

Engagement without Authority:  
An Analysis of Voluntary Planning and Community Health Boards of Nova Scotia in the  
Neoliberal Era

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#### **ABSTRACT**

In 1963, Nova Scotia began a complicated history with formalised citizen engagement practices as a vehicle to ensure citizen input into the policy making process. From Voluntary Economic Planning to Voluntary Planning, citizen engagement has been a fluid process over its nearly fifty years of existence, with the responsibilities of boards changing based on the governing party of the time. This thesis examines Voluntary Planning and Community Health Boards in Nova Scotia between the years of 1999 to 2017. Using a combination of government publications, academic literature and media data, this thesis argues that the changes to Voluntary Planning and Community Health Boards within this period reflect a neoliberal governance model. Under the leadership of three separate political parties, citizen engagement bodies were used to sustain central control in decision making and manage negative perceptions of the government by inhibiting the ability of citizens to hold consultative authority in policy deliberation.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **A Brief History of Citizen Engagement in Nova Scotia**

On December 6, 1963, the Honourable G.I. Smith stood before labourers, manufacturers and politicians of Nova Scotia to assert that “our greatest resource is our people,” (Smith, 1963). Smith, the Minister of Finance for the government formed by the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia (PC), spoke on the transition of public planning in the province. Smith believed that citizens possessed an expertise on local issues, and that policymakers could harness public knowledge through citizen engagement practices. Public planning through community consultation would serve as a new method to stimulate the economy by fostering cooperative policy deliberation that met the needs of local industries. Smith explained that utilising the creativity and abilities of citizens would lead to public plans that could attain more than any government imposed policy (Smith, 1963). The speech concluded with the notion that the top-down practice of decision making was failing industries and citizens. Though at the time Nova Scotia had a long history of citizen engagement practices through independent advocacy groups (Arthur D. Little Inc, 1956), Smith’s speech signified a shift in the government toward formalising the public participation process by creating a cooperative planning apparatus between the government and citizens.

In the 1950’s, many states were utilising partnerships among labour, business and the government to expand the booming industrial sector by identifying viable industries that could stimulate more economic growth (Bickerton, 1990). Sweden, England, and France were successfully implementing cooperative economic planning models, and the Government of Canada used Europe as a basis to begin forming citizen engagement

initiatives on the national level (Clancy, 1997). European systems of economic planning allowed multiple stakeholders to influence policy deliberation through cooperative councils that fostered dialogue between the private and public sector (Mills, 1965). In 1961, under the leadership of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, the federal government established the National Productivity Council (NPC) to implement economic citizen engagement boards (Waldie, 1986).

The NPC embraced the cooperative model linking business, government and labour to economic planning, which had been successful in revitalising European industries (Mills, 1965). The council recruited two dozen members representing industry, labour, and the federal government. The NPC acted as a conduit for private sector opinion within public economic planning, which served as a means to meet industrial needs and moderate union demands (Foster, 2016). As a federal model, the NPC had a positive response from the private sector, which led the council to begin assisting in the creation of separate provincial and regional initiatives that could stimulate local industries (Clancy, 1997).

During this period, localised models for cooperative economic planning administered by provincial governments had yet to be implemented in Canada. The NPC kept its federal mandate but assisted the provinces with funding and guidance to create new engagement boards. The NPC helped to establish the Conseil d'Orientation Economique du Quebec in 1961 and the Committee on Manitoba's Economic Future in 1963 (O'Neill, 1992; Government of Manitoba, 1963). The NPC helped most provincial governments introduce citizen engagement initiatives intended to interject private sector opinion into new economic strategies (Bickerton, 1990).

The Government of Nova Scotia had begun research on community-based economic planning before the assistance of the NPC. The 1950's marked a period of economic planning tensions in Nova Scotia as disconnection existed between the actions of the provincial government and the needs of local industry (Clancy, 1997). To bridge the disparity between the private sector and policymakers, the Government of Nova Scotia commissioned the *Report to the Department of Trade and Industry*. Released in 1956, the report concluded that the province should create an industrial consultative committee as "a systematic means of conveying the direction of its policy to the public, private industry and labour representatives," (Arthur D. Little Inc, 1956). The provincial government did not act on the report upon its release, but reconsidered the recommendation to create a consultative board when the NPC began assisting Nova Scotia in the creation of an economic planning apparatus (Lamport, 1988). Using the NPC model and the findings from the *Report to the Department of Trade and Industry*, the Government of Nova Scotia created a plan for citizen engagement based on formalised cooperative planning and consultation with the private sector (Clancy, 1997).

In 1963, under the leadership of Premier Robert Stanfield, the Government of Nova Scotia introduced Voluntary Economic Planning (VEP) (Lamport, 1988). VEP differed from other provincial initiatives as the mandate of the board was to work directly with the private sector and the government to create collaborative policies (Mills, 1965). VEP created economic plans *for* the government rather than planning *with* the government (Bickerton, 2000). The creation of the board stemmed from the notion that citizens possessed an understanding of regional struggles that the government had failed to comprehend (Smith, 1963). VEP created a vehicle for citizen engagement, as labourers became partners who could influence the decision making process.

Incorporating citizens and industry into policymaking was a radical decision intended to improve the province's economic performance. Industrial development in Nova Scotia was stagnant, and though the goals were hefty, the intention of VEP was to disrupt the top-down planning process (Bickerton, 1990). Stanfield identified that the province had to restructure the traditional economic strategy, stating that:

We felt we had to run very hard just to stand still. In agriculture, we had a system of small farms, which people were constantly leaving. Fishing was in a state of revolution. The so-called inshore fisherman was pretty well disappearing in most parts of the province. That involved a large expansion in the trawler fishing industry and the centralisation at certain points. The forest industry had to be reorganised substantially. The coal mining industry was fading rapidly, (Stevens, 1973, p. 125).

Bureaucratic gridlock contributed to the stalled economy in Nova Scotia, and policy deliberation in collaboration with VEP was intended to resolve the problem (Thorburn, 1984). Submitting reports directly to the Department of Finance and Economics, the board harnessed public, private and governmental opinion to develop industrial opportunities in Nova Scotia (Mills, 1965).

