Complex Policy Subsystems and Horizontal Management: The Case of the Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador

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Abstract

In recent decades, horizontal management has become an increasingly common vehicle for policy-making, as complex policy issues have demanded innovative approaches to address them. Despite its benefits, horizontality has been subject to critical examination, especially regarding the challenges it poses to accountability and the lack of appropriate governance structures. From a theoretical perspective, there is a paradox regarding horizontal policy-making in contexts marked by vertical accountability. This paper adds to the debate about the horizontal management of complex policy issues by examining it from a policy subsystems perspective, using the case of the Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. I argue that when facing a highly complex issue that involved the participation of a wide variety of actors with diverging interests, Government officials adopted mechanisms to ensure policy implementation was not symbolic or unsuccessful. After a horizontal and participatory approach during the planning stages of the Plan, a highly departmentalized implementation was established. I suggest that the theoretical contradictions found in the Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador case can be understood as a subsystem management effort undertaken by the Provincial Government, in order to minimize some of the limitations of horizontal management. The approach helped to overcome some shortcomings regarding accountability, but nonetheless has brought challenges and limited the horizontal nature of the initiative.

Introduction

In recent decades, horizontal management has become an increasingly common vehicle for policy-making, especially among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD (Bakvis and Juillet 2004a; Carlson, Elson and Struthers 2007). Calls for more responsive, efficient, and effective governance have made it evident that complex policy issues cannot be addressed by single government agencies with narrow focuses. In this context, there has been a reconsideration of the way to view certain policy matters and a re-conceptualization of the approaches used to deal with them. Increased inter-ministerial collaboration, close coordination across different levels of government, shared goals across departments and agencies, and active citizen engagement, reflect this tendency towards more comprehensive decision-making and implementation models.

The horizontal management of governmental initiatives offers advantages, especially regarding its comprehensive handling of complex issues and the broad scope of solutions it provides. Despite its many benefits, however, the approach has been subject to wide discussion and critical examination (Bakvis and Juillet 2004a; Hopkins, Moore and Couture 2001; Peters 2005; Termeer 2009). From a theoretical perspective, there is a paradox regarding horizontal policy-making in contexts marked by vertical accountability, which directly affects the public policy process. Effective implementation and accurate evaluation of gov-

ernment policies and programs are pivotal, but horizontality makes it difficult to track improvement and attribute responsibility (Peters 2006). It is pertinent to ask if horizontal management is helping to make decision-making more efficient or hindering government effectiveness and accountability.

In a federal system like Canada's, horizontal undertakings seem necessary but complex to execute (Peters 1998), given the coexistence of various orders of government embedded in a highly pluralist society. As the Federal Government has recognized, problems with respect to accountability and the lack of appropriate governance structures and instruments make horizontality a desirable but contested approach. Despite all the challenges, all levels of government in Canada have employed partnership arrangements and horizontality as a means of developing and implementing public policy.

The Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) Government has significant experience in this regard[1]. In April 2007, it launched the document *The future of our land. A future for our children. A Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador* (NSP), an ambitious strategy aimed at fostering social and economic development in the region (Government of NL 2007). The NSP stated the vision, long-term goals, and priorities for Labrador during an initial five-year period (2007-2012), describing in detail the main strategic objectives and a wide variety of initiatives to improve existing, and create new, programs and services.

The NSP was conceived as a horizontal initiative, requiring strong coordination among, and participation of, numerous stakeholders (confidential interview). The planning and development of the Plan involved a wide range of government agencies, Indigenous organizations, and citizen representatives in an extensive consultation process. While the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs (LAA)[2] [3] was responsible for the coordination, monitoring, and progress of the Plan, implementing the commitments of the NSP and achieving shared goals was the responsibility of specific departments and agencies. The success of the Plan also depended on collaboration with Indigenous organizations and the Federal Government.

Drawing on literature that suggests the structure of policy subsystems and the complexity of policy issues directly affects policy implementation, the case of the NSP will be analyzed[4]. The case is an interesting example of horizontal management directed to address a variety of policy issues in a particular geographic region – as opposed to tackling a crosscutting issue at the local, regional, or national level. The release of the first NSP progress report in March 2010[5] offers an opportunity to look at the evolution of the Plan and examine the impact of horizontality on policy-making. Moreover, it enables the exploration of the mechanisms put in place to overcome the aforementioned difficulties, especially with regards to accountability and evaluation. After a horizontal and participatory approach during the planning stages of the NSP, a highly departmentalized implementation was put in place. This helped to overcome some of the shortcomings of horizontality regarding accountability, but at the same time it limited the horizontal nature of the initiative. I argue that some of the theoretical contradictions found in the NSP case can be under-

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[1] Past horizontal initiatives developed and implemented in the province include the Strategic Social Plan (1998), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2006), and the Violence Prevention Initiative (2006).

[2] Now Labrador Affairs Office (LAO).

[3] The term 'Aboriginal' is used by the Canadian Government to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. In this paper, I use 'Aboriginal' only when referencing the NL Government's use of the term. Otherwise, I use 'Indigenous'.

