The Newfoundland and Labrador Strategic Social Plan:
The Life Cycle of an Innovative Policy

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INTRODUCTION[1]

This paper presents a case study of the Strategic Social Plan (SSP) of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Announced in 1998, implemented in 2000, fully operational in 2001, replaced in 2004, and eliminated completely in 2005, the SSP had a short but eventful existence, thus permitting us to examine its life from the conditions surrounding its conception to its abandonment. The SSP was unlike any social plan ever seen in the province or maybe anywhere else. It was not built around an array of policies—income support, daycare, or services for seniors, for example—but rather promised an entirely new way to make and apply social policy.

The foundation of this new model was to be the voluntary, community-based sector (VCBS), organizations such as a town's sports leagues, faith groups, women's institute, community museum, youth center, supported employment programs, local branches of national charities, and the like. Although this sounds like just another way of saying "engage civil society," it is more limited, because it focuses solely on local groups. At the same time it is a broader concept as the VCBS was understood to include the volunteers who make the organizations work. Further, the nature of the sector's engagement was novel: not only was the VCBS to deliver programs as contractors whose services were purchased, the volunteers who composed the sector were to become policy actors.

Equally novel was the fact that these new actors were to pursue place-based solutions that encouraged collaborative governance. Place-based refers to expanding the focus of policy making to include regions (here defined by a mix of geographical and socio-economic criteria) as well as functional socio-economic categories, for example, social assistance recipients or children; while collaborative governance suggests

incorporating more non-governmental actors in the design and delivery of policies. The underlying idea was to build partnerships among the federal government, provincial government, communities, and voluntary organizations that would yield a new way to make social policy and to ensure that social policy was better linked to economic policy. Clearly, achieving that goal demanded greater horizontal collaboration among government departments, as well as a significant devolution of authority and capacity from the central state (the provincial government) to Newfoundland's communities and citizens.

Finally, to assure that the communities and VCBS were suitably equipped to fulfill their new role they were to have access to social and economic data that would allow them to make informed decisions. This data would be gathered in community accounts and be easily available online. Putting all the above together would let the SSP reach its four goals.

- Vibrant communities where people are actively involved.
- Sustainable regions based on strategic investment in people.
- Self-reliant, healthy, educated citizens living in safe communities.
- Integrated and evidence-based policies and programs.

Shifting this from the government's discourse to the language of political science we find the following. The SSP was a social policy strategy that drew its inspiration, consciously or not, from the canon of New Public Management (NPM).[2] There were to be partnerships with civil society, at least the part formed by the VCBS. This was to facilitate the construction of social capital in the communities of Newfoundland and Labrador, especially the rural ones, thus raising their capacity to analyze and resolve their own local problems. From this starting point the regional committees where government and the VCBS would meet would generate policy ideas and proposals that government

could refine and blend into its broader social and community development policy frameworks. Structures were built but the predicted results were not forthcoming.

Operating at full strength for only four years, it is not surprising the SSP did not meet its designers' goals. What needs to be ascertained is whether the Plan was on track to fulfilling them, even whether those goals were realizable within the Plan's framework. To address this issue, thus to have an idea of whether a program like the SSP could be made to work in other circumstances, the paper moves through three steps. The first gives a historical overview of the SSP's development from beginning to end, treating it as a natural history of a dramatic, even radical, policy initiative. This will lay out for us the Plan's structures and processes, letting us see what they did and how they did it. It is about the SSP's operation. The second proposes a mix of factors that appear to be behind the Plan's lack of success. Here, the paper examines the concepts that underlay the SSP, asking if they were appropriate to the task and, if appropriate, whether or not they were applied well. Thus this second segment considers the Plan's conceptual focus and institutional environment. To conclude, the paper recalls the SSP's novelty and asks to what extent its problems were those of any radical policy innovation.

PART 1. A SKETCH OF THE STRATEGIC SOCIAL PLAN OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR[3]

Until oil revenues began entering government coffers in the first years of this century, Newfoundland and Labrador was regularly Canada's poorest province and it still shows the highest levels of unemployment—14.8 percent, compared to the national average of 6.3 percent, in 2006 (Statistics Canada 2007a). Despite these figures, which suggest serious challenges for social policy, Newfoundland's only previous experience with strategic social policy planning came with the resettlement program in the 1950s and

1960s.[4] That policy, which transported people from remote communities to so-called growth centers where the normal provision of social services could be assured, was controversial and unpopular (Matthews 1973; Stavely1981; Maritime History Archive 2005). In short, social policy thinking in the province was about delivery of services, rather than long-range planning. Moreover, government in Newfoundland and Labrador was historically extremely centralized: prior to 1975, local government did not exist in most parts of the province (Royal Commission on Municipal Government 1975). Before then most communities were unincorporated and had no formal means of self-government. Thus the SSP's emphases on place-based policymaking and collaborative social policy planning drew the provincial government into uncharted waters. How did it get there?