The creation of VEP institutionalised citizen engagement practices and united the needs of industry, labour and the state. The Minister of Finance, Ike Smith, boasted that VEP gathered “the potential, the plans, and the prospects of our main industries, to correlate them with each other and with the government's plans for the public sector” (Clancy, 1997). The board operated on a tiered system based on Sector Committees, which represented industrial groups within the province, such as agriculture and forestry (Thorburn, 1984). Sector Committees were broken into subcategories called Segment Committees, representing particular producers within the industry (Mills, 1965). Segment Committees produced recommendations based on their industry and channelled those upward to the Sector Committees, which compiled the concerns of all the producers

within the industry (Mills, 1965). This allowed for the extraction of common problems that would be submitted to the Executive Board, which directly relayed the Sector Committee plans to the Minister of Finance (Lamport, 1988). As some of the recommendations submitted by the Sector Committees were biased or lacked sufficient evidence to reinforce a claim, final reports were to be at the discretion of the Executive Board (Clancy, 1997).

The limitations of VEP to produce recommendations based on voluntarism and consultation were recognised quickly. Pross (1974) argues that the legislation of VEP allowed the board to have "no coercive power; it is not authorised to use financial persuasion; and it has no claim to coordinate those activities of the public sectors which affect the performance of private economic concerns," (p. 36). VEP provided citizens with the opportunity to formulate economic plans as equal partners with the government, but administrators remained the dominant voice in decision making (Thorburn, 1984). Even in an advisory capacity, VEP reports were often rejected by policymakers who considered the recommendations to be uninformed (Lamport, 1988).

VEP released its *First Plan* in 1965, which the Dalhousie Department of Economics labelled a "muddled document" (Lamport, 1988). Though VEP had a direct relationship with the Minister of Finance, negative attitudes within the civil service towards the board mounted. Lamport (1988) argues that the private sector and policymakers were reluctant to sacrifice government composed economic plans in favour of VEP recommendations, creating a fragile relationship between the board and the government (p. 52). The Stanfield government announced that the VEP did not meet the comprehensive and consultative mandate envisioned by the board, and indirectly rejected the *First Plan* (Clancy, 1997). Internal criticisms towards VEP came to fruition in 1969,

and the government suggested a complete overhaul of the board and its relationship to policy deliberation (Bickerton, 1990).

In 1970, VEP was reorganised into the Voluntary Planning Board (VP) (Voluntary Planning Board, 1970). The changes to VEP broadened the mandate into social policy, and also redefined the cooperative nature of the board into broad functional objectives:

It is clear that the original concept of VEP being a planning body to the extent outlined in the Act is no longer applicable. However... the concept of involvement of the private sector has, in VEP, illustrated an excellent potential, and an active more effective participation of the private sector should be the basis of the revised role for VEP (Voluntary Planning Board, 1970, October 27, p. 6).

The goals of VEP were ambitious as they gave citizens a degree of influence over the decisions that affected their everyday lives. VEP failed in its consultative role because policymakers ignored public recommendations and deemed the board as an irrelevant distraction to economic planning (Thorburn, 1984). In the revised role, VP acted as a governmental liaison to channel private sector interests to policymakers (Lamport, 1988).

For the majority of the 1970's, VP worked with advocacy groups and the private sector in routine consultation activities, but the government remained firmly in charge of policy deliberation (Clancy, 1997). VP determined the projects it pursued in isolation from the government (Bickerton, 2000). The board worked primarily with the private sector, which created tensions as many VP members wanted to create engagement capacities that worked with communities (Lamport, 1988). By the 1980's, VP had repaired its working relationship with the government and undertook a variety of projects within social policy, such as health care (Lamport, 1988). VP became a quasi-governmental structure that organised community information sessions on new public sector decisions, evaluated administrative structures, and made policy recommendations

(Lamport, 1988). The government commissioned VP to lead task forces that would submit reports based on the public consultation process and forward the recommendations to policymakers (Cameron, 1992). The board continued under this structure into the 1990's and 2000's. The mandate of VP was fluid over its nearly fifty years of existence, with responsibilities changing based on the governing party of the time. Though structural changes were frequent, VP remained a vehicle to ensure citizen input into the policy making process.

Beginning in the mid-1970's, the Department of Health utilised VP to understand patient needs (Lamport, 1988). Through this process, VP determined that health care administration was a "flawed and awkward system... demanding more than we can afford and providing too little in return," (Voluntary Planning, 1974). VP continued to evaluate health care administration into the 1980's and established the Health Sector in 1987, which contributed to the appointment of the *Royal Commission on Health Care Reform* by Premier John Buchanan (Lamport, 1988; Gallant, 1989). The mandate of the commission was to improve the delivery of health services across the province while reducing operational costs, an expense estimated at one billion dollars in 1987 (House of Assembly Hansard, 1987). Three hundred and twenty-two groups and individuals, including VP, made submissions to the commission to address issues in health care (Gallant, 1989). Released in 1989, the report concluded that health care administration in Nova Scotia required a system of citizen engagement that was separate from VP and created through regionalised reform (Bickerton, 1999).

Most provincial governments in Canada during the 1980's and 1990's began implementing regionalised plans for health care administration (Hurley, Lomas, & Bhatia, 1994). Lewis and Kouri (2004) argue that there is no consensus on a definition of

regionalisation (p. 14). However, many authors, such as Armstrong (2009), have come to understand the process as a means of integrating health care services for cost containment while also responding to the needs of local communities (p. 97). The *Royal Commission on Health Care Reform* had five principal recommendations to guide the regionalisation process, which included health policies oriented to patients, decentralisation, accountability, addressing health needs, and participation of citizens in the policy deliberation process (Bickerton, 1999). The Royal Commission recommended shifting from the top-down model of health care administration to one focused on community-based decision making (Lewis & Kouri, 2004).