[4] The analysis draws on data gathered from printed sources, including government publications, academic articles, and book chapters; online sources, including Federal and Provincial Governments' websites, news releases, and newspapers; and a confidential semi-structured interview with a Senior NL Government official involved in the NSP's planning and implementation. Given the limited amount of information publicly available, the latter was especially valuable, as it offered first-hand insights regarding the processes underlying the development and execution of the Plan, the challenges faced by LAA, and the evaluation and accountability mechanisms employed.

[5] The NSP formally ended in 2012. To date, LAO has not published a final report and/or evaluation of the Plan.

stood as a subsystem management effort undertaken by the NL Government in order to minimize some of the negative effects of horizontality. Specifically, I suggest that in the face of a highly complex issue that involved the participation of a wide variety of actors, the NL Government strategically used vertical mechanisms to ensure that implementation was not symbolic or unsuccessful. The subject seems particularly relevant in a context of debate concerning the ability of governments to successfully undertake horizontal initiatives.

In the following sections, I provide the theoretical framework for the analysis, focusing on the emergence and premises of horizontal management, and the challenges regarding accountability; examine policy subsystem configurations and their effects on implementation, highlighting the concept of network management and the relationship between issue complexity and horizontality; present and examine the case of the NSP, exploring its working structure, the challenges faced by the NL Government in the effective implementation of the strategy, the mechanisms put in place to overcome those challenges, and the implications this had for horizontality and accountability; and offer a final discussion.

Horizontal Management: Theory and Challenges

Horizontal management has grown in Canada since the 1990s, both at the provincial and federal levels (Canada 1996). The cross-cutting nature of many policy issues, the challenges posed by globalization to government coordination, increased fiscal and budgetary restraints, the need to avoid overlap and duplication of efforts, changes in policy domains and management philosophies, and the need for citizens to be considered in policy development have all contributed to its consolidation (Bakvis and Juillet 2004a; Peters and Savoie 1996).

The term horizontal management encompasses a diverse set of practices at different levels – ranging from the definition of policy goals, to decision-making, policy-making, or implementation (Peters 1998). Horizontal management might involve working towards the achievement of shared outcomes under a formal funding agreement, while sharing authority and the responsibility for achieving results. However, the means to achieve increased coordination and the degrees to which it takes place can vary widely, and horizontality does not necessarily involve the existence of shared budgets. Bakvis and Juillet (2004a, 8) offer a succinct definition, suggesting that horizontal management is "the coordination and management of a set of activities between two or more organizational units, where the units in question do not have hierarchical control over each other and where the aim is to generate outcomes that can not be achieved by units working in isolation." The underlying assumption is that "more extensive interdepartmental coordination will lead to better outcomes in public administration" (Bakvis and Juillet 2004b, 2), especially in complex policy areas.

In the view of many scholars, government officials, and public servants, "horizontal management is often the only or the best way to get results. It may not be the most efficient method, especially in the short run, but over time it can be the most effective" option in complex policy fields (Hopkins, Moore and Couture 2001, 3). When traditional administrative divisions and approaches no longer fit the realities governments face, greater interdepartmental coordination and integrative, comprehensive policy-making seem to be adequate approaches to address these challenges (Bakvis and Juillet 2004b; Kernaghan 1999). The existence of interdependencies among different entities and the multilevel structure within which many government organizations are embedded also challenge conventional understandings about hierarchy as a necessary condition for effective management and coordination (Sproule-Jones 2000).

Different factors facilitate successful horizontal policy-making and implementation. Among these factors are the existence of solid and clear processes; strengthening the interdepartmental policy-making system; the employment of results-oriented frameworks to guide policy development; and the development of a

collaborative culture within the policy community (Canada 1996; Peach 2004). The role played by specific individuals in expanding the commitment to horizontal policy-making at the bureaucratic level, and supporting the implementation and the management of horizontal initiatives, is also central to the success of the approach (Bakvis and Juillet 2004a).

Horizontal Policy Making in a Context of Vertical Accountability

Despite wide consensus that working horizontally is often the best option, some warning voices have emerged. They argue that horizontality certainly brings benefits, but should not be seen as a panacea or as an end in itself (Hopkins, Moore and Couture 2001).

Peters (1998) stresses the challenges horizontal management poses to government coordination, both at the policy and administrative levels. While being aware of other departments' activities and trying not to duplicate efforts might seem feasible, horizontality requires much stricter control over the activities of organizations, in addition to enforcing mechanisms that in his view "few public sectors possess" (Ibid., 5). Peach (2004) notes the complexities of bringing together different levels of government and citizens in policy development. Other challenges brought by horizontality include increased meeting time for public managers and longer decision-making processes, the risks of suboptimal outcomes associated with consensus building, increased paper work, and more complex reporting mechanisms, among others (Bakvis and Juillet 2004a; Hopkins, Moore and Couture 2001). Moreover, implementing new forms of governance always requires stronger and more consistent leadership (Bakvis and Juillet 2004a; Termeer 2009).