History

It was Premier Clyde Wells (1989-1996) who brought strategic government planning to Newfoundland and Labrador. Wells introduced both a strategic plan for the province's economy (1992) and the initial version of the SSP in 1993. While the Strategic Economic Plan was brought into play to help the province adjust to federal spending cuts to social programs and the burdens these placed on the provincial budget, the SSP arose in large part due to outside pressure to integrate social with economic development. It was introduced six years after the 1992 collapse of the cod fishery when demographic trends (low birth rate, aging population, high out-migration) were placing great pressure on Newfoundland and Labrador communities. Wells announced that government would develop a strategic social plan. His successor, fellow Liberal Brian Tobin, issued a discussion paper in 1996 and also established a Social Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC) to conduct a public dialogue. The SPAC's report (1997a; 1997b) combined the

themes raised in the public consultations with a set of conceptual benchmarks that included governance, partnerships, public consultation, citizen engagement and accountability. Thus, the conceptual core of the report was built around concern with the effects of government withdrawal from the social arena, on the one hand, and questions about the representativeness and responsiveness of contemporary governments, on the other.[5]

Specifically, the SPAC called for a new approach to social policy that would be "founded on the concept of social development and which acknowledges the essential roles of individuals and communities in fostering social and economic well-being" (GNL 1998:8). The provincial government accepted the SPAC's report and created both interdepartmental and ministerial committees to translate it into policy. In 1998, it released the final product: *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (GNL 1998a).

The SSP advocated a place-based model for development that encouraged a more collaborative form of governance. Place-based refers to expanding the focus of policy making to include regions (here defined by a mix of geographical and socio-economic criteria), as well as by the service to be delivered or the sector being served; while collaborative governance suggests incorporating more non-governmental actors in the design and delivery of policies. As such, it represented a significant departure from the province's approach to policy formulation, program design, and service delivery. The Plan also proposed increased partnerships involving the provincial government, the federal government, communities, and voluntary organizations as the basis of sustainable development (Rowe and Randell 1999). The SSP's four goals (GNL 1998a, 23-32)

summarized the expected outcomes of the Plan, although it provided no benchmarks to measure how completely these objectives were realized:

- Vibrant communities where people are actively involved.
- Sustainable regions based on strategic investment in people.
- Self-reliant, healthy, educated citizens living in safe communities.
- Integrated and evidence-based policies and programs.

In sum, the SSP proposed a new way to make social policy, built around "a partnership approach to policy development and service delivery" (GNL 1998a:10). The partners here were to be the state, the SSP regional committees, and the VCBS. What is significant is not the talk of service delivery, the usual theme of public-private partnerships (PPP), but rather the reference to policy development. The SSP held out the promise of bringing the voluntary sector and the communities in which the sector's organizations are rooted into the policymaking process.

To do this, the SSP aimed to integrate social and economic policy planning more closely and to engage communities, especially the VCBS, directly in the policy process. This to go beyond the usual relations found between government and voluntary sector groups, which either deal with purchase of service contracting or consulting with a specific group about a specific policy.[6] These objectives focus on the input and conversion facets of policymaking, not the concrete policies that result. This was a "process is policy" strategic plan. And because the Plan was about a process, the instruments devised to implement the SSP had to facilitate that process by linking communities and the voluntary sector to government in untested ways.

One point that emerges clearly from this brief overview of the Strategic Social Plan, is that the SSP gave little attention to questions of implementation or to how to

evaluate the policy's progress. This omission was doubtless partly the product of a civil service stretched very thin after several years of downsizing, but may also have reflected the initiative's novelty. In either case, the Plan had to be built on the fly, with little guidance and few guidelines. The SSP was not a detailed strategic plan.

Ostensibly about social policy, the SSP also had a rural focus. Although not specifically a response to crisis in rural Newfoundland and Labrador that followed the collapse and shut down of the cod fishery in 1992, the SSP's emphasis on community and sustainability fit well with the greatest social policy challenge of the nineties. Indeed, viewing the SSP in the context of the crisis of rural Newfoundland and Labrador makes the Plan look a bit like a community development initiative. Perhaps inadvertently, the Plan assumed multiple responsibilities.

The Linkage Mechanisms
For the SSP to work there needed to be mechanisms to link government with the voluntary sector in the province's communities. Three devices, examined in turn, were developed: the Premier's Council on Social Development (PCSD), the Strategic Social Plan Office (SSPO), and the Regional Steering Committees (RSC).[7]

The Premier's Council on Social Development (PCSD)
While the SSP called for the PCSD's creation (SSP 1998, 18) and setting up the Council was government's first step in implementing the Plan, the body was really not a linkage mechanism. Its stated purpose was to advise the premier and cabinet on "social policy, social development, and on the implementation of the goals and objectives of the Strategic Social Plan" (GNL 1998b), fully in keeping with its role as a consultative council. Nevertheless, the Premier's Council was not like the run of consultative councils for it enjoyed considerable freedom of action.