The report was in line with the neoliberal governance model as it recommended a decentralised system of health care administration. The new system would reduce the administrative costs of citizen engagement, as the onus of collecting public opinions and managing complaints was placed on volunteer operated boards (Boase, 1994). In Nova Scotia, health care administration operated in a highly centralised manner, as the Department of Health managed all funding and policy decisions (Sullivan & Scattolon, 1995). Local hospital boards were the regional representatives within health care, but only managed the day-to-day clerical duties of hospitals (Hurley, Lomas, & Bhatia, 1994). Black and Fierlbeck (2006) state that the intention of regionalisation was to redistribute the responsibilities of the Department of Health into smaller, localised administrative bodies (p. 510). However, the Department of Health retained central control in decision making as it could veto the choices of local administration (Bickerton, 1999).

By 1994, the newly formed Liberal government began significant efforts to regionalise health care administration. The Liberals, led by John Savage, formed a strong majority government by campaigning on the recommendations of the *Royal Commission*

*on Health Care Reform*, as the province experienced severe cuts to federal health care funding (Clancy, 2000). Once in office, the Savage government commissioned an internal review of health care entitled *The Blueprint for Health System Reform* which dealt with a wide range of issues in health reform, but primarily regionalisation (Minister's Action Committee on Health System Reform, 1994). *The Blueprint for Health System Reform* concluded that a new format for health care governance was necessary, as the system in place was neither fiscally responsible nor accountable to the communities it served (Minister's Action Committee on Health System Reform, 1994). Cost containment could be managed through increased citizen engagement practices, and the creation of Regional Health Boards (RHBs) and Community Health Boards (CHBs) (Bickerton, 1999). The report recommended that CHBs have the authority to determine policy, budgetary, and management decisions (Black & Fierlbeck, 2006). The recommendations were radical as they devolved decision making from the traditional top-down model of administration into citizen engagement capacities (Clancy, 2000). Bickerton (1999) states that criticisms against the report mounted as health care professionals argued that regionalisation would result in a mismanaged system (p. 165). The inevitable discontent towards policy choices would be directed to CHBs, rather than the government, allowing the administration to avoid public backlash.

Tensions continued between the public and administrators regarding the recommendations of *The Blueprint for Health System Reform*, but the Liberal government began implementing the CHB framework. Though the report stated that CHBs should have autonomy in budgetary decisions, when legislated in 1996, the government restricted the authority and scope of the boards (Clancy, 2000). Instead, the responsibility to plan and manage health care administration was delegated to RHBs (Department of

Health, 1996). As well, RHBs were to oversee CHB recommendations, funding allocation, the method of selection when appointing board members, and the number of industry, community, and government members selected for each board (Bickerton, 1999; Black & Fierlbeck, 2006). The Liberal government narrowed the range of responsibilities for CHBs and ignored the recommendations of *The Blueprint for Health System Reform* and the *Royal Commission on Health Care Reform*, as both reports concluded that citizens should work in cooperation with the government to plan health care. In practice, the government enhanced the role of RHBs and dramatically reduced the mandate of CHBs. By devolving the responsibilities of the Department of Health into the RHBs, the government reduced the need for a large bureaucracy and cut administrative costs - a principle of neoliberalism.

The changes to VP and CHBs show that citizen engagement practices have consistently adapted and changed in Nova Scotia. Citizen engagement must reflect the needs of the government, provincial economic conditions, and the community it represents - all of which are fluid. This thesis addresses the shifts in both VP and CHBs within the neoliberal era between the years of 1999 and 2017. Significant changes to the structure of citizen engagement happened in Nova Scotia during this period, under three separate governing parties. Though marketed by each party as a means to increase the ability of the community to influence decision making, this analysis will address how the changes to citizen engagement practices managed public opinions, and how each party inhibited the ability of VP and CHBs to affect the policy deliberation process.

VP and CHBs are both examples of citizen engagement bodies implemented by the Government of Nova Scotia. When weighing the various definitions and understandings of citizen engagement, the process has a variety of meanings. Many

scholars have conflicting views of what role citizen engagement plays in the government. Some authors consider citizen engagement to be a government technique that has positive and negative outcomes for the public (Creighton, 2005). Throughout the academic literature, conflicting views exist when measuring the success and effectiveness of citizen engagement. The first conceptualisation of citizen engagement positions the process as a means to enhance participatory democracy, while the second considers the initiative of the government to be a method of managing public opinion.

### **Citizen Engagement as a Technique to Increase Participatory Democracy**

The participation process exists as a means for the public to influence policy deliberation or the method in which bureaucrats consider and adopt the best course of action for governmental decisions. Policies created through cooperation between the government and citizens enhance participatory democracy, in that the process of collective decision making that ensures that political choices reflect the needs and priorities of the public. Scholars contend that formalised capacities for citizen engagement represent a useful tool for enhancing democratic participation as the process creates a dialogue between policymakers and the communities they serve (Halvorsen, 2003). This is achieved through consultation which provides a channel for the public, industry, and government to engage in meaningful conversations on a given social, economic or political issue.

Black and Fierlbeck (2006) argue that the creation of citizen engagement allows those who rely on the system, or social welfare programs, to assume an active role in developing policies (p. 508). Mills (1965) echoes that citizen engagement is a democratic process as consultation practices instil deliberative qualities into policymaking (p. 164). Halvorsen (2003) states that participants consider policies created through the citizen

engagement process less politically centric and susceptible to the whims of electoral cycles (p. 540). The government cannot plan or determine policies based on political agendas, as this isolates decision making from the community and consumers it affects daily (Black & Fierlbeck, 2006). In this understanding, citizen engagement has a positive outcome as it democratises policy deliberation.

### **Citizen Engagement as a Technique to Manage Public Opinion**

Many scholars contest the democratic conceptualisation of citizen engagement. They argue instead that consultation practices are used by the government to retain central control in the decision making process (Black & Fierlbeck, 2006; Dryzek, 2001; Halvorsen, 2003). Authors such as Adams and Hess (2001) maintain that citizen engagement is used by the state to manage discontent and pacify negative public opinions of decisions made by the government (p. 18). In practice, citizen engagement tools do not enhance community input in policy deliberation, but instead relieve the government from public pressures by creating a forum in which citizens believe their opinions are heard by policymakers (Brown, 2003; McAllister, 1998). By managing public opinion through participation, administrators can make decisions based on governmental needs.