Perhaps one of the most critical and widely discussed issues regarding horizontal management concerns accountability (Bakvis and Juillet 2004a; Fitzpatrick 2000; Hopkins, Moore and Couture 2001; Peters 1998). Responding to, and being held responsible for, policy actions and outcomes becomes difficult when initiatives cut across hierarchical responsibilities. Horizontal policy-making tends to create accountabilities between government partners, and may also involve mechanisms that allow civil society to hold government bodies accountable. In a country like Canada, these structures have to coexist with traditional vertical accountability frameworks based on the principle of ministerial responsibility. This hierarchical context appears as an obstacle to effective horizontality (Hopkins, Moore and Couture 2001); this drawback can be mitigated, however, by establishing alternative structures, such as joint decision-making committees, written agreements and protocols, arrangements to share resources, and communication networks, among others.

Some scholars go even further to argue that horizontality potentially threatens representative democracy and political institutions (Fitzpatrick 2000; Koppenjan, Kars, and van der Voort 2009). The struggle between the formal power of elected officials and the direct participation of the executive in horizontal management tends to erode the position of representatives. In the words of Fitzpatrick (2000, 5)

> The growing dependence on partnership arrangements to deliver services [in Canada] not only raises questions with respect to governance and accountability but also poses new challenges related to parliamentary democracy and the appropriate roles of the federal government, central agencies, departments, partners and citizens in the governance and accountability equation.

While it could be argued that horizontality weakens to some extent the traditional vertical chain of representation, it is interesting to look at what mechanisms can be used by policy-makers and public servants to address the aforementioned challenges. All the definitions of horizontal management reviewed here suggest that the approach is to a great extent an organizational matter, with direct implications for governance. In other words, one of the central features of horizontality concerns the number and diversity of actors involved in policy-making, their goals, and interactions. Using concepts from the policy subsystems

literature, horizontal management can be seen as an expansion and "complexization" of policy subsystems that have traditionally operated in isolation and/or disconnected from each other, in the face of more multifaceted policy realities.

In the next section, I will turn to the literature on policy subsystems to further explore these issues, focusing on how different subsystem configurations affect implementation and how some of the complexities of horizontal management regarding accountability can be understood using this analytical framework.

Policy Subsystem Configurations and their Impact on Policy-Making

The notion of policy subsystems has been widely discussed in the public policy and political science literatures. A major area of analysis that is particularly relevant to this paper is the manner in which policy implementation is affected by different structures and configurations of subsystems – the different ways "in which ideas, actors, and institutions interact in the policy process" (Howlett, Ramesh and Perl 2009, 81).

Subsystem Configurations and Management

The structure of policy subsystems has been explored from different perspectives. Iron triangles and issue networks (Heclo, 1974) illustrate two extremes, ranging from rigid and centralized elites to dynamic and broad decision-making structures, respectively. The concept of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier 1988) emphasizes the role of actors within policy subsystems, understanding subsystems as groups of individuals who share beliefs systems and seek to translate these conceptions into public policy. In a similar vein, the notion of epistemic communities (Haas 1992) highlights the significance of ideas and discourse in driving the policy process.

Howlett and Ramesh (1998) relate different subsystem configurations to their likelihood of being affected by transformations in policy discourses, concluding that policy change is more likely when subsystems are open to new actors and new ideas. Bressers and O'Toole (1998) suggest that certain types of policy subsystems are associated with the selection of particular kinds of policy tools, implying that it is possible to anticipate policy preferences based on structural features, which are more likely to be found in some social, economic, and political contexts than others. Howlett (2008) further develops this line of argument, distinguishing between procedural policy instruments –"intended to manage state-societal interactions in order to assure general support for government aims and initiatives" (Ibid., 412)– and substantial or operative tools –aimed to deliver concrete goods and services through programs and policies.

Following this line of inquiry, one of the discussions found in the literature seems particularly relevant for the purpose of this paper. The assumption that policy subsystems can be deliberately managed in order to facilitate the emergence of certain types of outcomes (Howlett 2002; Klijn, Koppenjan and Termeer 1995) implies that different subsystem structures are more likely than others to generate particular types of effects. This, in turn, would provide authorities with the power to alter those configurations and facilitate the accomplishment of predefined objectives.

Klijn, Koppenjan and Termeer (1995) use the concept of network management to refer to this idea, distinguishing between game management efforts and network structuring. In the former case, the characteristics of the network are given and the focus is on "anticipating the limitations and opportunities which occur within the network" (Ibid., 442) in order to influence the interaction between actors. Network structuring, on the other hand, aims at changing the network itself and emphasizes the role of actors and their diverse interests and resources, and how they can affect policy outcomes. While network management could potentially be led by single individuals, it is usually governments who fulfill this role (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000).

The described debates about the relevance of policy subsystems to the understanding of policy outcomes allow some conclusions to be drawn that are relevant to this paper. In the first place, the notion that different structures lead to different types of outcomes implies that changes in the composition and size of policy subsystems can significantly affect the policy process and implementation. Second, if governments can purposely manipulate the composition and organization of policy subsystems based on predictable effects, it is interesting to analyze how this fact can inform our understanding of horizontal initiatives – understood as complex policy subsystems– in general and of the NSP in particular.

