Northumbria Research Link

CHAPTER EIGHT

Looking for the 'Policy Window': the Social Economy and Public Policy Agenda in Atlantic Canada

Jan Myers and Martha MacDonald

1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of two significant pieces of work undertaken by the Atlantic Node of Social Economy and Sustainability (SES) Research Network under the remit of Sub-node 1: Mapping and policy analysis. Both of these projects produced considerable rich information and data. In this paper we are unable to do justice to the depth of information and learning produced. Nor are we able to provide individual profiles of each province and each of the projects involved in the research. However, there are a number of resources and materials that explore aspects of the policy research and give details on the different projects referred to in this paper, available through the SES Research Network (www.msvu.ca/socialeconomyatlantic)

We acknowledge that each province has its own peculiarities and own policy determinants and developments and that the policy and social economy landscape in each province is different and dynamic. What we have tried to do is to do is to draw out themes and practices that are found in common, rather than specific issues relating to particular organisations or provinces. We have also documented significant changes that have impacted government and social economy organisational relationships since the onset of the overall SSHRC-funded research in 2005. This also allows for comparison with other jurisdictions and provinces where similar activities are taking place.

While we looked at policy areas of importance to specific organisations (non-profits, voluntary and community organisations, co-operatives) or industry sectors, framing our discussion in relation to co-construction and co-production of public policy (see for example, Vaillancourt, 2008), particular attention is paid to cross-sector, multi-stakeholder opportunities. We use as our stepping off point Kingdon's concept of policy windows—moments in time where the combination of actors, context and issues comes together to effect change or to move a particular issue on to or up the government or political agenda and we are able to map some of these

changes in the Atlantic Provinces. For Kingdon, "public policy making consists of a set of processes including at least (1) the setting of an agenda, (2) the specification of alternatives from which a choice is to be made, (3) an authoritative choice among those specified alternatives, as in a legislative vote or a presidential decision, and (4) the implementation of the decision" (1995, pp. 2-3). Within this process, Galligan and Burgess (2003) point to the pivotal role of "policy entrepreneurs" who act at critical times particularly in relation to phases (1) and (2) above. These might be particular politicians or government ministers. If we broaden the concept to collective entrepreneurship this may also include significant shifts in influence of, for example, voluntary initiatives and coalitions at different times and in different locations.

In both research projects, we looked at policy areas that deal with specific services and single issues. Here, many of the relationships between government and social economy organisations are bi-lateral (for example, geared around discussion of funding and service requirements). We also found it useful to explore more cross-cutting issues that allow for a variety of economic and social actors to be included at the "policy table." These complex or 'wicked' issues include, for example, poverty reduction initiatives and rural economic and social development. These types of issues can open a 'policy window' (Kingdon, 1995; Galligan & Burgess, 2003), which provides opportunities for both vertical integration of policy development (different levels and tiers of government) and horizontal and networked approaches (both intra-governmental department liaison and wider stakeholder involvement). This calls for a range of purposeful, multi-stakeholder relationships or active alliances.

It is important, then, that there are levels of government, departments, and officers within departments to facilitate engagement with a range of stakeholders with the intention of being influenced. It is equally important to have an organised non-governmental sector to put forward ideas and local solutions. This requires both organized social economy infrastructure and a range of mechanisms, supported by government, for increased meaningful and purposeful exchange. This paper is an initial attempt to document where some of these initiatives have taken place, the opportunities that exist, and the enabling factors which may be required.

Purpose and Methods

For the purposes of this paper, the 'social economy' is an umbrella term for a number of groups, organizations, and sectors (e.g., voluntary and community sector, co-operative sector) that is broader and more inclusive than the "third sector," includes 'community economic development' and contributes to a 'vibrant civil society.' The social economy operates within (and sometimes apart from) broader economic and social systems that are governed, controlled, influenced and historically dominated by

public and private sectors. Finally, the social economy is a "bottom-up" concept co-constructed by the actors who make up the social economy in their localities. Place, community and participatory democracy can be seen to be important cornerstones for engaged social and economic activity. This can be seen in a range of activities and community-based actions undertaken by social economy actors, such as: caring for community members and environment; creation of new projects to meet social needs; providing equitable and accessible employment and leisure activities; community ownership and control of local amenities and services; campaigns to protect habitats and endangered species; and celebration and revitalisation of communities and cultures.

The first piece of work undertaken was to map and provide an inventory of provincial legislation, policies, programs and initiatives directly relevant to community economic and social development and the social economy (see Myers & McGrath, 2009a-d, for more detail). The process of carrying out this type of scan allows us to form a base line assessment of "current" government strategies, political commitments, jurisdictional and departmental remits, and action plans, which can then be used to monitor future developments. It also provides for the assessment of proactive and/or reactive engagement in policy development by both those within and outside of government. Furthermore, it gives a platform to assess espoused philosophies and strategies outlined in government department plans and statements with activity at a community level.