At its inaugural meeting (PCSD 1998) members of the Council asked if they were restricted to issues referred to them. The minister responsible for the SSP assured them that they did not have to wait for a request from Cabinet but could initiate studies, as long as these were related to the SSP. The principal limitation was that PCSD would not have its own staff but would have to count on other departments or seek approval from the Cabinet Secretariat to be able to engage consultants. A few examples demonstrate how the PCSD used its independence. First, it established a series of ad hoc committees, which was not anticipated in its terms of reference. These enhanced the Council's analytical capacity and kept the PCSD active between plenary sessions. The Council also acted independently in recommending that the premier appoint new members to the PCSD from specific sectors of society, for example those with physical handicaps or people from very small communities, when vacancies occurred. According to a former chair of the Council, the premier accepted the recommendations (Warren 2003).[8]

One of its more important activities was to advise government on the development of the Social Audit. This was an SSP initiative to provide the basic data to permit communities to engage in evidence-based decision-making about their social policy needs. The Audit collected information on employment, demographic trends, and health indicators from around the province. These data are currently available in the Community Accounts (Community Accounts 2007). The PCSD also worked with the government's consultative council on the economy (Advisory Committee on the Economy and Technology) in an effort to integrate social and economic policy thinking (PCSD 1999).

Finally and most significantly, the Council was occasionally asked by government departments to advise them on policy issues. For example, the PCSD established a subcommittee to advise the Interdepartmental Committee on Supportive Housing. Similarly, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment requested the Council's views on how best to support the VCBS and strengthen the sector's links with government. As well, the PCSD reviewed draft legislation proposing changes to the Income and Employment Support Act (2002), monitored implementation of the province's Strategic Literacy Plan, and delivered workshops on social inclusion to government.

These remarkable levels of activity for a consultative body are attributable, first, to the support the PCSD received from the two premiers it served, Liberals Brian Tobin and Roger Grimes, and to the fact that its members "left their sectoral hats at the door" and worked together to raise the profile of social policy matters within the government of Newfoundland and Labrador.[9] Yet it failed to build formal links to the voluntary sector or even to the SSP Regional Steering Committees. As a result, neither the VCBS nor the RSC had a direct channel to the premier and cabinet.

The Strategic Social Plan Office (SSPO

The SSPO was the bureaucratic agency created to manage the SSP. It doubtless seems odd to treat it as a linkage mechanism, but the Office did have a significant coordinating role. Without concrete policies but with a commitment to integrated programs, the SSP would not find a departmental home. So it ended up as a small, six-person secretariat in the Executive Council Office that had four important functions:

1. Serving as the PCSD's secretariat.
2. Coordinating work on the Social Audit and the preparation of the Community Accounts.

3. Building the inter-departmental links needed to make horizontally integrated, place-based policy.
4. Linking between government and the Regional Steering Committees.

This seems quite a burden for a six-person secretariat, especially considering that the SSPO never received more than $2million annually.[10] Nevertheless, it did bring the Social Audit, Community Accounts, and the RSCs on line; and, according to a former cabinet minister (Warren 2003), achieved a measure of coordination among departments with social affairs responsibilities.

Officials who worked with the Office (SSPO 2003; Rural Secretariat 2005) report that the SSPO had to invent its role as it went along; in fact no other outcome was possible. Since the Plan was based on building a process for integrating communities and community-based voluntary associations into social policy making, and because it specifically called for interdepartmental partnerships (GNL 1998a: 32), there were no internal models ready to use. Therefore the process of constructing implementing machinery began slowly and proceeded empirically: the first SSP secretariat, the SSP Unit, started in 1998 with just one person: the Assistant Secretary to Cabinet, who added the secretariat to her other duties (Rural Secretariat 2005). Obviously, little forethought was given to the policy instruments needed to make the Plan operational, which may suggest that SSP was not a top priority for government.

Looking at the Office's two linkage roles—among government departments and between government and the SSP Regional Steering Committees—raises two points. First, its role in linking government departments should not be seen as horizontal management (Peters, 1998; Hopkins, Couture, and Moore 2001). Rather, it appears to have been developing a role as coordinator, a hub that connected the social policy sides

of all government departments (SSPO 2003; Rural Secretariat 2005). From its strategic

position within the Executive Council the SSPO was certainly able to access all parts of

government, and its director, an assistant deputy minister (ADM), could deal directly

with the top officials in other departments (Rural Secretariat 2005). Further, the fact that

the SSP itself had the clear support of both the premier and the minister responsible for

the SSP strengthened the Office's position.

