



Dirt Roads and Highways: Reforming Municipal Governance and Government in Alberta

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Presentation Goals:

- 1) Examine challenges for rural municipalities and regionalization in Alberta
- 2) Examine shifting policy and strategic landscapes that affect rural municipalities in Alberta
- 3) Explore the democratic, representative and institutional implications of 1 and 2
- 4) Operationalize through the results of a one year project on the implementation the Land Use Framework and its affects on municipal governance in Alberta.



Provincial Context in Alberta: Challenges and Solutions

- Integrated approaches vs. Project-based
- Revised municipal governance ?
 - E.g. Edmonton/Calgary Charters
 - E.g. Penny sales tax – Canada West Foundation
- Land Use Framework (2008 - ?)
- Possibility of amalgamation
- Integration and compliance, planning, implementation, monitoring and enforcement increasingly engage municipalities



Working hypotheses

- There are multiple “democratic deficits” of different forms at play
- Municipal autonomy and individuality are unlikely for all (long-term)
- Evidence of competing (political vs. bureaucratic) rationalities
- May require/prompt functional and structural change for municipal government AND governance



Alberta – the Current State

- 300+ municipalities
- Wide variation in population/size
- Geographically dispersed
 - Eg. Lower Athabasca vs North Saskatchewan
- Variable capacity
- All governed by one MGA – treats municipalities as largely homogeneous
 - Review process 2013-14
- New pressures emerging (eg. LUF)

Land-Use Framework (LUF)

- 7 regions – loosely based on major watersheds
- Plans developed by interdepartmental committee under the Land Use Secretariat
- Secretariat receives recommendations from Regional Advisory Council (RAC)
- All plans must be approved by Cabinet



Source:

<http://www.albertacanada.com/business/statistics/land-use.aspx>



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History of Land-use Planning in Alberta

- 1948 divided Alberta's land into white and green zone.
- 1970s introduced regional planning commissions
- 1980s funding cuts and reduction in regional planning
- 1990s: move from regional planning to market-driven approach



Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA)

- In 2008: creation of the ALSA and LUF
- “Super-legislation” – unites all planning documents
- Shift from project by project planning to coordinated integrated land management
- Increased provincial involvement in land use planning



Regionalized Governance: Pressures

- Provincial Context: (as shown by the Rural Economic Development Action Plan 2014)
 - Business government
 - Empowerment/Regional/Collaborative
- Aligns with the 3 C's: Collaboration, Competition/Capitalism and Capacity Building
- Need to consider (beyond proximate economic goals) what these strategies may cause...

Results: Scenario Planning (Fall 2014)

- Scenario planning is about exploring the future
- Scenario planning does not predict the future
- Scenario planning provides 'clues' for what could be possible drivers of change

Scenario Planning Process

- Scenario planning process was broken down into 4 sessions:
 - 1) Better governance – where do municipalities want to go?
 - 2) What affects municipalities? Proximal and distal causes
 - 3) What are we missing?
 - 4) Trends and Patterns

Scenario Planning Process Results

- Session 1 (ideal): Sustainable, survival, even playing field, growth, high quality of life, uniqueness of rural municipalities.
- Session 2 (causes): legislation, viability, funding, economy, other municipalities
- Session 3 (absent): quality of service, long term planning, definitions of urban/rural
- Session 4 (trends): urbanization, increased downloading, uncertainty, viability reviews



Scenario Planning Results 1

- Two ways to municipal reform:
 1. Highway: accelerated/top down = amalgamation
 2. Dirt road way: slower, incremental/bottom up = collaboration

Scenario Planning Results 2

- Two perspectives/rationalities for municipal reform:
 1. Political: Get ahead of the province, leave history in the past
 2. Administrative: Must be pragmatic, work with what we have

Where does this take us?

- What is the right “unit” for regionalization?
 - Geography?
 - Proximity?
 - Functionality?
 - Sector?
 - All/some/none of the above?



Where does this take us?

- Factors to consider:
 - A) Size and distribution of municipalities
 - B) Facilitators and constraints on collective action and decision-making
 - C) Role for non-governmental stakeholders (governance)

Where does this take us?

- Geo-political regions are convenient, but not the only answer
- Also need to consider decision-making structures (institutions) between and within regional structures
 - Eg. LUF: representational & proportionality issues
 - Municipalities currently have limited venues for collective decision-making
 - Still have potential for Madisonian Challenge:
 - Tyranny of the majority
 - Tyranny of the minority
 - Do we need a “Great Compromise”(1787)?

Where does this take us?

- Need to consider institutional/representational/collective structures that facilitate and balance municipalities and regions (heterogeneity vs. homogeneity)
- OR: Calgary v. Edmonton v. everyone else (ie, the Battle of Alberta)
- Ex: bicameral body composed by rep by pop AND equal representation (USA)

Conclusion

- Regionalization has a (negative) history and possible future in AB
- Recent exercises are not perfect
- Municipalities have options, may not have choices
- Core tension between competition and collaboration needs to be addressed:
 - Inter-personally, inter-municipally, inter-regionally

Questions?



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