In this understanding, political power is retained through policy choices that create positive opinions of a government; therefore, decision making must be in the state's best interest, rather than the citizen (Habermas, 1976; Savoie, 2010). Kliewer (2013), for example, argues that the democratic understanding of citizen engagement ignores its interconnectedness to the political agenda, which is an essential component in understanding cooperative policymaking (p. 74). Citizen engagement manages public opinion as a means to increase public popularity towards a government while maintaining the party's governing ability.

Though some scholars consider the idealistic model of citizen engagement to be a democratic process, the current implementation by the state is a flawed system that produces undemocratic results (Black & Fierlbeck, 2006; Brown, 2003; Halvorsen, 2003; Mowbray, 2011; Roberts, 1997). McComas (2001), for example, argues that citizen engagement is a necessity in policy creation, but also recognises the faults in its implementation that disenfranchise many participants (p. 135). Some scholars recognise that there are limitations to citizen engagement and view the fundamental flaw of the process to be the ineffectiveness in promoting cooperation between the public and policymakers (Abelson & Eyles, 2002; Chessie, 2009; Hurley, Lomas, & Bhatia, 1994). Black and Fierlbeck (2006) argue that limitations in citizen engagement exist because practices are “complicated, unwieldy and frequently contradictory” (p. 507). Citizen engagement as a democratic process requires a deregulated administration that considers public opinion equally important to that of the government, but currently, the policymaking process is centralised, and citizen engagement capacities merely manage public opinions (Savoie, 2013).

Authors who maintain that citizen engagement is a method of managing public opinion consider it to be a government tool that provides the appearance of community involvement in policy creation but ultimately preserves the status quo of the government and industry power (Adams & Hess, 2001; Head, 2007; Lewis & Kouri, 2004; McAllister, 1998; Savoie, 2013). Clancy (1997), for example, argues that citizen engagement is a top-down process that favours the recommendations of advocacy groups representing private business (p. 12). Though ideally, citizen engagement may seem to enhance participatory democracy, in actuality, these strategies often reinforce central decision making capacities. As Savoie (2010) argues, power has been gradually shifting

away from political parties, public servants and voters towards the centre of government (2010, p. 130).

### **Citizen Engagement as a Planning Apparatus**

Several authors position “citizen engagement” as a planning apparatus based on business-labour-government consultation (Brown, 2003; Clancy, 1997; Coglianese, 2002; O’Neill, 1992). This perspective argues that “consultation” is a government technique used to collect public opinion on pressing political and policy issues (Chessie, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Reddel & Woolcock, 2004). Scholars conceptualise citizen engagement as a planning apparatus for consultation. It then becomes a foundational component of democracy as it is the only formal means for communities to influence policy deliberation (Mills, 1965; Adams, 2004; Cook & Jacobs, 2004; Head, 2007; Lewis & Kouri, 2004; Jabbar & Abelson, 2011; Vigoda, 2002; Williamson, 2014). Ideally, policy outcomes through consultation reflect the needs, values, and demands of multiple stakeholders (Lewis & Kouri, 2004, p. 16)

When considering citizen engagement as a government technique, debate continues with evaluating how effective the process is as a mode of policy creation. Systems of measurement, or the effectiveness of practices, play a fundamental role in public attitudes towards citizen engagement (Abelson & Eyles, 2002; Abelson & Lomas, 1996; Adams, 2004; Besley, 2010; Bickerton, 1999; Chessie, 2009; Jabbar & Abelson, 2006; Halvorsen, 2003; Rowe & Frewer, 2004). As there is no consensus on the role that citizen engagement techniques play within Canadian provincial governments, it is safe to conclude that the success of citizen engagement is contingent on how each scholar has chosen to understand the program.

From the democratic point of view, authors argue that policy outcomes alone do not reflect the success of citizen engagement as a cooperative planning apparatus (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). Rather, the success of citizen engagement is measured through the public's attitudes towards the process (Adams, 2004; Chessie, 2009; Rosener, 1982). Halvorsen (2003), for example, views the success of citizen engagement, and the success of the state agency itself, as being dependent on the positive experiences of citizens within the process (p. 536). The author concludes that citizen discontent with governmental bodies can be reduced using high-quality participation that satisfies the consumers (Halvorsen, 2003). Positive experiences in citizen engagement can transform negative opinions toward public deliberation and consultation. By improving citizen experiences with engagement techniques, the state becomes the benefactor of public attitudes (Hurley, Lomas & Bhatia, 1994; McAllister, 1998; O'Neill, 1992).

While some authors acknowledge the importance of public opinion when evaluating citizen engagement practices, they also consider governmental accountability to be of equal importance when considering its success as a planning apparatus (Abelson & Eyles, 2002; Abelson & Lomas, 1996; Besley, 2010). Rowe and Frewer (2004) argue that citizen engagement techniques are not democratic because the government does not utilise public experiences in participation to improve the planning apparatus (p. 552). In the absence of accountability, citizen engagement techniques do not function for the public but rather for the government (Rower & Frewer, 2004).

While much of the literature examines satisfaction as a means to evaluate the success of citizen engagement techniques as a democratic process (Adams, 2004; Delli Carpini, Cook & Jacobs, 2004), there are critics of these assumptions (Frankish et al., 2002; Head, 2007). Coglianesse (2002), for example, argues that there are negative

impacts to citizen engagement techniques and to the community itself when evaluating structures of participation based on feelings (p. 3). Satisfaction does not necessarily equate to effective citizen engagement, as deliberation and consultation only reflect the views of those who participate, and risk excluding some opinions (Coglianese, 2002). This is problematic as evaluations based on success potentially neglect stakeholders who are not in attendance or are apathetic to the process. In addition, satisfaction based on surveys can be biased as questions may be slanted to elicit particular results (Shaw, 2008). Due to the problems in the process of consultation and the methodological biases (Coglianese; 2002; Frankish et al., 2002; Head, 2007; Shaw, 2008), some authors argue that evaluation of citizen engagement techniques should focus on the effectiveness, efficiency, and the equitability of the process through measurable material outcomes (Brown, 2003; Kliewer, 2013).