Nevertheless, it is unclear how effective the SSPO was as a coordinator. It

operated for only a few years, and did so in times of fiscal restraint within a public

service whose numbers had been dramatically reduced in the preceding years. As well, its

permanent head was an Assistant Deputy Minister, leading an agency with very a limited

budget, who had to convince Deputy Ministers heading central agencies and big budget

line departments to sacrifice some of their autonomy.[11] Further, there is little evidence

that bridging the various policy silos of the provincial government had ever been a

priority of cabinet.[12]

What is more important here is its role dealing with the Plan's Regional Steering

Committees. The Strategic Social Plan established six regional committees[13] which were

to be the channels for regional input into social policy and serve as the base for

government efforts to support regional social development (GNL 1998a: 17-18). The

logic of this system meant that the SSPO had to represent government to the regions as

well as the regions to the government.

According to a senior official who worked with the SSPO for several years (Rural

Secretariat 2005a), much of the Office's work consisted of maintaining contact with the

committees. It did this in two ways. First, a representative of the Office usually attended

the meetings of the Committees. Second, each RSC had a single administrative officer, the regional planner, paid through the SSPO but formally responsible to the Committee, part of whose job was to liaise with the Office. The SSPO also sought to raise the analytical capacity of the Regional Committees to let them contribute to strategic planning by hiring a full-time researcher to be the in-house consultant and to conduct workshops with the regional committees. This research function dovetailed with the secretariat's work on the Social Audit and Community Accounts, which have proven useful for planning social development.

Regional Steering Committees

   Regional boards and committees have been prominent features of efforts to decentralize public administration in Newfoundland and Labrador since the 1980s. However, the RSCs had two functions that set them apart from other regional entities. First, they were to be the implementing mechanisms for the multi-sectoral development-cum-social policy partnerships the Plan called for (GNL 1998a, 17), while their second task was to build partnerships with their region's VCBS to plan for integrated social and economic development (GNL 1998a, 18). They were conceived, therefore, to go beyond decentralization and move well toward devolution. Unfortunately, the RSCs' structure stood in the way of securing that goal.

   In order to set the multi-sectoral partnerships in motion, something that in the end happened infrequently,[14] the vast majority of the RSCs' members were *ex oficio* appointments: namely the heads of other regional boards or regional directors of government departments (Table 1). Although this makeup reinforced the Committees' claim to be policy refineries where regional policy elites worked, it also squeezed out the VCBS: only 6 of the 65 members of the two RSCs examined in detail for this research

came from the voluntary sector.[15] Overall, the RSCs failed to engage voluntary groups: efforts made by the RSCs to bring the VCBS into the process seldom went beyond sending invitations to meetings the committee held in different parts of the region or notifying groups of special events. On the whole, the relationship between the committees and the voluntary sector was that of service provider and client (Powers and Locke 2006a, 14-16), with the RSCs helping community groups get financial support for projects. Given that the bulk of the organizations on the RSC were those from whom the VCBS sought funding, that was the most probable outcome.

Further, the absence of municipal governments—unless one counts organizations composed of municipal governments—merits comment. If the RSCs were only about social policy-making the exclusion of local governments is defensible, as they have no social policy role in Newfoundland and Labrador. If, though, the Committees had a community development focus the exclusion of municipal governments is harder to justify. If fact, their absence, combined with the heavy representation of provincial government departments and provincial government-appointed regional administrative boards, make it look as though the government in St. John's wanted to tap the policy ideas of the communities but not necessarily let those communities have much chance to develop those ideas themselves.

Table 1. Regional Steering Committee Membership[16]

Organization Type	Number of Members (including alternates)
Municipal government associations	3
Federal government	6
Provincial Government	10
Aboriginal associations	5
Voluntary/community based	6
Education	10
Regional economic development	13
Health institutions	8
Other	3
Strategic Social Plan	2
TOTAL	**65**

Source: Calculated by author.

Moreover, the structure of the SSP committees appears to have worked against horizontal collaboration. Departmental representatives tended to stay within their hierarchies and representatives from other boards also worked along known paths (CURA 2005a; 2005b). This is not surprising, as policies are made within departments, not between or among them. Government simply is not structured to facilitate inter-departmental communication; thus what the SSP sought to do went against the system's institutional logic. At best, regional representatives of the various social policy departments were able to meet more frequently, discover they had common interests and problems, and begin building informal ties that might ease future collaboration. A positive step, though not what the SSP's designers would have hoped for.

Third, the committees controlled few resources (Powers and Locke, 2006a; 2006b). Besides some money for traveling around its region, an RSC's resources amounted to one employee: a regional planner. Despite the title, this person's job had little to do with regional planning in the usual sense. Rather, the position entailed

working with voluntary sector organizations as an outreach officer, attempting to make

the RSC's work better known and to encourage community participation.

Nevertheless, RSC members reported generally positive relations with

government (Table 2), suggesting that some linkages mechanisms did develop. Evidence

of this is found in the committees' assessment of their internal operations. Twelve

respondents reported good rapport among the members, while several went on to

comment on the trust that was built within their committees. At this level, the SSP

worked well and demonstrated that regional policy elites could work together effectively

to plan social policy. Social capital was being accumulated but it was happening between

government officials and the leaders of quasi-governmental boards. Although this is

undoubtedly important for advancing the horizontal collaboration agenda, its effect on

community development and the engagement of the VCBS is less obviously positive.

