionalization?**

6. **What are the weaknesses of regionalization?**

7. **A. Would you agree or disagree with this statement?**
    "To understand how regionalization has been implemented in any given jurisdiction, you should pay close attention to the Political context in which strategies of regionalization have been implemented."

    B. Why (or why not)?

8. **Have you had an opportunity to review the Executive summary of the Tomblin Report?**

    If so, does the report synopsis paint a true picture of the regionalization of [XXXXX]?

9. **On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your awareness of the success of regionalization in the other policy fields?**
    Health Care   X
    Economic Development   X
    Municipal Government   X)
    Education   X
    Are you satisfied with that level of knowledge?

10. **What are the similarities between regionalization in [XXXXX] and in the other three sectors?**

11. **What are the differences between [XXXXX] and the other three sectors?**

12. **What are the next steps for the regionalization of [XXXXX] in NL**

13. **What benefits, if any do you see for citizen participation in regionalization in terms of:**
    a. **Processes for development and implementation**

    b. **Affects on individuals?**

    c. **Outcomes as determined by improved policy decisions?**

14. **What strategies have been implemented to support citizen participation with respect to training and knowledge in [XXXXX]?**

15. **How can tensions be resolved between members of the policy community and lay citizens with respect to knowledge of the policy system and the legitimacy of decisions taken?**

APPENDIX 2

Mapping the various regions, zones and authorities

Figure 2 – Regional Integrated Health Authorities

Newfoundland and Labrador School Districts 2004/5

LABRADOR
Schools 16

Pupils 4,505

Teachers 343.3

1

NOVA CENTRAL
Schools 75

Pupils 14,741

Teachers 1,099.5

WESTERN
Schools 82

Pupils 14,742

Teachers 1,159.1

2

3

4

CONSEIL SCOLAIRE
FRANCOPHONE
Schools 5

Pupils 193

Teachers 31.8

EASTERN

Schools 125

Pupils 45,258

Teachers 3,000.7

Figure 3 - Newfoundland and Labrador School Districts 2004/05

1995

1. **Strategic economic planning**
2. **Coordinating business support**
3. **Supporting communities and organizations**
4. *Coordinating social and economic initiatives*
5. **Public education and participation**

Figure 4 - Economic Zones 1995

Figure 5 - Strategic Social Plan Regions 1998

Figure 6 - Rural Secretariat Regions 2005

Layers of Regionalization
– Multi-level Governance

Municipalities

Economic Sub-Zones
(RDAs, municipal collaboration, EAS)

Economic Zones

Rural Secretariat Regions

SSP Regions

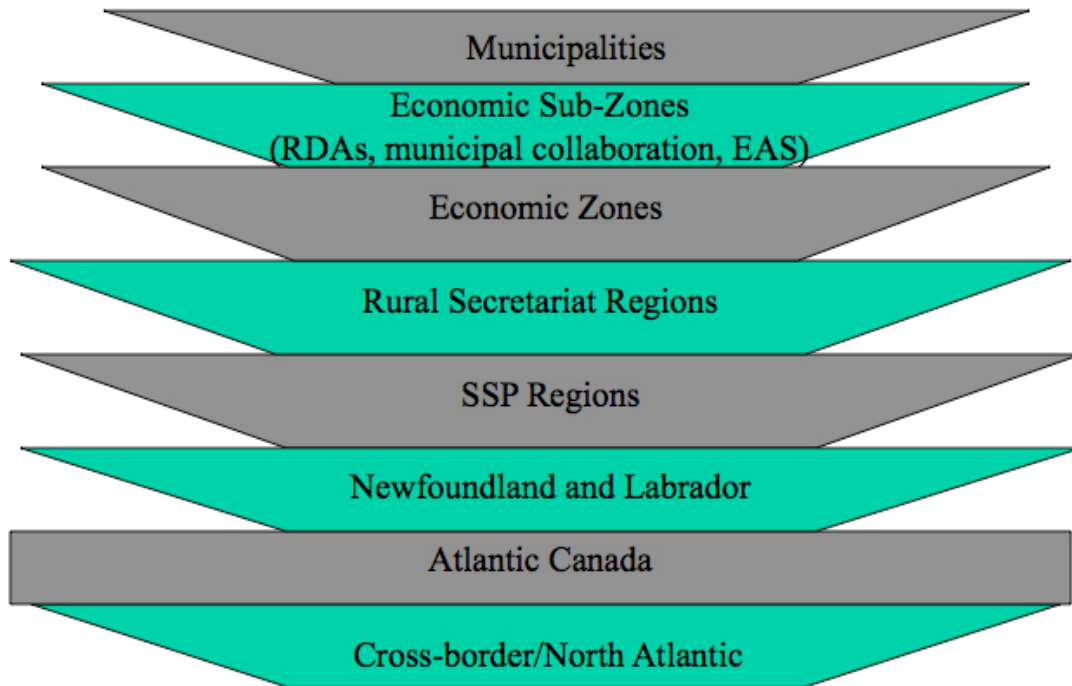Newfoundland and Labrador

Atlantic Canada

Cross-border/North Atlantic

**Figure 7 - Layers of Regionalization in Newfoundland and Labrador,
Kelly Vodden, Geography Department, Memorial University**

THE HARRIS
CENTRE
Memorial University

THE HARRIS CENTRE
Memorial University