Issue Intractability, Subsystem Complexity, and Implementation Modes

Adding to the previous literature, some authors argue that the nature of the problem to be solved also has a significant impact on public policy development and implementation. Churchman (1967, B-141) famously used the term "wicked problems" to describe "that class of social system problems which [sic] are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing".

More recently, the Australian Public Service Commission, APSC (APSC 2007) identifies eight key features that characterize "wicked problems": they are difficult to define clearly; there are many interdependencies and multi-causal aspects; proposed measures to tackle them may have unforeseen effects; problems may be unstable and continue evolving over time; there is no clear and correct solution; problems are socially complex with many stakeholders involved; responsibility stretches across many organizations; and solutions may require behavioural changes by citizens and stakeholder groups.

In a similar vein, Majone (1975) suggests that it is necessary to take into consideration why certain goals cannot be achieved, and under what circumstances. Feasibility emerges as a contested notion, distinguishing those policy issues that can be effectively managed from those that cannot. DeLeon (1992, 400) argues that most of the policy issues faced by decision-makers are intractable, "affect[ing] what type of programs [are] put into place and what type of resources they […] need". This could help explain why programs and governmental outcomes are frequently unable to successfully address some social and political challenges.

Head and Alford (2008) propose a typology of "wicked problems" based on two variables: complexity and diversity. The former relates to "the difficulties in acquiring knowledge of the... problem and of potential solutions", which results from a "patchy knowledge base; complex inter-dependencies of processes and structures; uncertainties arising from the contingent and dynamic nature of social issues and processes; and the incommensurability of many of the risks and potential trade-offs" (Ibid., 7). Diversity refers to the number and multiplicity of actors involved, their values, and interests. By integrating these two dimensions, different problem types can be identified[6], which demand specific policy responses. Based on this typology, tailored policy actions can be executed depending on the issue at hand, in order to maximize their effectiveness. According to the authors, traditional government approaches and governance modes have not been effective in managing these types of policy areas.

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[6] The table below summarizes the typology developed by the authors (Head and Alford 2008).

Complexity / Diversity	Single party	Multiple parties, shared relevant knowledge	Multiple parties, conflicting interests
Problem and solutions known	Tame problem		
Problem known, solution not known			Wicked problem
Neither problem nor solution known		Wicked problem	Very wicked problem

Similarly, Howlett, Ramesh, and Perl (2009) have linked problem intractability, subsystem complexity, and implementation. They suggest the nature of the issue area, in combination with the severity of the constraints faced by the state regarding a particular policy subsystem, determine to a great extent the character of implementation and the likelihood of success or failure. When low limitations exist and problems are tractable, full implementation seems possible; on the other hand, "wicked problems" tend to generate experimental or symbolic implementations, depending on whether the level of constraints is low or high, respectively.

These debates relate to Koppenjan, Kars, and van der Voort's (2009) views on the tensions faced by horizontal management. Subsystems in horizontal settings tend to be characterized by complexity "because of the number and pluriformity of actors involved and the complicated nature of the set of issues they deal with" (Ibid., 774). At the same time, interdependencies become more prominent and the dynamic nature of processes in these contexts results in even more complex policy development and implementation.

The discussions above establish clear links between the multifaceted nature and complexity of policy issues and the need to find more comprehensive approaches to address them. In many cases, this leads to the expansion and "complexization" of policy subsystems. Collaboration and horizontal management can be seen as attempts to address "wicked" policy issues, by bringing more interests, values, resources, and expertise to the policy-making process. However, the expansion of policy subsystems in the face of more multifaceted realities adds to the diversity dimension identified by Head and Alford (2008), thus contributing to the overall complexity of the policy-making process. In a context of vertical and hierarchical government structures this is particularly relevant since, as discussed in previous sections, accountability has been identified as one of the central problems of horizontality.

In the following sections, I will explore the development of the NSP as a means to address a highly multifaceted policy issue –social and economic development in Labrador– and the adoption of a horizontal approach to do so. Considering the challenges faced by the region regarding program and service delivery, given its distant geographic location and isolation, the strategy adopted by the Provincial Government seems to be an adequate approach. However, a closer evaluation reveals some theoretical implications.

The Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador: Horizontal Planning, Vertical Implementation

Origins and Objectives of the NSP: An ambitious Plan for a Multifaceted Goal

The Government of NL faces the challenge of administrating a vast territory, the majority of which consists of the northern region of Labrador. Only about six percent of the total provincial population lives in Labrador, and a large percentage of the region's residents self-identify as Indigenous (LAA 2007). The demographic trends are diverse, with the Indigenous population growing at rates that duplicate those of non-Indigenous people. Provincially, the population is expected to decline during the next decades, following the national trend.

From an economic perspective, Labrador is facing significant opportunities due to the development of large-scale projects, especially in the mining and energy sectors. Its remoteness and isolation, however, puts Labrador in a complex situation. The challenges of recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce threaten to create serious labour shortages. Also, limited access to, and delivery of, programs and services has a direct impact on social and economic development. There is a general perception that Labrador has historically been relegated to an unfavourable position within the province (confidential interview; Johansen 2007), both in terms of administrative importance and regarding economic and social development.

