

Abstract: Collaborative Governance for Implementing Sustainable Community Plans

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As social and ecological problems escalate, involving stakeholder groups in helping solve these issues becomes critical for reaching solutions. The UN Sustainable Development Goal #17 recognizes the importance of partnerships and collaborative governance. However, organizing large multi-stakeholder groups (or partnerships) requires sophisticated implementation structures for ensuring collaborative action. Understanding the relationship between implementation structures and the outcomes is central to designing successful partnerships for sustainability.

In the context of community sustainability plan implementation (which includes climate action planning and low carbon urban development planning), this research project examines how stakeholders configure to achieve results. The research considers two levels of implementation: (1) partner level and (2) partnership level; and examines two types of outcomes: (1) partner outcomes (i.e., what partners obtain through being involved) and (2) plan outcomes (i.e., actual sustainability progress).

The project is being conducted in partnership with ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability. To date we have the results of a survey completed by over 100 local governments around the world. The survey was offered in English, French, Spanish and Korean. Seventeen integrated environmental, social and economic topics are considered, including climate change, waste, ecological diversity and local economy. Currently this data is being analyzed to consider the relationship between the partnership level governance structure and the resulting partner and plan outcomes.

Currently we are also surveying (or have completed surveying) the partners in four large multi-stakeholder partnerships for local sustainable development. These are located in: Montreal, Canada; Bristol, UK; Barcelona, Spain; and Gwnagju, Korea. Each of these partnerships has over 100 partners and is community-wide in its scope. With this data will be able to consider the relationships between the partnership level governance structure, the partner involvement (motivation, ongoing engagement, actions taken), and the resulting partner and plan outcomes.

Overall, the preliminary results show that the design of the partnership is key to ensuring progress on sustainability goals and to keeping partners engaged. Should this abstract be accepted, the overarching project findings to date, along with the detailed results on key collaborative governance features (e.g., communication mechanisms, monitoring mechanisms, partner engagement mechanisms, decision-making structure,

etc.) for low-carbon urban development, will be presented in New York at the 4th International Conference on Sustainable Development.

For more information about the project see: <https://uwaterloo.ca/implementing-sustainable-community-plans/>

Besides being highly applicable to practice, this research project builds on and contributes to management literature about cross-sector social partnerships. While the project is being led out of the University of Waterloo (Canada), we are a team of academic and non-academic partners based out of Canada, USA, Korea and the UK.