CALL FOR PAPERS:
ISEMA SPECIAL EDITION

Place Based Policies:
Benefits, Challenges and Opportunities

Paper Submission Due Date: May 1st 2011

Introduction

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The Centre for Urban Research and Education (CURE) has been funded through the Centre for Policy Research Network’s (CPRN) legacy fund to publish a special edition of ISEMA in the Fall of 2011. In addition to selected articles being published in ISEMA, the findings from the research undertaken by SPPA MA/PhD students will be used to inform a collaborative SSHRC research project on place based policy making to be undertaken with our research partners (Policy Research Institute; Simon Fraser University and Natural Resources Canada) beginning April 2011 (subject to SSHRC funding decision).

Across the country, place-based governance initiatives have been emerging at an accelerating pace at the community, municipal, and landscape or watershed level. These “place-based” approaches develop out of the need to address what are often referred to as “wicked” problems: persistent socio-economic and environmental policy issues requiring a high level of collaboration among governments and with other players. We are rediscovering that economic competitiveness, social well-being, and ecosystem resilience depend, in large part, on collective behaviour in specific “places.”

Aims

In the tradition of the CPRN, the research will focus on examples of place based policy-making in Canada. There has been increasing national and international interest in the use of place-based policy as a means to meshing, enhancing, and forwarding national and local objectives at the community level. That is, “policies that are multi-level in their governance structure and tailored to the specific reality of individual regions and communities” (Bradford & Wolfe, 2010).

1 Our thanks to Teresa Bellefontaine (PRI) and Daniel Rosenbloom (SPPA) for their written contributions to this overview and to Micheal Howlett and Adam Wellstead for their valuable input. Special thanks also to the CPRN and SPPA without whose generosity and intellectual inspiration, this project would not have been possible.
While the traditional ‘Big Government’ policy processes are often characterized by ‘top-down’ decision-making, a place-based approach offers a ‘bottom-up’ alternative, whereby local stakeholders, are enabled to influence and shape the policies that affect them and given the tools to research and evaluate policy issues from a community perspective. Place-based approaches therefore, can be transnational, national or regional policies that use local actors and resources as assets in a collaborative process to address issues as they are experienced within a geographic space, be it a neighbourhood, a region or an eco-system.

<table>
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<th>Table 1 Characteristics of place-based processes</th>
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<td>● Are collaborative</td>
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<td>● Are opportunity-driven, dependant on local talent, resources and constraints</td>
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<td>● Have an evolving process due to an adaptive learning process and stakeholder interests</td>
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<td>● Attempt to integrated across silos, jurisdictions and dimensions of sustainability</td>
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<td>● Leverage assets and knowledge through shared ownership of the initiative</td>
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Bellefontaine (2011)

In particular we are interested in papers that will highlight the perceived benefits of place-based policy making (e.g. its potential to tackle seemingly intractable or ‘super wicked’ problems such as urban and aboriginal poverty, crime, infrastructure renewal, pollution and climate change, through its emphasis on local communities, participation and intergovernmental cooperation) as well as the challenges typically encountered when trying to align the policy focus of federal-provincial and local governments and attempting to ensure that community or regional needs, preferences and autonomy are balanced with the demands for accountable and cost effective programs at each level of government. One consequence of this has been the federal government’s emphasis on evidence based funding which presents significant challenges to place-based policies as evaluation is necessarily complex in respect of capturing impacts and demonstrating cause and effect relationships. To this end we would also welcome papers that focus on the evaluation challenges of place based approaches and can examine the frameworks and steps used to address them (this will be the specific focus of the SSHRC research project). Papers can adopt a federal, provincial, territorial, municipal or community based lens, but should also focus on the multi-level governance challenges and opportunities that underpin place based policies including the role of the third sector where relevant. Policies from any field will be considered, but given ISEMA’s focus on Innovation, Science and the Environment, papers that focus in these areas and/or can contribute to our understanding of how to advance sustainable development would be very relevant.