Acknowledging this, the Provincial Government under Premier Roger Grimes established the Department of LAA on February 13, 2001, with the intention of strengthening the Government's commitment to deal

with matters impacting Labrador and Indigenous peoples in NL (LAA 2002). The Department was responsible for developing policies and programs in that region, managing federal-provincial agreements, and coordinating with the Canadian and Nunatsiavut Governments regarding matters of common interest and shared jurisdiction, among other duties (LAA 2010).

The NSP emerged from a program renewal undertaken by the Conservative Government in 2004, which aimed to create a more efficient government structure and strategically allocate resources (Government of NL 2004, March 30th). In this context, LAA was mandated to explore how to address social and economic needs in Labrador, remove barriers to development, and advance the region's potential (LAA 2007). Given the challenges described, LAA suggested developing a comprehensive strategy to streamline all Government efforts towards Labrador in a more effective manner (confidential interview). The first announcement was made in the 2005 Speech from the Throne, revealing the commitment to develop a plan and securing substantial investment (Government of NL 2007, April 20th). In June of the same year, LAA released a public discussion paper launching the planning process of the NSP. As expanded upon below, consultations and one-on-one sessions with different stakeholders were held across the region.

The NSP was officially launched in April 2007. The document described an ambitious and comprehensive strategy, the main objective of which was to foster social and economic development in Labrador. The initial five-year Plan (2007-2012) stated the vision, long-term goals, and priorities guiding decision-making. Four main strategic goals were set: supporting equitable programs and services and improving infrastructure; fostering social development; providing leadership and supporting maximization of economic development opportunities; and encouraging communications and partnerships with governments, communities, Indigenous peoples, organizations and other stakeholders (LAA 2007). These broad priorities spanned eight major themes that were identified as critical to achieve balanced economic and social development in Labrador: transportation, natural resources and environment, tourism and cultural development, education and employment, health, access to programming and services, Indigenous partnerships, and working together. To support the effective implementation of the strategic goals, a wide variety of objectives detailed the actions to be undertaken in order to improve existing, and create new, programs and services[7].

The NSP was conceived as "a living document" (LAA 2007, 49). It started with 145 commitments and was expected to grow as new policy priorities emerged. This might suggest that the NL Government understood the magnitude of the challenges and recognized that no rigid and narrow-focused strategy could address such a large-scale goal. As the action plan document states, through the NSP, the NL Government "recogniz[ed] that social and economic development is closely linked and neither happens in isolation" (LAA 2007, 14). This supports Peters' (1998, 11) view that "it is increasingly difficult for any policy area to function in isolation from others if it wants to be effective, and it is also less likely that ministers will find it tolerable for any policy area to function independently".

In the next section, I will examine in detail the development of the working structure of the Plan, in order to assess how the NL Government approached the challenges of a set of complex policy goals.

The Development and Working Structure of the NSP: An Expanding Policy Subsystem

The varied, broad, and long-term goals to be addressed by the NSP facilitated the adoption of a horizontal and integrative approach to policy-making from the start. The involvement throughout the process of a variety of actors with different interests and values –thereby expanding the policy subsystem– can be

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[7] A complete list of the objectives and actions to be implemented under each theme is available at
http://www.laa.gov.nl.ca/laa/northern_strategic_plan/goal.pdf.

seen as a suitable strategy. As the literature suggests, complex issue areas are among the main candidates for horizontal and collaborative approaches to policy-making.

Although the Plan was originated in the 2004 program renewal, its origins can be traced back to the 1990s, when the then Liberal Government released the Strategic Economic Plan and the Strategic Social Plan. Both plans called for integrated approaches to policy-making under a structure that involved various departments and agencies working in collaboration to achieve shared goals. Given a tradition of political centralization and hierarchical structures, these documents fostered significant change in the provincial approach to policy development (Locke, Close, Powers, and Felt 2007; Locke, Rowe, and Makhoul 2009). While most implementation structures were dismantled by the Conservatives in the early 2000s, both plans left a considerable legacy and the approach taken for the development of the NSP can be seen as building on these lessons.

When LAA was mandated to explore ways to address social and economic development in Labrador, an Advisory Working Group was established, including several Government departments and agencies[8]. Its role was to provide advice and assistance in the development of the NSP "while receiving feedback from departmental Executive" (LAA 2007, 11), in addition to overseeing the development of the Plan.

The release of the public discussion paper in 2006 was intended to encourage the participation of the broader society and to foster debate among Government authorities and other stakeholders, in order to define the Plan's priorities. Diverse groups were involved in the development stages of the NSP (LAA 2007; Government of NL 2007, May 15). Briefing sessions were held with the Rural Secretariat Regional Council for Labrador, the Labrador Regional Senior Management Council, the Ministerial Advisory Group for Labrador Transportation, Federal Management Representatives, the Nunatsiavut Government, and Innu representatives.