Lewis and Kouri (2004) argue that satisfaction measurements of public consultation are assumptive, and provide little insight into how citizen engagement techniques have shaped policy deliberation (p. 27). By basing the success of citizen engagement techniques on how participants feel towards the process, it removes the government's responsibility to implement recommendations into policies (Adams & Hes, 2001; Drysek, 2001; Williamson, 2014). Accountability, or the responsibility of the government to fulfil promises, and transparency, or the obligation to respond to and justify decisions, are more effective measurements when questioning the democratic nature of policy deliberation (Casebeer, Scott, & Hannah, 2000; Frankish et al., 2002; Savoie, 2013). The authors who adopt this view argue that measuring the success of citizen engagement must be conducted quantitatively. Evaluating the outcomes of policy creation can provide both known data and transparency within the planning apparatus

(Adams & Hess, 2001; Brown, 2003; Coglianese, 2002; Head, 2007; Kliewer, 2013; Shaw, 2008). Material outcomes are important, as they allow researchers, government agencies, and the public to understand the influence that various stakeholders have in policy creation.

Satisfaction measures may have a negative impact on citizen engagement as the government can use positive opinions of the process to pacify and manage public opinion to create policies based on market needs (Mowbray, 2011). Brown (2003), for example, argues that power hierarchies shape citizen engagement bodies, and ensure fiscal decisions outweighs public opinion (p. 8). Mowbray (2011) echoes this, stating that effectiveness evaluations based on satisfaction do not account for the extent that market interests influence citizen engagement, which can work against the interests of the public (p. 149). Abelson and Lomas (1996) argue that since the 1990's, there has been a shift in the focus of decision making processes from sharing abundant resources to sharing scarce resources and deficit responsibilities (p. 48). Fiscal management often outweighs the priorities of the public (Church & Barker, 1998; Lomas, 1997; O'Neill, 1992). Satisfaction-based measurement, Kliewer (2013) argues, treats citizens like customers; citizen engagement should not be market-based, but ingrained in how to address implementation in the current system (p. 77). Therefore, recognising the relationship between government economic interests and policy deliberation is the only way to use satisfaction as a measurement tool to ensure the effectiveness of citizen engagement as a planning apparatus (Kliewer, 2013).

Some authors argue that satisfaction measurements of citizen engagement techniques are irrelevant as most engagement practices, such as town hall meetings or surveys, are not democratic, but instead reinforce the decisions of policymakers that

organise public spending and deliberation (Chung, Grogan, & Mosley, 2012; McAllister, 1998; Sullivan & Scattolon; 1995). Fitzgerald et al. (2016) argue that the only way to measure accurately the extent that citizen engagement techniques influence policy is hard data and policy outcomes (p. 256). As a planning apparatus, citizen engagement practices have a negative impact on the ability of the public to influence policy as the process manipulates participants (Brown, 2003). Citizen engagement provides the optics of democratic deliberation while relieving public pressures towards the poor conditions within the public sector. Mowbray (2011) echoes that citizen engagement is undemocratic because it is “effectively about containment and control... [without the ability] to extend beyond its marginalised status in local government” (p. 133). Within this context, many authors understand citizen engagement to be an undemocratic governmental technique that does not foster cooperative policymaking, but rather maintains central control in deliberation (Adams & Hess, 2001; Brown, 2003; Kliwer, 2013; McAllister, 1998; Mowbray, 2011).

Lewis and Kouri (2004) further develop the idea that citizen engagement is a government technique to pacify public opinions (p. 23). Some citizens feel a civic responsibility to engage with the government actively, but many consider the cooperative structures that are enabling engagement to be ineffective (Abelson & Lomas, 1996). Authors such as Black & Fierlbeck (2006) support this notion by highlighting the lack of diversity within boards, and the undemocratic means of the electoral processes in citizen engagement bodies (an average of ten to twenty percent voter turnout for elected engagement boards) (p. 513).<sup>1</sup> Rowe and Frewer (2000) echo this by stating, “There are

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<sup>1</sup> The undemocratic representation citizen engagement board membership is beyond the scope of this thesis.

various constituencies involved in the process, from the sponsors to the participants and various... stakeholder groups... what might appear to be effective to some might not appear so to others,” (p. 519). Chessie (2009) further argues that participants in citizen engagement activities feel that they have less authority than expected, as decision making happens centrally and inhibits the participation process (p. 714). Formalised citizen engagement practices maintain central control in deliberation, which favours market-based decisions rather than enhancing community and democratic values (Black & Fierlbeck, 2006; Chessie, 2009; Church & Barker, 1998; Hurley, Lomas & Bhatia, 1994; Lomas, 1997; McAllister, 1998; O’Neill, 1992).

### **Citizen Engagement in Nova Scotia**

Some of the conceptualisations of citizen engagement in the literature can be applied in Nova Scotia, using VP and CHBs as the case study. Comparing media data about VP and CHB participants and other evidence will enable the analysis to develop an understanding of the role public consultation plays in policy deliberation. This thesis understands the ideal form of citizen engagement as a technique to enhance participatory democracy, but considers the implementation by the Government of Nova Scotia as a means to manage and pacify public opinion. This thesis examines citizen engagement in a period absent from the academic literature in which a variety of structural changes occurred within VP and CHBs of Nova Scotia.

This thesis utilises the work of Black and Fierlbeck (2006), Bickerton (1999), and Clancy (1997) to argue that VP and CHBs are citizen engagement techniques that inhibit the public’s ability to influence decisions. Borrowing from the work of each author, this thesis extends the analysis of VP and CHBs beyond 1999. The analysis of VP and CHBs understands that the citizen engagement process is a technique of the government to

manage public input while maintaining central control in the policy deliberation process. By examining VP and CHBs in Nova Scotia from 1999 to 2017, this analysis compares two citizen engagement programs. This thesis argues that the changes to VP and CHBs within this period reflect a neoliberal governance model. Under the leadership of three separate political parties, citizen engagement bodies were used to sustain administrative perspectives in decision making, inhibiting the ability of the public to be an influential planning apparatus.