Process and timelines
In order to be considered for the special edition, papers should be submitted electronically to project contacts Elyse Lamontagne or Alex Carr by May 1st, 2011. Following submission, papers will be subject to a thorough review process, through the ISEMA Special Edition editorial board and specialists in the area including academics, alumni and public servants. A decision about accepted papers will be made by July 2011. Once papers have been selected, authors will be required to revise, edit and/or format the paper for final submission. Reviewer and editorial guidance will be provided to assist in this task and final drafts will then be submitted in time for publication. Final drafts of selected articles will be required by August 2011, for expected publication in the fall 2011.
Context
When faced with intractable or ‘wicked’ problems many experts acknowledge the importance of local government with respect to the economic, social, and environmental development of Canada (Bradford, 2008). In particular, there has been increasing interest in the use of place-based policy in meshing, enhancing, and forwarding national and local objectives at the community level. That is, “policies that are multi-level in their governance structure and tailored to the specific reality of individual regions and communities” (Bradford & Wolfe, 2010). Widely used as a policy approach in the US, EU, Australia and the UK, place based approaches have been less prevalent in Canada in spite of (and perhaps because of) our jurisdictional complexity, geographical size and persistent problems such as urban decay, sprawl, aboriginal settlements, pollution and climate change. To this end the project currently being prepared for SSHRC funding begins the process of drawing together a broad network of scholars and practitioners dealing with efforts to develop and implement integrated, multi-sector place-based solutions to policy problems in Canada. It draws on existing work done by the PRI in the areas of social innovation, and sustainable places, and academic partner expertise in forest, energy, environmental and natural resource governance, urban and community sustainability.
In summary, the research proposed here will enable SPPA students to make a valuable contribution to our knowledge of place-based initiatives in Canada and inform the longer-term aims of the research partners and the ISEMA journal. We believe the project will provide a fitting tribute to the CPRN and help to ensure that its legacy and research aims are continued into the future by current and future academics and policy-makers.

Background Discussion

Why place based policies?

“Coming from both ideological and pragmatic starting points, the trend has been to see “big government” solutions to complex and interconnected social problems as increasingly inappropriate, unworkable and expensive (or all three). Partnerships and smaller-scale, place or community focused strategies started to emerge as at least worth trying.”

Stewart-Weeks, 2002, p. 2 (Australia)

The emergence of place-based approaches has been attributed to perceived ineffectiveness of other options, policy gridlock and an increased need for public participation in policy making processes (Koontz & Thomas, 2006; Bradford, 2010). The proliferation of participatory and empowerment methods in consultation and evaluation has also been credited to changes in societal mechanisms due to “glocalization”, which has shifted decision-making away from national governments to transnational and regional or local networks (Arnkil et al, 2002). Place-based approaches are often seen as “collaborative means to address complex social-economic issues through interventions defined at a specific geographic scale”. (Cantin, 2010).

An effective place-based policy requires comprehensive interagency collaboration and investment that can facilitate an increased impact of federal dollars and a greater return on federal investments. By concentrating resources, this approach asserts the primacy of place in moving towards more robust social and economic outcomes. A place-based policy is about
finding the place-specific triggers not only to localized neighbourhood and community growth but also to metropolitan and regional growth. Federal programs that meet urban and rural areas where they are and federal policies that respond to the ways that people live will meet the demands of communities that are striving for a better quality of life.

Place-based approaches seek to harness social innovation; driven by local opportunities, the paths to objectives are multiple and are unknown during the initial phases. This means iterative learning and failure is expected as part of the process. The social complexity is reflected in the partnerships as well. Stakeholders may have different objectives from the partnerships, consensus may not be possible, and partnerships may necessarily change, affecting knowledge base, resources and intended objectives over time. There is also an understanding that capacity must be increased at the local level and that strategic management needs to be encouraged if communities are to realize improved economic performance (Brender, Cappe & Golden, 2007; Wolfe & Bramwell, 2008).

**Extent and scope of place based policies**

*Knowing that our national economic health is driven by regions, if we are to usher forward a new area of prosperity it must be based upon a sound policy foundation across agencies and respond to the characteristics, obstacles, and opportunities that shape the economic landscape of cities, towns, and regions across the country.*

Derek Douglas - Special Assistant to the President on Urban Policy

The international context reveals that a number of countries are already investing in local capacity through place-based policy and innovative partnerships (Douglas, 2010; Lyons, 2007) with Australia investing significantly in place-based policy and capacity-building at the local level (Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, 2009) in addition to EU countries such as the Netherlands and the UK. South of the border, the United States’ Office of Urban Affairs has recently initiated, at the direct behest of President Obama, a comprehensive review of federal programs and policies which affect communities at the local level (Douglas, 2010). The review represented an important first step toward leveraging federal investments in an integrated way, on a regional scale, and in a particular place to have the most transformative impact. The review will also advance the formation of partnerships within the community in an attempt to “leverage local assets” and improve quality of life. In effect, the partnerships will attempt to view the community as an integrated system and will work towards solutions by acknowledging and addressing the relationships between issues and their local context. In preparation for the 2012 Federal budget, Douglas (2010) maintains that the goal is to continue to apply place-based principles to existing policies, potential reforms, and new and promising innovations with a particular focus on strengthening economic growth and achieving greater cost effectiveness.

