

THE REGIONAL DISTRICTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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The Regional Districts of British Columbia in Comparative Perspective

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Introduction

- ◉ What are the Regional Districts of British Columbia? *Are they a form of local government?*
- ◉ Local governments are the 'first order of government' because closest to people
- ◉ Local governments provide people with services (Emergency, Transportation, Planning, Waste Management, Parks, and others)
- ◉ Local governments are provincial instruments
- ◉ Local governments revenues primarily come from property, taxes, fees, and development charges

Local Governance Structures Across Canada

- ◉ The literature generally discusses four types of local government structures: *single tier, upper tier, lower tier and special purpose bodies*.
 - *Single-tier municipality* is elected, multi-functional i.e. manages a wide range of functions
 - *Upper-tier municipality* is elected, with limited functions and overlaps a number of lower-tier municipalities
 - *Lower-tier municipality* is elected, manages local functions
 - *Special purpose body* (or joint services board, regional district or special purpose authority, or public authority) is flexible, allows municipalities to cater servicing arrangements to an optimum economy of scale.

Local Governance Structures Across Canada

PROVINCE	INCORPORATION (area)	GOVERNANCE SYSTEM
Manitoba	20%	Single-tier
Nova Scotia	100%	Single-tier
New Brunswick	15%	Single-tier
Prince Edward Island	50%	Single-tier
Newfoundland and Labrador	2.5%	Single-tier
Quebec	Unknown (99% population)	Two-tier
Ontario	Unknown (99% population)	Single-tier and Two-tier
Alberta	50%	Single tier and Two-tier
British Columbia	Unknown (85% population) (5% land mass)	Single-tier and Regional Districts
Saskatchewan	67%	Single-tier

Comparing Local Governance

- ◉ *Single tier and lower-tier bodies* are in most cases directly elected and an upper-tier body is indirectly elected
- ◉ *Regional Districts* have a board to manage municipal agreements that focus on efficient service delivery.
 - Proponents of this model assert that the board remains accountable to the municipal level and it allows for strong accountability and responsive governance (Sancton, 1994).
 - Others contend that complex inter-municipal agreements result in unclear bureaucratic and functional responsibility and lack of local control (McMillan, 1997)
 - The flexibility of this institutional arrangement, however, loses its appeal once the number of functions to be managed by the board expands (Mc Millan 1997, Smith 1998, Tindal, 2000).

Comparing Local Governance: Local Control

- ⦿ One historical feature of local governance in BC is local control.
- ⦿ “BC has a long history of allowing its residents to take the initiative on the structure of their local governments” (Bish, 1999)
 - BC local governments have a say – (Broad Powers)
 - RD were encouraged NOT mandated
- ⦿ This is a unique feature in Canada

Comparing Local Governance: Representation

- ⦿ Single tier, upper tier and lower tier local governments in Canada are governed by elected councils: *Two separate sets of elected officials*
- ⦿ Regional Districts Across British Columbia are comprised of municipalities and electoral areas: *One set of elected officials*
 - *Directors* represent municipalities. They are appointed by municipal councils
 - *Elected directors* represent electoral areas
- ⦿ This is a unique feature in Canada

*Comparing Local Governance:
Flexible Service Provision*

- ◉ Single tier, upper tier and lower tier local governments in Canada have specific scales and functions.
- ◉ Regional Districts Across British Columbia provide services on many flexible scales – including unincorporated rural communities, municipalities and regions.
- ◉ The same elected officials make service production allocation decisions both at municipal and Regional District level
- ◉ Municipalities are encouraged to opt-in when a service benefits their community.
- ◉ This is a unique feature in Canada

*Comparing Local Governance:
Recover Taxes*

- ◉ Single tier, upper tier and lower tier local governments in Canada collect directly property taxes, fees, development charges and have few other sources of revenues.
- ◉ Regional Districts Across British Columbia is the policy body that determines the amounts but it only recover taxes -do not collect taxes-requisitions paid by municipalities/province.
- ◉ This is a unique feature in Canada

Conclusion

- ⦿ Regional Districts are unique in Canada – and across North America
- ⦿ They are bottom – up local governance mechanisms
- ⦿ They focus services provision on service efficiency
- ⦿ They represent functional and political communities
- ⦿ They provide services on flexible scales
- ⦿ They recover taxes

THANK YOU !

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