Mapping policy developments can provide insight into the changing priorities and language used by successive governments in relation to the diverse sectors of the social economy. It can provide a timeline for the acceptance and embedding of concepts—the move from marginal to mainstream (such concepts would include social economy, social capital, social enterprise, venture philanthropy, and social entrepreneurship). This also links to the visibility of certain sectors—volunteerism over (paid) voluntary sector; non-profits and charities rather than co-operatives. These observations also link to the generation and development of the social economy in different localities and jurisdictions.

The policy scan and review gave a useful platform and foundation to support research in each of the Maritime Provinces to further develop dialogue with key stakeholders. This second phase of the research involved interviews and discussions with key respondents to identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration and inclusive approaches to engagement and involvement linked to improved policy planning and decision-making. This helped to identify points of fracture between policy and practice with regard to supporting social economy organisations and

enterprises, as well as good practice on the ground in developing and sustaining relationships and dialogue between sectors.

The policy threads project examined the many ways social economy organizations interact with the policy arena with the aim of pulling-out, summarizing and thematically organizing/analyzing their policy findings, and exploring the implications and/or recommendations for practice. In order to trace the policy threads running through the Node/sub-nodes' projects, documentary analysis was undertaken, based on project proposals, reports and papers produced. Phone interviews were also conducted with some project researchers and sub node coordinators to clarify the policy issues and implications and to invite further elaboration (see MacDonald & Reiners, 2009, for more details). Many of these projects involved social economy organizations that are delivering programs and services—i.e., helping to implement or produce government policy. These activities fall into two main streams—organizational responses geared to delivering government-initiated programs and services, and those filling gaps in services. A number of the social economy organisations involved in the Sub-node projects were also actively involved in advocating for policy changes and initiatives, particularly in relation to marginalized groups, sectors and communities.

In addition, several Atlantic Sub-node projects focused on social enterprises such as coops, credit unions and others offering goods and services for sale in the market. They are affected by policies geared largely to the private sector. Some projects looked at the experiences of specific enterprises in particular localities or areas of work, for example, rural women's entrepreneurship, which focused on a particular co-operative in Prince Edward Island (PEI). Others focused on cross-cutting issues of importance to a range of social enterprises, such as financing; accounting for cooperatives, performance measures; management tools for coops; developing indicators of the 'coop difference,' and employment law and workers cooperatives.

In both research studies, we were looking to discover the levels of commitment to and awareness of, social economy organisations in the region, and the spaces where, and mechanisms by which, government and social economy organisations intersect. In addition, we wanted to explore the scope and range of influence that social economy organisations have on identification of problems and issues in their communities and industry sectors (co-construction of public policy) and the capacity to offer mainstream services and alternative solutions to identified needs (co-production of public policy deliverables). Moreover, we were concerned to identify opportunities and challenges of cross-sector alliances with regard to setting the agenda for policy deliberation and direction; the choice and implementation of policy decisions; and the subsequent delivery of goods and services.

Policy in Context

Brown (2005, p. 4) notes that "trends in government finance and policy in Canada and elsewhere indicate an enhanced future role for the Social Economy (SE) [with] responsibility for social services (e.g., in health, immigration) increasingly devolved from federal to provincial; provincial to municipal; and municipal to community level." At the same time, there are continuing and emerging pressures (e.g., credit and financial crises, rural decline, globalization) that require collaboration among governments as well as participation of social economy organizations to "combine insights and actions of multiple actors learning about what works in particular places, and how to make it happen 'on the ground'" (Bradford, 2005, p. 4). The move towards building collaborative processes recognises the need to promote both informal and formal networking opportunities between government and non-governmental organizations. This effort to bring together individuals and organizations that have different, but inter-connected and interdependent interests can serve to reduce the perceived and actual power divide between government and civil society participants. In the longer-term, collaborative strategic alliances can work towards the democratisation or equalisation of these relationships. Evidence from the policy threads and policy scan projects shows there is a long way to go in terms of developing such collaborations and cross-cutting initiatives.

For each of the Atlantic Provinces, it is possible to list all departments and a number of programs that relate to supporting aspects of the social economy. For example, in 2007, the Bradshaw Report (Bradshaw et al., 2007) identified 26 separate government departments in New Brunswick, each having their own relationship and set of protocols in relation to the voluntary and non-profit sector alone. In PEI, there are seventy-five municipalities, ranging in population from 77 to over 32,000 people, providing a plethora of services. The Department of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour (2008) describes:

> complex layers of community development areas, incorporated community development groups, economic development districts, school boards, health districts, and watersheds, along with all other components of governance from the Provincial level, including a network of 'regional communities of interest' under the Community Development Bureau system.