Table 2. RSC Members Perceptions of Relations with SSPO

Perception	Responses (out of 17)
Good Relationship with SSPO	8
SSP staff at meetings	7
Most contact is through the Planner	5
RSC sets own objectives guided by SSP	5*
Limited administrative support	3
Regional work more important than SSPO	3

Source: CURA (2005a)

*: N=13

Although the respondents felt that the RSCs and SSPO worked well together, they

also criticized specific practices, particularly a lack of administrative support that made

RSC's seek short-term assistance from member organizations. There was also a widely

held view that the RSC could set its own priorities if it stayed within a broad construction

of the SSP's objectives,[17] suggesting that some saw the committees as a means to

promote regional goals regardless of central government priorities. While this weakened

the SSP, in the short run, in the longer term having strong regional identities could benefit regional development.

Finally, although the VCBS was supposed to be the heart of the SSP, there was little knowledge of the Plan within the sector. Twenty-seven groups in one of the six regions were questioned about the SSP. Twenty-four (89 percent) had heard of the Plan; 17 (63 percent) knew some of the individuals who were RSC members in their region; 14 (52 percent) knew nothing about the committee; and 8 (30 percent) had sufficient knowledge of the SSP and the committee to complete interviews (CURA 2005b).

Powers and Locke (2006a, 19) suggest that the voluntary, community-based sector was not organized in a way that facilitated collaboration with the RSC: the voluntary sector, like government, works within silos. Even if the leaders of voluntary organizations in small towns are natural community leaders, which need not always be the case,[18] the organizations themselves have different objectives and distinct clienteles. There is no reason why they should work together; indeed, since they compete for donor funds, there can be good reasons not to cooperate. Further, there is also the question of whether voluntary community-based sector leaders had the skills to operate effectively within mid-level policy councils, like the Steering Committees. And if they did not, what could be done to develop those skills?

Outcome

The Strategic Social Plan did not survive a change in government. The Conservative administration that came to power in late 2003 suspended the PCSD immediately, changed the SSPO to the Rural Secretariat, and suspended the Regional Steering Committees in 2004; in 2005 nine newly designed, aligned, and constituted Rural Secretariat Regional Councils eliminated the last vestiges of the SSP structure.

Although there was an evaluation of the program in 2003 (Helleur and Associates 2003), none was done after its termination. Based on the evidence presented above, we can say that the SSP did little with the VCBS, gave few signs of moving toward place-based policymaking or devolving authority in ways that encouraged collaborative governance, took some steps toward building cross-sector partnerships, and did little to encourage using the Community Accounts to analyze local needs.[19] Now that we know what happened we need to ask why it happened.

WHY THE SSP DIDN'T DO MORE

Detailing why the Newfoundland and Labrador Strategic Social Plan secured few of its goals requires a multi-causal, five-factor, explanation. First, because the SSP was about process, it had no deliverables; and without deliverables it had little presence. Second, political culture and political tradition combine in the province to form what is practically an informally institutionalized preference for a highly centralized state. Third, the relatively low priority assigned social policy by Newfoundland and Labrador provincial governments needs to be borne in mind, as does the straitened state of the provincial civil service since the early 1990s. Fourth is the matter of the SSP's implementation. That the original document gave few operation details is understandable; however, the government's ensuing failure to dedicate significant resources to the plan or apparently to even try to put more of its principles into effect should be considered. Fifth, the SSP was in place for at most four years: it entered into operation in 2000 and ended its useful life in 2003. There had not been time to assess its operations and address whatever needed fixing. Moreover, the SSP was ill-funded, reducing its ability to make an impact.

<u>No Policy Deliverables</u>

The relationship between process and product is at once straightforward and complicated. Without Henry Ford's assembly line there could not have been a Model T, but if the Model T had not been a success other manufacturers would not have rushed to set up their own assembly lines. A process has to have a product before it can be evaluated. If there is no output to assess we cannot say if a process works or not. Yet the SSP's product was its process. Was that its Achilles' heel?

Doubtlessly, the SSP would have had a higher profile if it had incorporated an array of concrete policies. These would have given the VCBS material to deliver and the province's communities tools to use as they planned for the future. But making those policies effective would have demanded precisely the tight inter-departmental coordination that characterizes horizontal collaboration, one of the very things the SSP was to establish.

Was the SSP then compromised from the outset? Having no policy deliverables was a disadvantage but not one that should, by itself, have made the Plan unviable. Had the VCBS been engaged as foreseen and the Regional Committees functioned as hoped there should have been enough positive results to have boosted the SSP's stature. Similarly, allocating more than $1/16^{th}$ of 1 percent of the provincial budget to the process would also have helped. However, it is improbable that, by itself, any of the factors discussed here could have slowed the Plan's progress. That demanded all of them working together.