At the same time, an extensive consultation process took place across the region[9], which sought to involve the Labradorian community and to obtain further input for the development of the Plan. More than 300 individuals and organizations contributed to the discussion through feedback forms, telephone, e-mail, and consultation sessions. Six facilitated sessions with stakeholders were held and one-on-one sessions with industry, local Chambers of Commerce, Regional Economic Development Boards, the Labrador Métis Nation, and other organizations took place (LAA 2007). As well, other Government departments and agencies that were not represented on the Advisory Working Group were consulted.

Based on the substantial input received through these different mechanisms –in addition to research and "expert opinion" (LAA 2007)– the NSP was developed by LAA. According to the document, that department was responsible for leading the strategic planning process and overseeing the progress of the Plan. Its role was to ensure effective and timely implementation of the NSP measures and initiatives towards the achievement of the objectives set out in the document. Moreover, it had to monitor the evolution of the Plan to ensure success. As suggested in the document, "the Department [played] a role similar to a central agency, as a coordinating and advisory body, rather than a delivery agent" (LAA 2007, 8).

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[8] It consisted of the then Departments of Human Resources, Labour and Employment; Natural Resources (Mines, Energy, Forestry and Agrifoods Agency Branches); Transportation and Works; Innovation, Trade, and Rural Development; Fisheries and Aquaculture; Tourism, and Culture and Recreation; and the Women's Policy Office; the NL Housing Corporation; the Office of the Provincial Development Plan; and the Rural Secretariat.

[9] Consultations were held in 2006 and took place in Central Labrador, Western Labrador, South Eastern Labrador, Labrador Straits, Northern Labrador, and Churchill Falls.

The work of LAA involved coordinating and facilitating all activities relating to Labrador and Indigenous issues, in collaboration with other provincial public entities, Indigenous representatives, and the Federal Government (LAA 2007). This was critical in order to ensure the effectiveness of programs and services in Labrador, that the region benefited from social and economic initiatives, that social and economic development maximized benefits and was respectful of Indigenous land claims, and that the needs of Indigenous peoples were met. At the governmental level, close coordination with other departments was a central element to ensure that the Plan was aligned with other provincial initiatives.

The participatory and horizontal nature of the planning process differed widely from the approach taken during the implementation. The initial stages of the Plan took place in a large and diverse policy subsystem, involving a "collaborative effort from many individuals, organizations and government entities within the province" (LAA 2007, 10). The execution of NSP measures, on the other hand, was assigned to specific line departments within Government. The document revolved around well-defined commitments aimed to address concrete issues. Initially, there were 145 commitments, which were expanded to more than 200 throughout the duration of the Plan. Each one was defined by the Executive of a specific department in collaboration with LAA (confidential interview). This means only one department owned each commitment. Similarly, the NSP did not have its own budget. All the initiatives were funded through the department in charge of the implementation (Government of NL 2008, April 29, July 28; 2009, Government of NL, March 26; Government of NL 2011, April 19).

Ten departments and agencies were directly involved in the implementation of the NSP[10], in addition to LAA. However, there was no Advisory Working Group supporting the work of LAA. Instead, once the strategy was put in place, each department designated a frontline representative responsible for reporting on the progress made towards each commitment. LAA, in turn, nominated four Senior Analysts, each responsible for monitoring and tracking the progress of two of the eight themes identified in the Plan (confidential interview). To support these processes, planning sessions with departmental representatives and LAA take place once a year in the Fall, in order to prepare for the next fiscal year. During these sessions, the departments were updated on the progress of the Plan, identified gaps, and evaluated in a fairly informal manner (i.e. brainstorming) new measures to keep moving the Plan forward. In addition, ad hoc executive meetings took place once a year, although they were not institutionalized through a formal mechanism (i.e. inter-ministerial committee, inter-departmental working group, steering committee). These meetings also fulfilled the role of updating the Executive of the departments involved in the Plan and provided spaces for further discussion (LAA 2010).

The Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs was mandated to provide an annual update on the progress of the NSP to the House of Assembly. In addition, every two years a written progress report had to be released to the public. Given the implementation structure of the Plan, the NSP's evolution was also reviewed in each department's annual report.

This departmentalization of the implementation, as will be expanded below, can be seen as a way to facilitate the process of tracking progress and maintaining accountability in a context of multiple and multifaceted goals that were pursued within a complex and dense policy subsystem. While the approach offered advantages, it also poses some questions regarding the horizontal nature of the strategy.

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[10] They were Human Resources, Labour and Employment; Natural Resources; Transportation and Works; Innovation, Trade, and Rural Development; Fisheries and Aquaculture; Tourism, Culture and Recreation; the Women's Policy Office; the NL Housing Corporation; the Office of the Provincial Development Plan; and the Rural Secretariat.

