British Columbia’s Regional Districts – An Overview

How BC Filled a Gap in the Fabric of Local Governance in the 1960’s
## Topics Covered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Slides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background &amp; history of RD system</td>
<td>(3) - (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The RD system today</td>
<td>(6) - (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study of Columbia Shuswap RD</td>
<td>(10) - (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key observations about the RD system</td>
<td>(12) - (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Regional Districts (1960’s)

- Mountainous terrain, 95% uninhabited
- Linear settlement pattern
- Only 1% municipalized
- 60’s rural pop. ~15-20%
- No county system:
  - 99% of territory under direct Provincial administration
  - Issues in infrastructure and in interlocal & rural services
  - Pressure on Province to fill service gaps, resolve conflicts

**BC Topographic Map**

BC Estimated Pop., July ‘16

| Total: 4.75M | Metro: 3.2M (68%) |
Made in BC – Resolve, Ingenuity, Perseverance

Pre-1950’s:
- 1920’s – joint single-purpose utility boards for Greater Vancouver created
- 30’s-40’s – more joint boards, e.g., libraries, regional parks, planning, etc.
- 1947 – Goldenberg Commission urges more joint services (JE Brown, Secretary)

1950’s:
- 1953 – Metropolitan Toronto (*first 2-tier system in Canada*)
- 1954 – JE Brown appointed Deputy Minister; talks on revising the architecture of the BC local government system start... but **not** following the Toronto model
- 1957 – timid new legislation on rural & metro services (*treated as separate issues*)

1960’s:
- 1960 – Winnipeg Metro created; Ray Committee urges 2-tier for Gr. Van. (*flopped*)
- 1963 – proposal to build “rural counties” on top of school boards (*didn’t fly*)
- 1964 – Brown develops self-organized, multi-purpose, regional federation concept
- 1965 – original legislation for “regional districts” as self-organizing federations
- 1965-68 – 28 RD’s formed voluntarily as “empty vessels”, each with the responsibility for determining its own priorities for service partnerships
- 1970 – Brown retires... after nearly a quarter century working on regionalism
Strategy of Gentle Imposition

Year of Initial Incorporation:
- 1965.............. 6
- 1966.............. 7
- 1967.............. 12
- 1968.............. 3

Regional District System, 2017
### RD System Today

#### Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Range</th>
<th>RD Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1+ million</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 - 400K</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 99K</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 24K</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median pop.</td>
<td>~ 60K</td>
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**Note** – 68% of population resides in 3 largest RD’s

**Note** – the rural (non-municipal) pop.% ranges from 1-100%, with a median value of about 30%

#### Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Range</th>
<th>RD Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;100K km²</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(larger than NL Island)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10K km²</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(larger than Avalon Peninsula)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median area</td>
<td>17K km²</td>
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<tr>
<td>(about 2x Avalon)</td>
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**Note** – only about 5% of total BC land mass is inhabitable, and only about 1% is municipalized
Five Roles of RD’s

Territorial Flexibility

- **Sub-regional scale:**
  1. *Local*... *community services in rural areas*
  2. *Interlocal*... *partnerships connecting town(s) to countryside*

- **Regional scale:**
  3. *Regional*... *capturing scale economies*
  4. *Multi-regional*... *interconnecting regional districts*

Superior Capacity

- **Any scale:**
  5. Contract service provision to members... *public-public partnerships (a different kind of P3)*
How RD Boards Are Composed

Chosen from among all directors

Typical Board

- Board Chair
- Rural Director
- Municipal Director

How Voting Works:
- rep-by-pop
- large cities, multiple directors
- weighted ballots for money votes

RD Boards serve municipalities & non-municipal territory alike

Elected to serve 4-year term

Appointed FROM and BY municipal councils
## How Services Are Organized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Choose service component (all or part of a function)</th>
<th>2. Choose service area</th>
<th>3. Choose service mode</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local / rural</td>
<td>Direct production (all or part of a function)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Rural fire – CSRD</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suburban fire – CSRD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interlocal</td>
<td>Public-public contracting (all or part of a function)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Western – CSRD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suburban transit – CORD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Public-private contracting (all or part of a function)</td>
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<td>Landfill – NRD</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Waste collection – NRD</td>
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<td>Multi-regional</td>
<td>Autonomous entity (all or part of a function)</td>
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<td>Regional parks – Low. Mainland</td>
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<td>9-1-1 services – North Island</td>
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<td>CRHC – CapRD</td>
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**Notes:**
- CSRD: Capital Regional District
- KBRD: Kelowna Community Board
- CapRD: Central Okanagan Regional District
- NRD: North Okanagan Regional District
- CORD: Central Okanagan Regional District
- GVRD: Greater Victoria Regional District
- CRHC: Central Okanagan Regional Health Care
- BVRD: British Columbia Regional District
- BV-EDA: North Okanagan Regional District
- BNRD: Border Regional District
- BV-EDA: North Okanagan Regional District
- CRHC: Central Okanagan Regional Health Care
- BVRD: British Columbia Regional District
- BV-EDA: North Okanagan Regional District
- 9-1-1: Emergency Services

Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD)

CSRD Fast Facts:
- POP: 52K (single corridor)
- RURAL: 39%
- 10-YR GROWTH: 4%
- DOMINANT CITY: none
- AREA: 3x Avalon Peninsula
- LGU’s: 4 urban, 6 rural
- SERVICES: ~95
- BUDGET: about 25% of all spending by local gov’ts
- STAFF: ~50

Municipalities:
- Salmon Arm (18K)
- Sicamous (2.5K)
- Revelstoke (7.3K)
- Golden (3.9K)

Rural: 6 EA’s (20K)
CSRD – Collaboration in a Multi-nodal Rural Region

- **RECREATION** – established consensus:
  - Four cities and their hinterlands
  - Goal: lower costs, better service, fairer cost sharing

- **FIRE SAFETY** – extending the consensus:
  - 13 volunteer departments + 3 town/RD partnership agreements resulting in 95% overall coverage
  - Needs: regional support for prevention, training, etc.
  - Goal: greater integration, NOT consolidation

- **CLEAN WATER** – building a new consensus:
  - Fragmentation of delivery, multiple small purveyors
  - Engineering standards, water quality suspect
  - Goal: consolidation under RD, raise service quality
Ancillary Institutions Are Crucial

- Reliable assessment system is needed:
  - “Who gets” vs “Who pays” is rarely an issue for RD’s – services are financially self-contained
  - A province-wide real property assessment service makes this possible (bcassessment.ca)

- Borrowing & insurance can be problematic:
  - MFABC (*AAA-rated*) pools all debt financing for the local government system in BC (mfa.bc.ca)
  - MIABC provides pooled self-insurance for local governments (miabc.org)
How Integration Reduces Consolidation Pressure

- Solving service issues one-by-one is easier
- First things first – a focus on true service priorities
- Public-public contracting helps small municipal & non-municipal communities stay independent yet effective
- Cooperation tends to reduce interlocal friction
- Cooperation is self-reinforcing – success breeds success
- Cooperation keeps Province from meddling incessantly
Concluding Observations

- RD system is self-organizing and designed for continuous evolution – both critical success factors.

- RD system has greatly reduced transaction costs in creating interlocal service partnerships.

- RD system has enabled professionalization of service delivery – even in small & remote settings.

- We like to say “regions on tap, not on top” – regions are part of the municipal system, not apart from it.

- The provincial role has been critical – BC’s Local Government Department has been facilitative, not directive – but not absent.

- The local government association role has been vital – for instance, UBCM was integral to the founding of MFA + MIABC and to delivery of educational programming (e.g., “RD Toolkit”).

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BCRegionalDistricts
Rural Development through Regionalism?

Findings on the Role of Regional Districts from the Kootenays, BC

Kelly Vodden, PhD, Grenfell Campus Memorial University; Sarah Breen, Selkirk College; Sean Markey, Simon Fraser University and Research Team
Project goals (2011-2017):

• Assess the application and relevance of “new regionalism” in Canada,

• Seek lessons and innovations in regional development; and

• Understand how these are shared across regional development networks.
Methodology

Mixed methods, case study-based

- 5 case study regions
- 5 core themes and indicators
- Document/literature review; 190 semi-structured interviews, 33 in BC (2011-2014); observation
- Coding and pattern searching
- Multiple analytical “passes” with team dialogue and theme + case study region team cross-checking
BC Case Study- Kootenays

Government of British Columbia, n.d.
Some Key Findings on RDs

- Importance/encouragement of regional approach
- Ability to provide services for those who want and are willing to pay (varied arrangements, new and growing demands)
- Flexibility (and complexity)
- Representation: on other regional bodies, rural vs. municipal, community vs. region
- Challenge of appropriate boundaries
Regional Boundaries and Identities
Economic Development

Imagine Kootenay

- 3 Regl Districts+
- Economic opportunity + lifestyle

www.imaginekootenay.com

“Your Better Life”

Branding the Boundary

- Initiative of Boundary Economic Development Committee, formed by Regional District of Kootenay Boundary

http://www.boundarybc.com/discover
Innovation and Environmental Action: Carbon Neutral Kootenays

Planning

• “pre-emptive planning and maintaining the values which the region considers important”

RD Planner

Boundary Area
Agriculture and Food Security Plan
Concluding Remarks

• Power of regions acting in a more coordinated way, particularly when formalized and around key issues and services

• Challenges of identity and identifying and maintaining common self-interests across different communities – strength of the formalized yet flexible Regional District model
This multi-year research initiative is investigating how Canadian regional development has evolved in recent decades and the degree to which New Regionalism has been incorporated into policy and practice. Five key themes are examined: (i) place-based development, (ii) governance, (iii) knowledge and innovation, (iv) rural-urban relationships, and (v) integrated development. The project is funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development.

Website: http://cdnregdev.ruralresilience.ca/

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