<u>Historical-Structural Constraints: the Centralized Path</u>

Whether as a colony, short-lived Dominion, or province of Canada, what is now Newfoundland and Labrador had a centralized government (Noel 1971; McCorquodale

1978; Dyck 1991, 47-92; Gwynn 1999; House 1999; Summers 2000). The pattern of settlement, with fishing villages—outports—stretched along the nearly 10,000 kilometers (over 6000 miles) of coastline[20] and very few larger settlements outside St. John's, made communication difficult and gave little incentive to offer government services widely. Economic organization reinforced geography as the fishermen in the outports depended on merchants concentrated in St. John's both to buy their fish and to provide them with credit to mount the next year's fishery. Further, until Confederation in 1949, the political role of most outports was to return a member to the House of Assembly, almost always a parachuted candidate from the capital, and little else. A constituency that elected a government member got its reward in the form of patronage—they "won their vote;" those electing an opposition member waited for the next time.

Although one pre-1949 movement—William Ford Coaker's Fishermen's Protective Union (McDonald 1987)—challenged this system, there were no significant changes to the model of governance until self-government was taken from Newfoundland in 1934. And when Joey Smallwood's pro-Confederation-with-Canada forces won a referendum in 1948 the old order lost its chance to return. Changing the legal regime, however, did little to change Newfoundland's political style: the outports were better represented but patronage still dominated and decisions were made at the center and mainly by the premier. Although the province has experimented with administrative decentralization, decisional power has stayed in St. John's.

So for the SSP to have worked the politics of Newfoundland and Labrador would have needed a significant off-path change. That would have required the government to have dedicated substantial energy, time, and money to assure that decisional power was

devolved and that departments began working together to provide integrated policies. This did not happen, whether because of lack of commitment or a shortage of resources is immaterial.

Low Profile Social Policy

Aside from the resettlement program of the fifties and sixties, social policy innovation has not been a priority for Newfoundland and Labrador's governments. This does not mean that they have been insensible to social issues, only that they have sought first the economic resources with which to address social questions. So one after another, resource megaprojects have been put in motion that have created thousands of jobs and pumped millions of dollars into the provincial economy. None of them, unfortunately, proved sustainable, leaving the mix of low incomes, poor permanent job prospects, low levels of education, and uneven levels of health care that has always bedeviled the province.

Thus to move into a project like the Strategic Social Plan that dealt with engaging the voluntary sector, devolving decisional power to communities, and coordinating not just social policy across departments but actually integrating economic and social policies was a qualitative change, not an incremental one. Worse, it had to be made when the Newfoundland and Labrador public service was being drastically reduced to cut costs, falling from a peak of 13,351 in 1987 to 8745 early in 1999, a decline of 34.5 percent (Statistics Canada 2007b). The result was a straitened public sector that was increasingly hard pressed to carry out more than routine operations. Planning and implementing a novel, sophisticated social policy initiative made extremely difficult demands.

Implementation

A pair of observations made in the section describing the SSP's structure and operation, noted that the document presenting the Plan to the public was short on specifics and that the evolution of the SSP Office suggested that a good deal of the Plan's machinery was built on the fly. How clear, then, was the government about what was needed to make the Plan work? And had it thought about how much institutional reworking would be needed?

It is unreasonable to expect that a document announcing a new program will present a fully elaborated framework for its operation. Nevertheless, the SSP appeared to start life with many loose ends. The most obvious of these were the absence of any operational measures by which to know if the Plan's four goals were being met and the manner in which the SSPO was set up and staffed. To some extent, these may reflect the program's novelty and thus would be part of the start up costs of any radical policy initiative. There is, though, one other area where hindsight causes us to question the SSP's design, and that is the structure of the Regional Steering Committees.

At its broadest, governance, as used in contemporary political science, refers to linking and coordinating government and non-governmental actors to make and deliver policy. However, we have seen that the RSCs were composed principally of representatives of government departments and quasi-autonomous health services, education and economic development boards. Since only about 10 percent of the RSC members came from the voluntary sector, it appears that the committees were designed, even if inadvertently, to let regional administrative boards and regional branches of government departments establish more effective contact with each other. This is a laudable administrative objective that should one day increase horizontal coordination,

but it is not governance. The Helleur Report (2003) recommended that clearer links between the VCBS and the RSCs be developed, so perhaps time would have allowed this problem to be resolved.

What is true of governance in the SSP applies to civil society, too. The structure of the RSCs not only gave the voluntary, community-based sector little representation, in many cases it also left the volunteers trying to deal as equals with those on whom they depended for funding. Further, the capacity of the VCBS and its members to engage immediately as active members of a policy-making team may have been overestimated, although that point could still profit from further study.