This thesis argues that between 1999 and 2017 the Government of Nova Scotia introduced neoliberal strategies into the citizen engagement process. The analysis considers all the governing parties within the period and the extent that the neoliberal governance model enabled each administration to maintain central control in deliberation. David Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as an economic model which deregulates some areas of market capitalism (p. 7). In governance, the neoliberal model facilitates the free market through public policies (Busch, 2010). Neoliberal reforms in the government devolve social responsibilities to the private sector and encourage administrators to base decision making on the market, not the public (Steger & Roy, 2010; Savoie, 2013). The neoliberal governance model transfers the cost and responsibility of responding to social programs into the community, regardless of whether the public can fiscally or effectively maintain the program (Allen & Guthman, 2006).

Understanding citizen engagement in the context of neoliberalism is important because it helps to explain the management of public opinions. The state must control discontent towards the public sector to maintain broader political and economic objectives, including those which benefit the public good. Exemplified in VP and CHBs in Nova Scotia, citizen engagement practices are a technique used in the neoliberal

governance model to manage public opinions, and the practice of consultation does not instil any significant changes to the top-down process of policy creation.

Neoliberalism operates on market-based decisions, which have become an increasingly important aspect the public's day-to-day lives. Decisions that favour the market are necessary to secure some aspects of the public good, but damage other essential social programs (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism negatively affects cooperative policymaking as decisions must focus on market needs rather than the priorities of the public (Brown, 2003). This is not to say that the number of citizen engagement bodies within the government decreased during the relevant period. Rather, the recommendations submitted by the public were more thoroughly scrutinised by policymakers. Public policies in the neoliberal state encourage the reduction of social services, downsizing the government, and the creation of citizen engagement practices designed to reproduce the central control (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 14). Administrators use community involvement through engagement practices to justify reforms that accomplish market objectives (Kliewer, 2013).

Similarly, this analysis uses Habermas's concept of legitimation crisis to further understand the Government of Nova Scotia as a neoliberal state. Habermas is a sociologist and philosopher in the tradition of critical theory. Legitimation crisis understands that the material world is socially organised to reproduce state legitimacy (Habermas, 1976). This interpretation views the organisation of the public as a means of reproducing the social power of the state over those whom it governs. As Habermas states:

A concept of public opinion that is historically meaningful, that normatively meets the requirements of the constitution of a social-welfare state, and that is theoretically clear and empirically identifiable can be grounded only in the

structural transformation of the public sphere itself and in the dimension of its development (Habermas, 1962, p. 88).

Habermas looks at the political institutions that organise people and the specific relationships between the state and participation practices. As political unease surfaces, such as economic or political instability, these by extension cause revolt against the state and break down a party's ability to govern. Social organisation is not structured on what is best for the citizen, but rather on how institutions maintain control without dissent and revolt (Burawoy, 2012). In this view, the government uses public opinion as a political manipulation tool to sustain state power and disenfranchise citizens' ability to affect decision making (Habermas, 1975, p. 293).

A legitimisation crisis is the largest threat to a state's political survival because it occurs when citizens lose faith in government and begin to question the political and economic structures supporting the current form of governance (Habermas, 1976, p. 24; Schweickart, 2016, p. 8). In *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas states:

Because a class compromise has been made the foundation of reproduction, the state apparatus must fulfil its tasks in the economic system under the limiting condition that mass loyalty must be simultaneously secured within the framework of a formal democracy and in accord with ruling universalistic value systems... A structurally secured civil privatism becomes necessary for continued existence because there are no functional equivalents for it. Hence, there arises a new level of susceptibility to crisis (Habermas, 1976, p. 58).

Habermas (1976) argues that economic imbalances generate crises within a state, but deficits and capital loss transition into instability within the political sphere as the public lose faith in the state's ability to produce good outcomes for citizens (p. 29). Though a state may claim to be just and right, positive public opinions regarding state decisions are fundamental to retaining political power (Savoie, 2010). A state's central crisis is not economic, but rather based on public perceptions. The concept of legitimisation crisis

theorises the relationship between political parties that maintain power within the state, and the public perception of their legitimacy to govern. If citizens view the actions of the state to be working against the needs of the public, this creates a large-scale loss of legitimacy in the governing party and an inability to retain political power. In response to legitimisation crises, the state must make strategic policy choices to sustain citizen approval, requiring the state to restructure institutions, policy and funding to counter the loss of public favour (Habermas, 1962).

Evans's concept of embedded autonomy strengthens Habermas' argument of legitimisation crisis. Evans is a political sociologist and researches the success and failures of state involvement in decision making. Embedded autonomy argues that state structures follow the neoliberal governance model, which devolves responsibilities into the private sector (Evans, 1995). Though the state must deregulate and decentralise social programs, the internal organisation of decision making capacities must remain central to ensure policies maintain state success (Ünay, 2006). Evans's embedded autonomy reinforces Habermas' theory, as the choices of the state must be in the interest of administrators to retain political power.

This thesis analyses government publications such as annual reports, academic literature pertaining to citizen engagement, and media data such as editorials from local news sources to determine the success of VP and CHBs between the years of 1999 to 2017. To understand the changing nature of both the citizen engagement bodies, this thesis looks at government documents published by VP and the Department of Health reports pertaining to CHBs. As well, various aspects of public accounts and provincial budgets are compared from 1999 to 2017. To gain public input on citizen engagement

capacities, media data was collected from the *Chronicle Herald*, *CBC: Nova Scotia* and a few independent local news outlets.

This thesis has three chapters that follow a chronological progression of the governing parties in Nova Scotia from 1999 to 2017. Each chapter focuses on a different political party that formed a government, beginning with the PCs, then the New Democratic Party of Nova Scotia (NDP), and finally the Liberals. The chapters address the changes to formalised citizen engagement practices under each government. The first chapter begins with an analysis of VP and CHBs from 1999 to 2009 under the provincial government of the PCs. Led by John Hamm, and Rodney MacDonald from 2006 to 2009, the PCs legislated a variety of changes to citizen engagement capacities in VP and CHBs. The PC party under Hamm ran its 1999 campaign on improving the ability of the public to influence policy decisions (Mutimer, 2005). In practice, the government implemented legislation in line with the neoliberal governance model. The PCs applied a new form of regionalisation, which restructured the health care system by minimising administration and deregulating responsibilities to public consultation into CHBs (Black & Fierlbeck, 2006). As well, the government commissioned a series of task forces to be undertaken by VP, but did not include the recommendations of the reports into policymaking (*Chronicle Herald*, 2007; House of Assembly Hansard, 2001; Delaney, 2002). Through these events, this chapter concludes by considering whether the changes to both VP and CHBs by the PC government increased or inhibited the ability of the public to be an active voice within policy deliberation.