This complexity and fragmentation can result in short-falls in community planning, assessments and development. The lack of a unifying central department with responsibility for social economy organisations, for example, can mean a mix of jurisdictional responsibilities and can result in a lack of strategic development in

relation to government-sector relations and cross-cutting issues that affect more than one government department and or level of government. It encourages (intentionally or not) what is referred to as a silo mentality: a focus on specific departmental mandates that discourage inter-departmental communication and cross working. SEOs often find their broad interests out of synch with such government silos and often work on a broader territorial basis. For example, environmental groups intersect with agriculture, forestry, fishing and tourism departmental interests. As we shall see later, this can also increase the administrative burden on SEOs, which can have consequences for their capacity to balance their own organizational aims and objectives as well as deliver on government agenda.

However, we need also to pay attention to the emergent and evolutionary aspects that result in changes in public policy. For example, Kingdon (as cited by John, 2003, p. 488) suggests that we should regard policy making as a "complex adaptive system" in which multiple actors react to crises or opportunities, are proactive about asserting marginal needs and then create or enact opportunities for changes to occur. For example, in New Brunswick, the appointment of a minister with portfolio for the voluntary and non-profit sector came after six years of concentrated activity on policy issues with the launch of PolicyLink NB in 2001. This was made possible through the federal government and pan-Canadian initiative—"Partnering for the benefit of Canadians" (part of the National Voluntary Sector Initiative–which focused on child and family poverty. The aim of the initiative was to look at building appropriate mechanisms and capacity building to enable more effective input by the voluntary sector into public policy matters. The Premier's Task Force on the Community Non-Profit Sector later undertook a process of consultation during 2006 and published its 'Blue Print for Action' (Bradshaw et al., 2007). This in turn led to the development of a Secretariat and ministerial brief for Community Non-Profit Organizations.

Window Open or Window Closed: Emerging Themes That Present Opportunities and Challenges for Sector Relations

This section provides a broad overview of some of the common themes or threads arising from the research. As mentioned earlier, there are issues that are sector or province specific and it is not within the scope of this paper to develop an in-depth analysis relating to specific organisations or departments. Rather we flag some of the recurring issues that hinder active alliances between government and social economy organisations and highlight some of the good examples and windows for opportunity that exist to enhance relationships.

The policy scan indicated a concentration on substantive or administrative policy and relations. This includes program design, funding and accountability measures,

and/or issue based concerns (e.g., employment, social exclusion and services for specified groups) often, but not always, in relation to resourcing and service delivery. Evidence of good practice can be identified in relation to, for example, single issue concerns (e.g., child care, elder care, learning disabilities, housing, drugs and alcohol services); communities of interest (Native communities, migrant and immigrant workers); and in relation to transaction relationships (often bi-lateral and concerned with service delivery, contracts, funding, accountability). While less common, there are also examples of commitments to working in partnership, or engagement of individuals, associations, and communities (via action plans, regulations, annual reports and accountability statements). Concrete examples of joint working (for example, through roundtables and task forces) can also be demonstrated:

- Newfoundland and Labrador Violence Prevention Initiative, Women's Policy Office, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador: community partners make up a Community Advisory Committee, take part in and may co-ordinate and/or chair regional co-ordinating committees.
- The Nova Scotia Volunteer Advisory Council was established in 2008 and aims to bring together members of volunteer and voluntary organizations with government to develop action plans to address key issues affecting volunteers. The Council will meet four times a year with The Minister for Volunteerism.

There was certainly an open window to raise awareness and possible policy interventions with regard to the social economy in 2004, with the presence of a Liberal federal government and a stated commitment in the Throne Speech. This was echoed, for example, in Newfoundland and Labrador in the provincial throne speech, albeit with a narrower focus. The speech announced the development of the Rural Secretariat's remit to foster partnerships and decision-making between government and communities and to ensure that regional perspectives would inform public policy development and implementation. Beyond communities (i.e., municipalities), the speech detailed inclusion of women's and aboriginal voices in policy formulation, and a support for community service and voluntary commitment. By 2007, there was no specific mention of community, voluntary or co-operatives sectors in the provincial throne speech although there was an outlined commitment to individual self-reliance (poverty reduction strategy) and promotion of choice in service provision (Ministerial Council on Aging and Seniors). However, the tide turned again in 2008 with appointment of a new minister responsible for the Volunteer and Non-profit Sector. This gave renewed strength of commitment by the provincial government to "draw on the talents, energy and compassion of thousands of volunteers and hundreds of community-based organisations across our province who are working to make Newfoundland and Labrador a better place to live" (Crosbie, 2008).