Time and resources

Did the SSP have enough time to find its way and become a useable strategy for making social policy in Newfoundland and Labrador? Perhaps four years would have been enough if there had been a culture of devolving power to citizens and encouraging horizontal policy planning, not to mention more money for more staff and a bigger budget. That would have made the Plan another experiment in policy thinking that could conceivably have been introduced, implemented, tested, and revised after a few years. However, the SSP moved policy thinking in a dramatically new direction at a time when there were few resources available to facilitate the change. Thus, when the 2003 elections brought a new party to power, the SSP's development was arrested quite abruptly.

Obviously, if a new administration wants to abandon an existing project it can do so. It has an agenda to advance. However, it does complicate attempts to restructure institutions, develop new process, and involve new actors. In any event, although there is no reason to believe that the Liberals would not have retained the SSP had they been returned to office in 2003, neither is there much reason to think that they would have

pursued a significant rethinking and restructuring of their program. From 2000 to 2003

the budget of the SSP remained frozen at $2 million per year, while the general provincial

budget rose by something over 22 percent, going from $3.1 billion to $3.8 billion in that

time. The SSP was not a high priority item, at least not to judge by its budget, so while

another evaluation might have been ordered, extensive retooling was probably not on the

agenda.

CONCLUSION

  Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan was an innovative and

exciting policy. It sought to overcome institutional inertia and promote horizontal

collaboration among departments, not just at the central government level but also among

the regional offices of the ministries. More dramatically, the SSP promised to bring the

voluntary, community-based sector, the men and women who run community voluntary

organizations, into the process of social policy making, not just as contractors delivering

programs. Neither objective was realized.

  A skeptic might conclude that the SSP was nothing but a case of BSTDS: Being

Seen to Do Something. That is, it was action for the sake of action, to be able to say that

"something is being done." Although the SSP did not cost the provincial government

much money, it did demand a substantial investment of time and effort from many

people, both inside and outside of government, form the planning stages until it was shut

down. And while government never put the SSP as close to the top of its agenda as the

Plan's supporters would have wished, dismissing the whole effort as a bone thrown to

appease some constituency's cries for action overlooks the SSP's achievements and what

we can learn from both those and its failures.

Regarding, first, its achievements, whatever else the SSP did or did not do, it broke new ground in Newfoundland and Labrador in four areas: recognizing the importance of horizontal collaboration between and among departments; acknowledging the potential utility of civil society as both policy instrument and policy actor; building a first set of mechanisms to link government and civil society, here the VCBS; and taking steps toward focusing on communities, thus thinking in terms of holistic approaches to public policy. Beyond these there were the Social Audit and Community Accounts, the latter of which are still in use, which provide one-window access to otherwise scattered social, economic, and demographic data. Finally, there is anecdotal evidence that regional offices of government departments and regional boards dealing with health, education, hospitals, and economic development work together more often and more easily than before. The question is what will be built on these admittedly modest results. This leads us to the Plan's failures.

The worst failure was at the level of government funding and bureaucratic support. Funding fell from $1/16^{th}$ of 1 percent (0.06) of the budget in 2000 to $1/19^{th}$ of 1 percent (0.05) in 2003, hardly a sign of interest. And although the six officials in the SSPO did yeoman service, they were still too few to do much thinking about how to restructure and improve the Plan while they were designing and implementing its structures. A second error may have been even to call the SSP a strategic plan. Strategic planning demands having "highly structured, future-oriented management techniques" (Berry and Wechsler 1995: 159) that better align "an organization with its environment" (Kissler, et al, 1998: 353). This demands that a strategic plan be "action-oriented (and)…carefully linked to implementation" (Poister and Streib 2005: 46). Making those

definitions, derived from the public administration literature, fit the SSP, takes a lot of stretching and bending. Even so, I doubt that a more accurate title, like social policy strategy, would have made much difference to the outcome, as development had to take place in a highly centralized administrative framework, where notions of horizontality were only starting to penetrate, and where personnel were scarce.

Whatever the SSP's strengths and weaknesses were, the project's history holds three lessons for policy reformers anywhere. First and foremost, they have to pay attention to the institutional framework in which the reform will be implemented. Having to change that framework while you change specific polices and processes is a larger job than you may have reckoned with. Second, financing is paramount. Having enough to get something started may sound satisfactory but the SSP showed that raises are not always forthcoming. Third, hope that your project is either backed by all parties able to win power or that it has gained enough institutional presence to make it hard for a new government to drop.

In the end, the SSP did not realize the hopes of its proponents and designers, i.e., generate evidence-based policies and programs to produce viable communities and sustainable regions. It did, however, show that securing those objectives will require more support, financial and administrative, than the Plan received; it tested a model for regional consultation that proved to need revision, and raised interesting questions about what might be needed if government were to engage the community-based, voluntary sector in a genuinely devolved system of governance. Though disappointing to its supporters, the SSP's history should help others design more effective instruments elsewhere.