The second chapter analyses the brief governance of the NDP from 2009 to 2013, under the leadership of Darrell Dexter. Though the NDP made no significant changes to CHBs, the government discontinued VP activities and moved administrative staff into the

Provincial Treasury Board (Corbett, 2010). In doing so, the Dexter government eliminated all of the responsibilities of VP to citizen engagement and removed the only formal means to provide public input into social and economic policies. The NDP made neoliberal decisions towards VP by deregulating citizen engagement practices and beginning initiatives to outsource the public consultation process into the private sector (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011). This chapter addresses the implications of removing citizen engagement practices such as VP, and how this affected central control in decision making.

The final chapter addresses the subsequent Liberal government, and the changes it made to CHBs and the former responsibilities of VP. The Liberals, led by Stephen McNeil from 2013 to 2017, restructured the regionalised health care system by creating one provincial administrative body for health care (Capital Health, 2014). The ability for CHBs to influence policy became inhibited as recommendations of each board were vetted through the provincial health care authority, a large bureaucracy in comparison to previous localised health authorities (Corfu, 2017). As well, the Liberal government devolved the responsibilities of the former VP by contracting a private consulting firm to engage with the public (One Nova Scotia, 2014). The Liberal government made neoliberal decisions for CHBs and VP, which reinforced the ability of the state to make decisions in the absence of public opinion. The choices of the McNeil government dramatically impacted the ability of citizen engagement recommendations to affect policies.

In summation, all chapters address the neoliberal governance model and how changes to citizen engagement bodies within Nova Scotia enhance central control in policy deliberation. Citizen engagement is a political technique that merely collects public

opinion with no intentions of including the needs and the priorities of the community into decision making. This thesis concludes that citizen engagement bodies in Nova Scotia have experienced a similar history. The choices by the PC, NDP and Liberal government towards CHBs and VP reinforced the top-down administration model and disenfranchised citizens within public policy deliberation.

## CHAPTER I

### **The Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia: 1999 – 2009**

This chapter provides a history of citizen engagement in Nova Scotia through an analysis of VP and CHBs from 1999 to 2009. The chapter addresses the policy and funding allocation within provincial budgets of the PC government for VP and CHBs during a period of political unease. The PCs followed a Liberal government which had accumulated ongoing civic distrust throughout its six years in office. Policy and funding choices by the Liberals were often criticised as being the opposite of the public's priorities. The operational and budgetary changes to CHBs and VP by the PCs demonstrate efforts to enhance citizen engagement through a new regionalised health care system and the reallocation of responsibilities and funding within VP. The restructured systems of citizen engagement would, according to the PC government, improve democratic practices and accountability through "evidence based" governance and public opinion (House of Assembly Hansard, 2001, June 15). The PC's utilised campaign promises that responded to the legitimization crises, or public discontent, created by the Liberals (Habermas, 1976). Using Habermas' theory of legitimization crisis (Habermas, 1976), this chapter argues that the transitions in VP and CHBs enabled by the PC government to manage public opinions and make state decisions within policy deliberation independent from democratic accountability.

#### **The Democratic Deficit and the Dying Days of the Liberals**

To understand the political climate of Nova Scotia during the PC government that lasted from 1999 to 2009, this chapter identifies conditions that led to the initial electoral success. The Nova Scotia Liberal Party maintained power from 1993 to 1999. In 1993,

Premier John Savage inherited a \$471 million deficit (Maclean's, 1997, March 31). To balance the budget, Savage's administration began the difficult task of cutting government spending through hospital closures, decreasing the wages of civil servants and teachers, and approving the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) (CBC, 1999, July 26). The HST implementation combined the federal government sales tax and the provincial sales tax which resulted in a fifteen percent combined tax on all goods and services (Bergman, 1997, April 7). Public outrage swelled in 1997 when Savage resigned as the party leader due to a series of politically mismanaged decisions that damaged public perceptions of the Liberal government and created internal conflict within the party.

The decisions of the Savage government resulted in a democratic deficit, which occurs when a government fails to function with transparency, accountability, and perceived adequate participation of citizens in policymaking (Berger, 2011). Savage became unpopular due to claims of patronage within high-level governmental job allocation, while civic unrest arose due to the metro amalgamation where the public claimed the Liberals ignored the results of polling firms regarding the decision (MacLeod, 2006, p.563; House of Assembly Hansard, 1995).<sup>2</sup> The Savage government had implemented the forcible amalgamation of eight municipalities in industrial Cape Breton because six of the municipalities filed for bankruptcy (Clancy, 2000, p.206). When the Liberals announced a similar plan for the Halifax area, the amalgamation was

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<sup>2</sup> Local government in Nova Scotia had existed since before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and owed their "their geographical boundaries to the accidental, unplanned circumstances of by-gone days" (Clancy, 2000, p. 202). In 1992, a provincial task force on local government recommended creating single municipalities as a means to bring together education, public services, and provincial-municipal relations. This was implemented by Savage, bringing together Halifax, Dartmouth, and other surrounding communities in 1996 (Clancy, 2000).

met with bitterness as the surrounding metro municipalities were not in pressing financial situations like in Cape Breton (Clancy, 2000, p. 206). Citizen opinions continued to be ignored by the Savage government in the decision to fund the development of a casino in the province while implementing ‘draconian’ and neoliberal inspired cuts to social services, prompting a public outcry (Wozney, 2017; MacLeod & Sawler, 2015). The Liberals were unpopular with Savage as the Premier, and as an election neared, the party changed its leader as a means to alleviate public pressure and maintain the stability of the government.