How to Manage Complexity? Trading Horizontality in the Search for Accountability

What distinguished the NSP from other horizontal initiatives led by the NL Government was its geographic focus. The NSP aimed to address a wide range of themes within a specific region. Such an enterprise necessarily involves strong coordination, collaboration, and communication across government agencies if different initiatives are to converge towards the same goal. The breadth of the objectives also demanded input from outside government. In this context, approaching the initial planning and development stages of the Plan in a broad, horizontal, and participatory manner seems a suitable decision by the NL authorities, which is consistent with the trends identified in the literature when policy issues are complex and multifaceted (Peters 1998; Peters and Savoie 1995; Bakvis and Juillet 2004a; Hopkins, Moore and Couture 2001). However complex issue areas combined with the participation of multiple stakeholders with diverging interests and values, are more likely to produce symbolic or unsuccessful implementations (Howlett, Ramesh, and Perl 2009; Koppenjan, Kars and van der Voort's 2009). While horizontal structures facilitate collaboration, they also can limit efficiency, make it difficult to track responsibility, and affect accountability (Bakvis and Juillet, 2004b; Peters, 2006).

Peters (2006) distinguishes among four levels of accountability as mechanisms for control[11]. The simplest —answerability— involves merely reporting on the actions that are executed. On the opposite extreme of the spectrum is responsiveness, which requires interaction among more stakeholders in contexts characterized by participatory forms of governance. The accountability debate becomes more complex as more actors are involved in policy-making, since more interests and values affect the policy process. Moreover, "adequate performance for one of those actors may be malfeasance or nonfeasance for another" (Ibid., 308). Hopkins, Moore and Couture (2001, 37) add to this view, arguing that "horizontal initiatives are ambiguous for… auditing. Breaking down results and goals into performance indicators… can be a significant challenge, especially in the case of a highly populated network", where goals are often vague and/or responsibilities are not clearly defined. Other scholars have even argued that in large and populated networks there are inherent principal-agent conflicts (Milward and Provan 2003), given the lack of clear hierarchical relationships among the organizations involved in the delivery of services.

In order to maximize the probability of successful implementations in multi-actor contexts, O'Toole long ago (1986, 200) argued that governments should "design policies to keep the degree of required behavioral change low […]; simplify the structure of implementation and minimize the number of actors […]; seek more consideration of the problems of implementation during the initial stages of policy formation […]; and take care to leave the responsibilities of implementation among units sympathetic to the policy […]", since "the world of multi-actor implementation is sufficiently complex" (Ibid, 202).

Building on the preceding analysis, I argue that the departmentalized implementation of the NSP can be seen as an explicit attempt by the NL Government to compensate for the difficulties associated with the horizontal management of complex issues in large and diverse policy subsystems. In particular, the working structure of the Plan —including its approach to monitoring, reporting, and evaluation— represents a subsystem management effort aimed at centralizing decision-making, avoiding a weak implementation, and fostering accountability. In view of the nature of the goals being pursued and the tensions between horizontal policy-making and hierarchical accountability structures, the NL Government strategically used

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[11] From simpler to more complex to achieve: answerability (minimalist form of control, can be fulfilled through an annual report or by reporting to a legislative committee); accountability (goes beyond answerability and also requires the assessment of an independent body); responsibility (as opposed to accountability, is not based on hierarchical and external relationships, but involves control over the actions of public servants); and responsiveness (most complex form of control, given the emergence of more open and participatory forms of governance).

some existing vertical mechanisms to ensure that implementation was not symbolic or unsuccessful. Moreover, by reducing the complexity of the subsystem and fragmenting the ambitious goal into smaller and more manageable objectives, effective implementation seemed more likely.

Indeed, the strategy adopted by LAA offered some important advantages from the perspective of the implementers. While LAA did not have its own budget to implement the NSP and did not deliver programs or services, the responsibility for implementation belonged to that department. The development of thematic objectives and concrete policy actions are a clear attempt to support the Department's work without the direct involvement of many actors. The fact that different departments owned specific commitments helped LAA to easily measure and track progress, attribute responsibilities, and enhance efficiency in policy implementation. Most importantly, under this format, accountability remained circumscribed within one entity, facilitating a streamlined and vertical approach to evaluation.

The internal process developed by LAA was designed to measure results and monitor the progress of each commitment twice a year. An accountability framework was created, which defined responsibilities and identified key results, performance expectations, and strategies to ensure transparency (confidential interview). To assess the degree to which the NSP objectives were achieved, departments were asked to supply a baseline, performance indicators, and measures for each commitment, including information on when the commitment was budgeted, implemented, and completed. Designated department representatives provided updates on the commitments, while LAA was responsible for "monitoring and evaluating the status of each commitment, the progress made, and the future of the commitment" (LAA 2010, 9). This streamlined and clear distribution of responsibilities facilitated effective answerability and accountability, although it did not promote the same levels of responsiveness, as conceived by Peters (2006).

The decision to assign frontline staff to track progress and monitor the Plan –rather than to establish a formal mechanism at the Executive level– also facilitated progress reporting, improved communication, and fostered efficiency in the accomplishment of the goals (confidential interview). Based on evidence available to date through the first progress report, the working structure of the NSP was generally successful in ensuring the timely implementation of the commitments, and effective in reporting progress (Government of NL 2009, April 29; Government of NL 2010, March 25; Randell 2010, April 26).

