

EVALUATING REGIONAL DISTRICTS AGAINST OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES – HOW DO WE STACK UP?

Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly
School of Public Administration
University of Victoria
ebrunetj@uvic.ca

How do we stack Up?

- ▣ What do we learn from the history?
- ▣ What do we learn from Rural RDs?
- ▣ What do we learn from Urban RDs?
- ▣ What are the debates in the literature?
- ▣ How do we stack up?

How do we stack Up? What do we learn from the Regional Districts' history?

- Single – Purpose Districts were early examples of municipal partnerships – municipalities shared building and operating water and sewer works; To share efficiencies and economies of scale.
- The Improvement Districts were provincial creations but managed by elected trustees who often volunteered their time; they extended those same policy goals.
- Hon. Dan Campbell (Evert Brown) recognized the importance of inter-municipal forms of governance based on a collaborative and voluntary approach.
- Originally, Regional Districts were (1) partnerships – not a new level of government, (2) RD boards comprise municipally-elected representatives, (3) Functions are determined by board only, votes and costs are linked to population or household.

How do we stack Up? What do we learn from Rural Regional Districts?

- ▣ Stewart Fleming: (1) *“The 1969-71 challenge was the newness of the whole idea and the lack of restriction – the board members were wonderful.”* (2) *To be successful - be flexible, be willing to communicate, listen to people and use help.*
- ▣ Lee Ann Crane: (3) *“Public consultation is of utmost importance – Use various means communication depending on the kind of services and people that are involved .”*
- ▣ Moray Stewart: (5) *“Down with RDs – Down with tyranny”* (6) *“The biggest success was to respond with services. Protect maintain and enhance the quality of life of its residents.”*
- ▣ Rural background: Opposition to any forms of government. (Lee Ann, Moray...)

How do we stack Up? What do we learn from Urban Regional Districts?

- ▣ Ken Cameron: Regional Districts are (1) *“Do it yourself regional government”* (2) *“Our challenges are accountability, capacity to address policing (& other social and economic) issues in the region, (3) our relationship with the province and members.”*
- ▣ Kelly Daniels: *“It is about herding cat”* – *“Democracy is messy”* but strive to *“Find the common ground”* – *our challenge is to link service quality to public perception & image.”*
- ▣ Greg Toma: *“having staff level relations,”* Wayne D’Easum - *“RDs are Service delivery boards that have become political”* & Gary Paget, we work on *“this is a tough job – we don’t train people for it”*
- ▣ Fred Banham: *“What are the challenges facing RDs today?”* *“They have become a mediation tool between all levels of government (Federal, Provincial, Municipal and First Nations)*

How do we stack Up? Key issues

- ▣ Today we know that Regional Districts are:
 - ▣ (1) Bottom – up local governance mechanisms
 - ▣ (2) Focus services provision on service efficiency
 - ▣ (3) Provide services on flexible scales
 - ▣ (4) Represent functional and political communities
- ▣ They have issues – Are they dysfunctional?
 - ▣ Accountability - Issue of democracy and accountability
 - ▣ Ratings are high on services and low on public perception/image
 - ▣ Provincial/Regional/Members Relations – visibility and size
 - ▣ Relations with members is key -- / -- Rural RDs
 - ▣ Relations with other governments (Province, Federal, First nations) key -- / -- Urban RDs.

How do we stack Up? How does the literature assesses similar structures?

- ▣ **Efficiency:** One argument is that the market regulates cost-efficient services to the best level (municipalities compete); the other argument is that economies of scale are possible in larger local governments (upper tiers/regional districts).
- ▣ **Size and equity** - mutually reinforcing? Larger local government are praised for their ability to provide equal access to local services, and to expand their services to regional communities/population.
- ▣ **Democracy/ accountability and representation:** May vary either with local government size, specifically, the size of electoral constituencies, or with the electoral mechanisms that organize direct or indirect representation of the electorate.

How do we stack Up? Well

- ▣ **Efficiency:** *Regional Districts are very efficient because they provide economies of scale , and*
- ▣ **Size and equity** - mutually reinforcing? *Regional Districts provide services on many flexible scales, and provide services to the larger region/ population.*
- ▣ **Democracy:** *A Regional District is a partnership -- not another level of government; however this is inherently more complex (duplication/ overlap/ confusion) than a single-tier (Slack, 2003). Very large regional partnerships need two elected tiers (McMillan, 1997).*

How do we stack Up? Well. But you said there are issues do be addressed

- ▣ “RDs are mediation tools between levels of governments and First Nations. (Fred)” This is affecting two central issues:
- ▣ Ratings are high on services - and - low on public perception/image : Is this a political or an administrative issue? Should this be addressed from both angles? *Keep the members happy (Gary), “Public consultation is of utmost importance (Lee Ann)”*
- ▣ This will not go away (information communication society) - Is this only a political or also a bureaucratic issue?
- ▣ Provincial/Regional/Members Relations: if you are “flexible, willing to communicate, listen to people and use help (Stew)” you’ll succeed. “If you are flexible and like being picked on – this is a job for you! (Wayne).”
- ▣ World interconnectedness won’t go away / governance and articulation of RDs with governments.

THANK YOU !

Dr. Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly
School of Public Administration
University of Victoria
ebrunetj@uvic.ca