In Newfoundland and Labrador, unlike other Atlantic provinces, the use of the label 'social economy' appears in practitioner and government recordings of speeches, workshops and in written literature. Even so, there is no consistent understanding or usage of the term. However, it is applied more than in other provinces to describe activities that involve social enterprises, non-profit organizations and co-operatives. This lack of usage of the term is not unusual and in many ways reflects how both government and social economy organizations or sub-sectors are organised: theme and issues based activities (e.g., health, education, business); services provided to particular sections of the communities (e.g., youth, seniors, people with physical disabilities, mental health issues and other specific needs); categorised by organisational legal and governance structures (e.g., charity, volunteer organisation, self-help group, co-operative, credit union). As one of our research respondents identifies:

> Economic Development is probably our key partner, second is Community Services, but we cross all departments, we have this interdepartmental approach to our advocacy work. We work with Finance and the Securities Commission on CEDIFs and other financing. We work closely…department that governs co-ops, where our act is and they hold the inspector of co-ops function.

and

> We are doing work right now…with the province. They don't associate themselves with the social economy, which is probably not a bad thing…like a lot of phrases in government; it resonates with some departments, like social services or economic development…When the CEDIF program was launched a decade ago, co-ops were not a part of that either and we lobbied and got that changed. Most of the economic development policies put in place prior to the last ten years never mentioned co-ops. Now we see it, we have influenced that (DNG Interview).

In this sense, the policy window for the social economy per se may be closing in Atlantic Canada, but there are windows of opportunity emerging (or opening wider) for specific sectors—voluntary and community organisations, co-operatives, and particularly social enterprises tied to meeting governments' aspiration goals of sustainability, well-being, and prosperity. In New Brunswick, this shift can also be seen in terms of government structures to facilitate government-nonprofit relations, as explained by a research respondent:

> [New Brunswick Community Non-Profit Organizations Secretariat acts] as a point of contact within government for non-profits [and] play[s] a support role in connecting non-profits with other departments…[The Secretariat] has an interdepartmental committee within government. Every department has assigned an employee to link with the Secretariat. There are regular meetings and…work…to provide access to non-profits when they are needed for consultation in the policy development process…[The Secretariat] is exploring if there are ways [to connect] with the Department of Justice around co-ops. Not many co-ops are engaged in…regional network meetings, they seem to talk a different language than the community non-profit group. (NG Interview)

As illustrated in the quote above, despite these co-ordinating efforts, engagement in policy determination and design seems to be of a consultative nature than full participation. There are some cross-cutting issues—such as poverty reduction initiatives—that involve multi-sector organisations and actors, although often with an emphasis on public-private sector partnership. Involvement of "community" partners is geared to elected members (municipal representatives) and/or individual citizens. Moreover, inter-departmental and cross-sector working is more difficult to achieve when responsibility for relationships with the non-profit and community sector, or social enterprise, or co-operatives is "line-managed" by a particular department. Even where those departmental-sector relationships have been longstanding and extremely positive, it still inhibits wholesale take-up of working across boundaries. Departments that do not have a formal remit in developing relationships do not always have departmental capacity to network and participate in on-the-ground strategic alliances. We can see this illustrated in the views of one development practitioner:

> Generally government feels that they have all the bases covered with the policies and programs they have in place…there areprograms for non-profits, businesses, there are financing programs…They use the term social economy when it is convenient, when they are trying to make a policy statement, but at this point in time there is not a real commitment to the idea. (DNG Interview)

There are ways around this, as this respondent explains:

> I think the key for influencing policy is to have a champion on the inside that you work with as a team to bring ideas forward. In many ways that is why we have been successful, we have champions in many departments.

The sub-node projects examined in the policy threads project provide clear examples of the difference supportive individuals on the inside can make—individuals do matter. Yet, several of these comments place emphasis on the individual organisations to develop capacity to articulate on behalf of themselves and on behalf of their sector and to engage with multiple government actors—capacity that has been eroded through a move away from core and long-term funding and grants to short-term projects and contracts; changing jurisdictions; and downloading of public programs. The shift to project funding is a significant trend, particularly commented on by non-profit organisations. It can be seen in the varied and short-term nature of programs and funding initiatives since the major government funding cutbacks in the mid-1990s.

The policy threads project clearly demonstrates the negativeimpact project-based funding and ever-changing short-term initiatives can have on individual social economy organizations. There have been broader impacts, too, with the set up and closure of significant social economy capacity building, practice development and research/policy "initiatives," such as the Innovative Communities Fund (5-year initiative); the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (2001-2006); CVI Nova Scotia (2003-2006); and the Co-operative Development Initiative (2003-2009). However, more positively, this last initiative has now been renewed through a successful linking to the rural development agenda. For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Federation of Co-operative (NLFC) published a report in 2005 informing government (and those in the social economy sector) of the existence and role that co-operatives could have in developing the social economy and social economy enterprises, specifically in rural areas. The report actively links how the NLFC can help government fulfil their goals outlined in federal and Atlantic wide programs (Industry Canada and Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)-respectively) to support social enterprise and co-operatives. More recently this has developed into a co-operative development strategy and alliance between NLFC, the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development, ACOA and the National Co-operative Development Initiative, which includes establishing a co-operative developers' network, co-operative business development projects and increased focus on research and policy development relating to co-operatives. This process is clearly articulated by the experience of a co-operative development practitioner in another province: If you can align your goals and mission with the goals and the mission of the people you are trying to influence, you have a 90 percent better chance of success than if it is a tension filled thing. Sometimes the social sector tries to force or guilt the government into doing things, but they do not respond well to this because it is not aligned with their goals and values. You have to show [government] why doing the things you want

them to do is good for them, make them look good and help them achieve their goals–they can buy into that.