Notes

[1] This work was prepared as part of the *Values Added* Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) that links the Community Services Council, St. John's, NL, and the Memorial University of Newfoundland. The CURA is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I wish to thank Ms. Penelope Rowe and the other members of the CURA research team—Dr. Larry Felt of Memorial, Patti Powers and Fran Locke, CURA research associates, and Colin MacDonald, CURA research assistant— with whom I have had the pleasure to work on this project. All errors and peculiar interpretations are, however, mine.

[2] One element of New Public Management thinking that apparently did not enter the SSP process was cost cutting. Penelope Rowe, the Director of the CURA investigating the SSP and chair of the Social Policy Advisory Committee that recommended the SSP's general outlines, says that she never heard cost reduction (for example, through contracting out services) mentioned by anyone in government as a rationale for the SSP.

[3] The material in this section is adapted from Close, Rowe, and Wheaton (2007).

[4] The paper excludes unemployment insurance for self-employed fishermen, a federal initiative that lasted from 1957 to 1996, which certainly had significant social impacts in Newfoundland and Labrador, because the paper's focus is the provincial government.

[5] Phillips (2001a; 2001b), Brock (2001), and Patten (2001) discuss these questions in the context of national politics.

[6] In 1998, when the SSP was launched, this was an area on which little research had been published. A search of the political science literature on the voluntary sector found in the Worldwide Political Science Abstracts database revealed very little material published before 2001 that was not focused on contracting out service delivery. After 2002, there begin to appear journal articles and theses on the voluntary sector and governance.

[7] The Plan also featured a special SSP Ministerial Committee, which brought together the Social Policy Committee of Cabinet (Ministers of Education, Health and Community Services, Human Resources and Employment, Justice, Municipal and Provincial Affairs, Environment and Labour, Government Lands and Services, and Tourism, Culture and Recreation) in addition to the Chair of the Economic Policy Committee of Cabinet, the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board, and the Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Rural Revitalization. It was responsible for ensuring implementation of the plan and the creation of mechanisms for interdepartmental decision-making and for informing Cabinet of developments. A lead minister, who happened to be the Minister of Health and Community Services, was designated and a deputy ministers' committee, mirroring the Ministerial Committee, established. Because this was not a mechanism linking government to communities, it will not be treated further here.

[8] The Premier's Council had 18 members, a third appointed every year, with reappointment possible. The majority of those members came from the VCBS and "social" sectors, like health and education, but there were also representatives of business and the artistic community (Close, Rowe, and Wheaton 2007, 7-8).

[9] Three chairs of the PCSD (Doyle 2003; Saunders 2003; Warren 2003) raised this point in interviews.

[10] All figures are in Canadian dollars. The budget for the SSPO was the budget for the SSP, too. During the Plan's years of full operation, 2000-2003, the provincial budget rose from $3.1 billion to $3.8 billion, while the SSPO's budget stayed the same. Thus the SSP's share of the provincial budget was roughly 0.06 percent.

[11] The SSPO could not have been headed by a Deputy Minister unless it stood outside the Executive Council, because the Clerk of the Executive Council is that department's Deputy Minister.

[12] Dunn (2005) presents material bearing on this question; cf. Dunn (2002). It should be noted, though, that the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs has responsibility for all matters affecting that region of the province, thus giving its policy planning more of a horizontal character.

[13] These were Avalon, Central, Cormack-Grenfell, Eastern, Labrador, and Northeast Avalon.

[14] Partnerships were stuck but they were narrow and ad hoc; for example, in one of the regions the Departments of Health and Education agreed to contribute equally to the salary of an additional speech pathologist. Though small in itself, the interdepartmental collaboration was highly unusual and could have paved the way to more joint projects.

[15] Anecdotal evidence suggests that these Committees were not exceptional in allotting only 10 percent of their seats to the VCBS. Business also had a low profile, as the only businesspeople on these two Committees were representatives of economic development boards (CURA 2005a).

[16] Table 2 reflects the membership of the two RSCs studied in depth by the *Values Added* CURA. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the representation of VCBS organizations was no higher on the other committees.

[17] Only one committee was asked how it had been guided by the SSP's objectives (CURA 2005b).

[18] The local head of the heart and stroke foundation may not be interested in anything besides collecting funds for his charity, just as the president of a community's softball league need not care about much besides her game. It may even be a mistake to classify these individuals as potential community leaders, as their participation in voluntary activities could as easily be private regarding – it is what they want to do – as public regarding – they do it for the common good. This is a question that merits further study.

[19] The SSPO did attempt to improve the Regional Committees' analytical capacity, which would involve using those data. The CURA organized a Data Mining Workshop at Memorial University in December 2004, after the Plan had been closed down, that could prove useful in future attempts to broaden community understanding of and participation in the social policy process.

[20] Including the Labrador coast, which was settled, albeit sparsely, from the nineteenth century, and the many offshore islands, many of which were inhabited until resettlement in the 1950s and '60s, extends the province's coastline to 23, 212 kilometers, about 14,500 miles (Natural Resources Canada 2007).

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