Instead of a top-down command-and-control approach, Bradford believes that regional policies will be developed to enhance innovation, economic health, ecological sustainability, as well as social and cultural development. The United States, he argues, has realized that “[c]ountries that invest in their cities and communities are likely to be at the forefront of progressive change in the 21st century” (Bradford, 2005).
Policy impact
Assessing the impact of place based policies in the US, Douglas claims “....we are finding that placed-based policy approaches work”. The Obama instigated review made clear that there are many existing opportunities to work across agencies – cutting redundant, dislocated programs and replacing them with innovative, regional policies designed to improve the economic health, environmental sustainability, and social opportunity of urban and rural communities. For example, the Sustainable Communities Partnership—a collaboration between the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development as well as the Environmental Protection Agency—is one example of interagency efforts to align planning and implementation dollars to achieve more affordable, economically vital, and sustainable places. At the same time, Douglas maintains that the interagency working group on Regional Innovation Clusters—spearheaded by the Departments of Commerce, Labor and Education as well as the Small Business Administration—is working to support economic cluster strategies by leveraging local assets to improve the economic well-being of neighbourhoods and regions.
Place-based processes are also being adopted in a variety of policy fields in Canada from health, public health, poverty alleviation, public safety, economic development, Aboriginal community planning, child and seniors services and homelessness to name a few, with thousands of place-based processes identified in the realm of environmental stewardship alone (Nolan cited in Cantin, 2010). Historically Canada has had some notable success with place based approaches including the Urban Development Agencies (UDAs), focusing on Cities such as Winnipeg, and also the Vancouver Agreement which was commended by the Auditor General (Canada, 2005). Described as the ‘New Deal’ for cities and communities, the approach adopted by Paul Martin’s Liberal government was regarded by many observers as one of place-based policy-making and saw the introduction of innovative transfers for local infrastructure renewal. Based upon a collaborative approach between municipalities, the provinces and federal government the “Gas Tax” extended significant autonomy to local communities in determining local priorities and, in return, required municipalities to establish Integrated Community Sustainability Programs (ICSPs).

In spite of the federal government’s continued funding of the gas tax transfers and the Conservatives stated commitment to “open federalism”, place based policy-making in Canada appears to have taken a back seat in recent years. One of the key reasons for this may be the federal government’s emphasis on accountability and the fact that place-based approaches to complex problems are difficult to evaluate.

Evaluation challenges
Core and persistent challenges to evaluating place-based approaches include: the nature of open-systems, capturing long-term objectives, and reconciling collaborative multi-stakeholder processes with evaluation methodology. Measurement challenges also pose on-going practical obstacles for evaluation (Bellefontaine 2011). Due to the social complexity of the problems being addressed they involve trade-offs and their solutions are “not verifiably right or wrong, but rather better or worse or good enough” (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007, p. 4). For example, programs that attempt to reduce global warming can never empirically prove the extent to which temperatures would have risen without the intervention, despite the existence of

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baseline data and projections. Consequently, place-based approaches operate within a realm of uncertainty that is likely greater than traditional top-down interventions and it is to this end that the proposed SSHRC research would be targeted. If you feel you would like to contribute to this developing field of knowledge, as well as, potentially, the ISEMA special edition please consider choosing a relevant topic. For term papers you should also make sure with the class instructor that it is an appropriate choice of topic.

References
Koontz, Tomas M. & Craig W. Thomas, 2006. ‘What Do We Know and Need to Know about the Environmental Outcomes of Collaborative Management?’. *Public Administration Review. Dec 2006 Special Issue on Collaborative Public Management*
Nolan, Clare, 2010, Presentation to the Improving the Outcomes of Place-Based Initiatives Conference held February 11-12, 2010 in San Francisco.