The Co-operative Development Initiative has been a key support for the development of new co-operative ventures. For example, PEI does not currently have a midwifery service and there are no plans for an in-Province Service. The Co-operative Development Agency funded the Birth Options Research Network (a volunteer-run group) to carry out a feasibility study to set up a women's health co-op and birthing centre in PEI (Women's Network PEI: www.wnpei.org/midwifery. html). This also demonstrates the importance of specialist development agencies to support and develop community-led initiatives.

For their part, policy makers and officers often balk at the sheer size, complexity and range of social economy organisations and look for an apex organisation or intermediary infrastructure organisation to act as a conduit into the larger communities of voluntary and community organisations, charities, and co-operatives. The "different language" of co-ops and non-profits often makes it difficult for government bodies to understand and navigate the whole range of SEOs. This further points to the need, as Bradford (2007) suggests for "institutional mechanisms and governance arrangements that link area-based initiatives with upper level policy making." This works best with a central, high level, "single coordinating secretariat or desk for SE policies within each government" (de Clercy, 2009, p. 12). This does not negate individual departmental mandates and liaison, but can serve to strengthen communications and collaborative working. It enables "the right people from government' to participate: those with 'sufficient seniority…[and] longevity…across all the departments relating to all parts of the sector" to support specific sectoral policy, financial and funding frameworks and access to the appropriate policy tables (Carter, 2008, p. 9).

As identified above, there is a corresponding need for co-ordinating and bridging bodies among social economy organizations. For example, Newfoundland and Labrador is one of the most visible of the Atlantic provinces in its publication of reports, participation in regional and federal initiatives and involvement in research on third sector activities and contribution. This is due in part to the active involvement and remit of the Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC). Like many organisations of its kind and in different countries (e.g., the UK, Australia) this local development agency works to support and develop local volunteer and voluntary organisations and community enterprises. Many, like CSC, have the ability to work at the interface with public sector and government in relevant policy development and implementation. They can also facilitate consultation with and

input by their member organizations into appropriate levels of government and policy arena. Similarly, the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council (NSCC) has been recognised as a significant intermediary providing innovative support for co-operative development (Soots et al., 2007).

What we can see is that there are some established and emerging opportunities for collaboration in provinces and in municipalities in Atlantic Canada. There has been significant change in the social economy landscape in each of the four provinces since the start of the Atlantic Node research and projects in 2005, specifically with the appointment of ministers with portfolio for voluntary and community sectors in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. But there are new organisational forms and emerging social enterprise activities that need to be accounted for in this changing landscape; and many organisations still do not feel they are active players at the policy tables where key decisions are being made, even when invited. Many projects in the Atlantic Node documented the frustrations of trying to get to the policy table and/or be heard once there. While early days, there is room for manoeuvre to significantly develop opportunities and to convert government rhetorical support into meaningful action and relationships. As Fairburn (2008, p. 5) observes:

> In Canada, so far, it is only in Québec that a reasonably cohesive set of understandings and networks have been created around the idea of the social economy; and only in Québec have governmental resources (both provincial and federal) subsequently flowed in significant measure into the development of the social economy.

This necessitates a focus on high level structures and frameworks to support policy development around civil society and organisations that positively contribute to this. It is also necessary to acknowledge the operational and practical aspects that support organisations on the ground. As mentioned earlier, access to the right kind of funding is of prime concern. As one respondent complains:

> The one agency that frustrates me the most from a development perspective, community perspective, from a finance perspective is [the federal agency]. They have no concept of community development or social enterprise, they mouth the words, but they are not in the game. They are so bureaucratic it is virtually impossible to do business with [them]…when they think of business development or community development, they only think of private sector activity. (DNG Interview)

Nonprofit and volunteer-led community organisations in particular are limited

by endless rounds of project funding and the administrative burden that comes with reporting to several funding bodies each with their own monitoring and reporting procedures, often fulfilled at the cost of service provision. This takes enormous energy away from their main work and can result in mission drift as organizations scramble to patch together funding from a variety of agencies, chasing funds that have specific priorities and terms of reference, and in their efforts to fit with externally driven demands for goods and services.