Nonetheless, there are also significant problems associated with this subsystem management effort, since there is a thin line between providing appropriate structures for accountability and generating rigid and vertical mechanisms. Hierarchical accountability mechanisms might support policy-making and make possible the direct attribution of responsibility, but they also reinforce top-down authority structures and departmentalism. This seems to be the case in the NSP's approach. Unfortunately, as Hopkins, Moore and Couture (2001, 37) argue, there are still no "evaluation tools that can fully assess the value of horizontal initiatives. Current auditing practice stresses the importance of clear objectives, results tied to core business lines and clear lines of accountability".

It is evident that the approach has limited the horizontal nature that characterized the initial stages of the NSP, and that this was a deliberate strategy. The formal evaluation framework that was used helped to systematize performance measurement, but also strengthened verticality and generated tensions for an initiative that was conceived horizontally. The high level of departmentalization also makes it difficult to assess the global impact of the Plan, since measurement indicators were defined in the context of each department. It is not possible to determine impact beyond the accomplishment of individual commitments or the allocation of specific funds. This is a flaw officials at LAA were aware of (confidential interview).

Moreover, the double accountability structure –which required reporting both within each department and to LAA– proved to be a challenge. The sense of ownership of NSP commitments remained weak

among government departments (confidential interview). As Klijn and Koppenjan (2000) suggest, a central issue in horizontal management is how concerted action around a concrete issue takes place. In their words, "actors need to co-operate in order to achieve satisfying outcomes. This is not always easy… Policy is made and policy processes occur in the tension between dependency and the diversity of goals and interests. And while this tension can be more or less regulated by the rules and resource distribution in the network, the tension will exist and needs to be solved" (Ibid., 140).

With New Public Management in the 1990s, the general trend was to "move political and administrative controls away from the political center of government" (Peters 2005, 1) under the assumption that more decentralized governance would be more democratic, flexible, and efficient. In NL, important advancements have been made with regard to community-based, decentralized, bottom-up and integrated approaches to policy development since then. However, excessive decentralization generated new calls for more integration and greater capacity to work across government departments and agencies (Bakvis and Julliet 2004a). The NSP can be considered a re-centralizing approach to policy implementation, which incorporated strong elements of horizontality in the planning and development. Despite the tensions, this integration can certainly offer some advantages, as this case demonstrates. Clear distinctions between vertical and collaborative management are not always accurate and hierarchical structures can help to foster horizontality by helping to shape appropriate institutional environments that facilitate policy-making (Bakvis and Juillet 2004b; McGuire 2006). The existence of leading entities such as LAA, able to perform as controller or facilitator, is often a determinant for effectiveness in collaborative management, especially in large and diverse policy networks. The challenge is learning how to maximize their potential.

Conclusions and discussion

This paper has provided insight into the analysis of horizontal management by looking at the NSP from a subsystems perspective, focusing on some of the implications of the working structure of the Plan. As many policy areas have become more complex, horizontality has consolidated as an effective vehicle for policy-making. Nonetheless, collaborative and comprehensive approaches bring significant challenges to policy development, implementation, and evaluation, especially regarding accountability.

Using policy subsystems concepts, I examined the mechanisms employed by the NL Government to address some of these challenges. I suggested that the tensions found in the NSP approach can be interpreted as a deliberate subsystem management effort by the Provincial Government, directed to minimize some of the negative effects associated with horizontality. The NSP was developed to address a highly multifaceted goal –economic and social development in Labrador. Such an enterprise involved the participation of a multiplicity of actors with divergent interests and policy agendas, in what can be seen as an integration of policy subsystems that had traditionally operated in isolation. In the context of this "complexization" of the policy subsystem, I suggest the NL Government strategically used vertical accountability mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of a symbolic or unsuccessful implementation.

The initial approach employed at the planning stages of the NSP had a strong horizontal and participatory nature, which involved different levels of government, stakeholders, and individuals. This seems consistent with what one could have expected given the multifaceted overarching goals of the Plan. In contrast, the implementation phase was marked by a highly departmentalized approach, based on narrowly defined and discrete objectives.

The working structure defined by LAA helped to compensate for some of the shortcomings of horizontal management. By manipulating the configuration of the subsystem and managing the relationship among the actors involved, the provincial authorities gained some control over the implementation process, facilitated the process of tracking progress and evaluating the Plan, and contributed to enhancing

accountability. However, the approach limits the horizontal nature of the initiative in important ways. According to the first progress report, the NSP has been mostly effective in accomplishing most of the commitments made upon its release. However, evaluation of the overall impact of the Plan has not been carried out to date. Moreover, the mechanism used can be misleading, since it does not measure impact or outcomes, but administrative outputs. It will take some years to assess the global effects of the measures that were implemented. In the meanwhile, LAA has ensured that each department has spent the agreed upon amounts within the specified timeframe.

The examination of the case from a subsystems perspective has contributed to the analysis of a complex and pressing issue area that is of key importance for the future of NL. It has also helped to explore how the coexistence of vertical and horizontal elements can help to mitigate negative effects of horizontality when facing multifaceted problems that require the involvement of diverse actors. The challenge remains to keep working to identify mechanisms that facilitate effective implementation and accountability in a context of increasingly complex policy needs. From this perspective, the paper opens the door to further research that could provide more evidence regarding how to overcome the challenges that horizontality has brought to policy analysis and public administration.

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