As mentioned above, project based funding constraints stymie long term planning and also makes it difficult to attract and employees with relevant skills and abilities. For example, a recent study in Nova Scotia showed that while education attainment levels of employees in voluntary and community organizations is high (the workforce in better educated then the national average), 60 percent of employees interviewed has been in post for less than two years with "job-hopping" being prevalent. The report suggests that this may be attributed to the numbers of employees employed on short and fixed-term contracts (Fraser, 2010). Staff turnover was a challenge faced by many organizations involved in our sub-node projects.

Often staff resources are limited by available funding or cut backs in core funding and inability (both in terms of service provision, but also in terms of legislative frameworks) to income generate. There are challenges in working across levels of government to patch together funds–finding matching funds, for example, where one level of government may be onside, but not another; or where funding in kind (for example volunteer input) cannot be included in budgets for funding. One long standing umbrella organization that links coastal community groups is turning to the social enterprise model as a way to escape dependence on the vagaries of public funding. However, this has its own challenges and is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire!

While social economy organisations are asked to do more with less, it is also acknowledged that many organisations rely on volunteer labour, and employees are often paid less than their counterparts in public and private sectors. This contributes to the staff burnout and turnover noted above. Many social economy organizations studied see the need to build capacity within and across organizations in order to effectively intervene on the policy front, but these efforts are stymied by the loss of seasoned staff. In Newfoundland and Labrador, a workshop and report commissioned and produced in 2005 by the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment on the development of the poverty reduction strategy concluded that there was a need to balance government responsibilities and partnering arrangements with the voluntary and community sector in order not to overload the sector and

that recognition of the contribution of the sector needed to be adequately resourced and compensated. There was, at this time, a felt need to also redress the shift towards economic development, which was increasingly overlooking the valuable social and community components to government initiatives.

The main support for development of social and community networks and resources in Atlantic Canada is through community economic development activity delivered through business focused programs. This consists of a joint federal and provincial initiative to support the development of new projects; more local community development targeted funding and community business development corporations' services, training and funds. As well as differing interpretations and weight given to policy platforms and focus—economic and social development, and social, economic and environmental sustainability, organizations can also be caught by the changing funding priorities, as governments change and the political winds shift. The push towards innovation and project work where an emphasis is on "new" work packages rather than proven practice can also result in organisations having to "re-invent" their services to attract further funding. For example, some organisations reported that even though program reviews were positive, programs were dropped because of redirections in funding policy. Some funding has restrictions regarding explicit "advocacy" work. Advocacy can put funding in jeopardy, especially for those groups funded to deliver programs. Funding for advocacy work per se is not generally available, while private sector organizations have a number of resources to draw on to support their lobbying efforts. Even where good relationships exist between specific organisations and individual program funding staff, these staff are often not in a position to influence policy decisions at a macro level.

Finally, there is a need for legislative and regulatory review to allow for new hybrid organizational forms (social enterprises and social businesses) and the move from organisations being grant dependent to income generating and trading as part of their overall mission and service goals, which may in turn subsidise those parts of their work that are difficult to attract funding/donations. As Eakin and Graham (2009, p.16) point out, "problems with government regulatory and accountability requirements and processes have been identified in a number of studies over several years. The issues are therefore well understood but remain unresolved." In addition, as one interview respondent remarks, as yet "there is little cross jurisdictional support or understanding of social enterprise" (NNG Interview).

Social enterprises are challenged by accountability requirements and performance measures used by government programs that are not reflective of their goals. Multiple bottom lines are becoming more common in social enterprises, but

may not be compatible with investment criteria geared to the private sector. Social enterprises studied in the Atlantic Node are also looking to government for more than capital. For example, training and other capacity building supports are needed. Several projects showed the need for policies to facilitate domestic fair trade in food products, which would support a variety of social enterprises involved in food production and distribution. Other policy areas, such as employment law, also need to be considered from the point of view of social enterprises. Employment law, based on the fundamental distinction between employers and employees, creates many challenges for worker co-operatives.

Looking Forward

As mentioned, the last five years has seen significant change in the policy environment for social economy organisations in the Atlantic provinces. Some of this has been connected to changes in government and government personnel; to the development of new areas of responsibility for social economy organisations in different parts of government; and the continued growth of social economy organisations and networks. There are also examples of inter-connectivity between government departments, and between provincial, municipal and private sector organizations, some of which include social economy representation or strategies and action plans that outline intention to include citizen's organizations and social economy organizations in current and future policy deliberations. As a key respondent suggests, this "has been a learning process for both sides…and now there is more dialogue [between the sectors] the…process has been evolving", but warns that:

> Engagement needs to begin from the start, true engagement means being involved in the whole process. Both sides need to honest to build trust, open discussion from the start. This can be tricky, non-profits are worried it will impact their funding, and government sometimes has confidentiality issues. [We] need an open mind, need to be willing to do things differently, need to try different angles… [We need to] recognize different expertise and work together; [we] need to be willing to hear the other side. [We] need to engage people that are impacted by policies and [we] need a voice at all stages, including development and implementation. (NG Interview)

One aspect of the need to do things differently consists of, in the words of one interviewee, the need for "entrepreneurial solutions" (DNG Interview) with regard to capital investment (in start-ups and new forms of organisation; development of patient capital); capacity building; awareness and promotion and in practical

issues which link to economies of scale and can help with administrative costs for organisations and in seeking new work, for example, business development advice and procurement.

There are also opportunities for the Atlantic provinces to apply lessons learned from other provinces and from review and reflection on programs and developments in their own jurisdictions, particularly around cross-cutting issues such as poverty reduction, violence against women, environmental issues and rural initiatives. For example, we learned that more education is needed to keep social enterprises visible throughout the policy realm. One approach could be to develop a social enterprise lens, similar to a gender lens, through which policies and programs can be evaluated. An alternative (or complementary) approach is to develop more targeted programs, including funding, aimed at social enterprises. Quebec provides a model for such initiatives (see for example, Loxley & Simpson 2007; Mendell, 2009; Mendell & Neamtan, 2009). Sectoral policies can be used to facilitate the growth of social enterprises, as in Quebec.

Another example is the Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) project, which produced a series of tools and resources on using research and influencing policy. As with the development of relationships between government and community regarding health and well-being, the RCIP also provides opportunities for learning in terms of improving and increasing "citizen participation and…individual, organisational and collaborative capacity to support broad participation in rural development" (Langille et al., 2008, p. 45). As discussed earlier, this collaborative capacity building resonates with the moves away from transaction and bi-lateral relationships between government and social economy organisations (regarding funding and specific sector-department relationships) to broader, more issue based strategy and thinking, which require local knowledge and context-specific interventions. There is, therefore, a need for developed collaborative, multi-sector, multi-stakeholder alliances, which Bradford notes were significantly absent in policy practice in Canada in 2003 and remain in limited supply in our more recent research.

In conclusion then, we have identified a number of themes and lessons learned from our research, not all of which we have been able to explore in detail in this paper. The research in the Atlantic Node shows little evidence of co-construction of policy. The policy process remains largely top-down with elected government representatives driving policy development. However, the size of each province allows for relatively easy access to Premiers, Ministers, MPs and Deputy Ministers and individual relationships sometimes create the avenue for discussion around policy development when the relationship is based on mutual trust and respect.

These relationships need to be formalized and institutionalized (without losing trust, confidence and flexibility).

Lessons learned include the need to build partnerships with government and the importance of leadership: "There needs to be shared leadership and ownership" and "strong partnerships require an active role for all partners…everyone needs a role to play" (RNG Interview). This links to the need to minimize silos; the importance of networking and multi-stakeholder approaches; and the need for coordination horizontally and vertically within and across governments. To do this there needs to be education, flexibilities with regard to government structures and alliances, and capacity building to allow full participation of community members and social economy organisations in policy deliberation and development. This may mean specific support including appropriate range of funding and sector development support initiatives and also the development of research and evidence gathering capacity.

We have learned for example that in Atlantic Canada, the social economy is not well understood by government or social economy practitioners 'on the ground'. This may not be such an issue if we have territorial and sector policies that actively support, promote and capture the full value of the goods and services provided, and the resources used (and saved) by the range of community organisations, voluntary organisations, charities, non-profits, co-operatives, campaign and advocacy groups, networks and coalitions that exist in different parts of Atlantic Canada.

It may not be an issue if we have strong, funded, intermediary organisations that work on behalf of sector organisations at operate at the nexus between government, private and nonprofit/social enterprise sectors. These organisations that can clearly express and advocate for their member organisations in terms of the contributions made to civil society and social and economic development, for example: accountability, widening of democracy and active citizenship through engagement and participation of individuals, groups, and marginalised communities; bottom-up approaches to problem solving and community development; promotion of financial and social inclusion; non-profit distribution; and development of trust and public governance of public services. All of which actively contribute government and politicians drive for prosperity, wellness, sustainability and health communities and supports a policy approach that promotes the concept of the social economy as an alternative vision, an economy based on co-operative and associative values.

References

Bradford, N. (2007). Placing social policy? Reflections on Canada's new deal for cities and communities. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research, 16*(2), 1-26.

Bradford, N. (2005). *Place-based public policy: Towards a new urban and community agenda for Canada*. (Research Report F/51). Family Network. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Bradford, N. (2003). *Cities and communities that work: Innovative practices, enabling policies.* (Discussion Paper F32). Family network. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Bradshaw, C., Rickards, S., Landry, F., & Hutchins, R. (2007). *Blueprint for action: Building a foundation for self-sufficiency.* New Brunswick: Department of Family and Community Services, Government of New Brunswick.

Brown, L. (2005). *Atlantic node social economy and sustainability-SSHRC proposal*. Halifax, NS: Mount Saint Vincent University.

Carter, S. (2008, June). *Deliberate relationships between the non-profit/voluntary sector and governments: The what, why, when and how well*. Paper presented at the Association of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research, Vancouver, BC.

Crosbie, J.C. Honourable. (2008, March 10). [Throne Speech]. Speech presented at the General Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's, NL. Retrieved from http://www.exec.gov.nl.ca/thronespeech/2008/speech2008.htm

De Clercy, C. (2009, May). *An inventory of social economy policies in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and northern Ontario*. Paper presented at the ANSER-ARES Annual Meeting, Ottawa, ON.

Prince Edward Island Department of Communities, Cultural Affairs & Labour. (2008). *Land and local governance: A white paper on governance and land use in Prince Edward Island*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/cca_white_dec08.pdf

Department of Human Resources. (2008). *Poverty reduction strategy: 2008 consultation booklet*. St John's, NL: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Eakin, L. & Graham, H. (2009). *Canada's non-profit maze: A scan of legislation and regulation impacting revenue generation in the non-profit sector*. Toronto, ON: Wellesley Institute.

Fairburn, B. (2008). *Imagination and identity: The social economy and the state in Canada*. (Working Paper). Leuven, BE: Katholeke Universiteit. Retrieved from https://hiva.kuleuven.be/resources/pdf/anderepublicaties/P52_BFairbairn.pdf

Fraser, B. (2010). *The state of health of the non-profit/voluntary sector in Nova Scotia*. (Discussion Paper). Submitted to the Federation of Community Organizations and Phoenix Youth Programs. Halifax, NS: Gardner Pinfold Consulting Economists Ltd.

Galligan, A.M. & Burgess, C.N. (2003). *Moving rivers, shifting streams: Perspectives on the existence of a policy window*. (Occasional Paper No. 29). Paper presented at the 29th Annual Social Theory, Politics and the Arts Conference. Retrieved from https://arted.osu.edu/files/arted/paper29.pdf

John, P. (2003). Is there a life after policy streams, advocacy coalitions, and punctuations: Using evolutionary theory to explain policy change? *Policy Studies Journal, 31*(4), 481-498

Kingdon, J.W. (1995, 2e). *Agendas, alternatives and public policies*. New York, NY: Longman.

Langille, L., Munro, I., Romanov, P., Lyons, R., Bull, A., & Williams, P. (2008). Building collaborative capacity for research and influencing policy: The rural communities impacting policy project. *Journal of Rural and Community Development, 3*(3), 23-55.

Loxley, J. & Simpson, D. (2007). *Government policies towards community economic development and the social economy in Quebec and Manitoba.* Report prepared for the Northern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite. Victoria, BC: Canadian CED Network.

MacDonald, M. & Reiners, G. (2009, June). *Overview of policy research: Social economy and sustainability research network Atlantic node*. Paper presented at the Third Annual ANSER Conference, Concordia University, Montreal, QC.

Mendell, M. (2009). Financing the social economy in Quebec: A work in progress. [Special Issue: Capital for Communities]. *Making Waves, 20*(3).

Mendell, M. & Neamtam, N. (2009, September 30-October 2). *An overview of the social economy: Policy and practice in Quebec*. Plenary presentation to the 'Building Policy for the Social Economy' Policy Colloquium, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS

Myers, J. & McGrath, C. (2009, a). *Public policy and the social economy in Atlantic Canada: New Brunswick. An inventory of jurisdictional policies, programs and activities that support social economy organizations at municipal, provincial and federal levels*. Halifax, ND: MSVU SES Research Network.

Myers, J. & McGrath, C. (2009, b). *Public policy and the social economy in Atlantic Canada: Newfoundland and Labrador. An inventory of jurisdictional policies, programs and activities that support social economy organizations at municipal, provincial and federal levels.* Halifax, NS: MSVU SES Research Network.

Myers, J. & McGrath, C. (2009, c). *Public policy and the social economy in Atlantic Canada: Nova Scotia. An inventory of jurisdictional policies, programs and activities that support social economy organizations at municipal, provincial and federal levels.* Halifax, NS: MSVU SES Research Network.

Myers, J. & McGrath, C. (2009, d). *Public policy and the social economy in Atlantic Canada: Prince Edward Island. An inventory of jurisdictional policies, programs and activities that support social economy organizations at municipal, provincial and federal levels.* Halifax, NS: MSVU SES Research Network.

Soots, L. K., S. Perry, S., & Cowan, J. (2007). *Supporting innovative co-operative development: The case of Nova Scotia co-operative development system.* Paper presented at Congress 2007, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK.

Vaillancourt, Y. (2008, July). *Social economy in the co-construction of public policy / La democratization des politiques publiques: Une vision canadienne et quebecoise.* (Occasional Paper No. 3). Victoria, BC: Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships; University of Victoria.