Following his resignation, Savage was quoted by *Maclean’s* stating, “I was obviously unpopular...I think it's fair to say that the party will do better without me,” (Maclean’s, 1997, March 31). The Liberal government created a political environment in which the leadership did not fulfil its campaign promises, as Savage explained:

So around that time ... I did a lot of soul searching. I looked at it. And a number of factors came into play. One, that I was unpopular. And never mind if it was justified or unjustified, the point was that I was at something like 19%. But the point was, I was unpopular and many of the policies that were associated with the government that was not working or had created political turmoil were identified with me (MacLeod, 2006, p. 564).

Though Savage was not solely responsible for the decisions that created unpopular opinions of the Liberals, the polling showed that the public viewed his leadership as the problem. By removing Savage from office, the Liberal government managed public perceptions to help minimise the legitimisation crisis and ensure political stability. Russell MacLellan became the Liberal leader in 1997 and was entrusted to resolve the legitimisation crises that he had inherited from Savage (Madill, 1998). As the public perceived Savage’s leadership as problematic, MacLellan was placed in the leadership role to help restore the reputation of the Liberal party in Nova Scotia.

In a 1997 poll conducted by the Halifax-based Corporate Research Associates, the Liberals had the support of twenty-six percent of decided voters, the PCs twenty-eight percent, and the NDP had the majority of support with thirty-three percent (Maclean's, 1997, March 31). These statistics elicited an immediate response from the Liberal government. MacLellan stated that, "We need the courage to listen, the courage to change, the courage to lead," (Maclean's, 1997, July 21). MacLellan promised an open dialogue with citizens as the Savage government had not done enough to address the "social deficit" caused by funding cuts and joblessness (Berman, 1997, July 21). The Liberals attempted to bridge the democratic deficit with Savage's resignation as a means to change public perceptions of the government, but the strategy proved unsuccessful in changing the party's electoral success. MacLellan's leadership was central to regaining public favour, but unsuccessful in resolving the legitimization crisis produced under the leadership of Savage.

Besley (2010) argues that the public's perception of the government has material outcomes (p. 258). If citizens consider administrative decisions to be made in the absence of public opinion, this negatively affects the ability of a political party to retain power (Besley, 2010). This is evident in the 1998 election in Nova Scotia, which created a weak Liberal minority government that lost twenty of its thirty-nine seats (Madill, 1998). Though the Liberal government platform committed that it would put "Nova Scotia first" in all decisions, policies did not reflect this (House of Assembly Hansard, 1997, April 17). For example, MacLellan campaigned to correct the perceived mistakes of Savage through job creation in vulnerable communities; however, measures such as the Petroleum Resources Removal Permit Act, or Bill 102, put the interests of private corporations over those of citizens. Bill 102 granted offshore gas exploration licenses to

corporations but did not have any contingencies within the agreement to hire Nova Scotians or buy locally when developing the industry (Bill 102, 1999). With many industrial jobs coming to a rapid end throughout the province, rural communities were unhappy with Bill 102 (Chronicle Herald, 1999).

The public perceived the Liberal government as being untrustworthy in its ability to uphold promises, particularly in rural Nova Scotia. Though the MacLellan government was creating job growth in the offshore gas sector, the public perceived the deals with corporations to be a different priority than rural revitalisation and not in line with the “Nova Scotia first” campaign promise. PC Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), George Archibald, note that, “Who is looking out for Nova Scotians? Who is putting Nova Scotia first in this government? Nobody. This government forgot about Nova Scotia,” (House of Assembly Hansard, 1997, May 9). Negative perceptions of the Liberal party continued, which resulted in a loss of public faith and political stability for the party.

The Liberals struggled to maintain public support while managing the fiscal deficit and the province's non-negotiable \$700-million annual debt payments, which were pushed higher than anticipated by the low Canadian dollar (Premier's Office, 1998). The strains on provincial spending negatively affected the delivery of health care across the province (Lees-Marshment, Giasson, Thierry & Marland, 2012). The Liberals already faced public claims of inadequate and irresponsible spending within health care, as the federal government removed \$320 million in funding a few years before (Morrison, 1998). Similar to the Savage government, MacLellan was perceived negatively by voters, which caused the Liberals to lose almost half of their seats, and in a rare circumstance, earn the same number of seats as the NDP (Smith & MacKeen, 1999). In response to the

weak minority victory for MacLellan, NDP leader, Robert Chisholm, stated, "Something happened on the way to the Liberal coronation... It's called democracy," (Madill, 1998). The growing public discontent towards the Liberal party was signified by the poor performance in the 1998 election, which resulted in mounting instability towards MacLellan's political power.

The 1999 budget created further instability for the minority government. In an attempt to address the growing public outrage over the lack of funding for health care, the Liberals created the Health Investment Fund by borrowing \$600 million over three years to improve healthcare services (Smith & MacKeen, 1999). The Health Investment Fund allowed the Liberals to mitigate public perceptions about health care funding without cutting other social programs. Despite the projection of a balanced budget, public criticisms of the MacLellan government did not cease. The Health Investment Fund was excluded from the standard operating costs reported for health care within the budget, which led to claims that the Liberals intentionally left out the funding as a means of "financial sleight of hand" (Mutimer, 2005, p.155).

By taking the health investment fund off the books, the Liberals were perceived by the public as misleading citizens into believing that the budget was balanced for political gain. In response, Hamm stated, "Over the last six years, the Liberal government has dismantled health care in the name of a balanced budget... The cruel truth is, we now have neither quality health care nor a balanced budget," (Smith & MacKeen, 1999). The efforts by the Liberals to manage negative public perceptions of the delivery of health care resulted in an administrative system that citizens considered less responsive to patient needs. The 1999 budget exacerbated perceptions of the Liberal government as being untrustworthy, which intensified the legitimization crisis.

Though questions arose surrounding the reporting of funding, the Liberals insisted they had produced a balanced budget, with the Minister of Finance, Donald Downe stating that, “We raised the bar again and for the first time we are going to have balance in three years for the health care system, something this province hasn't seen for decades. That is good fiscal management, something [the other parties] don't understand,” (House of Assembly Hansard, 1999, June 3). Public perceptions of the budget became problematic as discontent over the Health Investment Fund and the projected fourteen-year repayment plan became overwhelming (Lees-Marshment, Giasson, Thierry & Marland, 2012). For example, Hamm campaigned at a daycare as a backdrop to explain how the Health Investment Fund would be “mortgaging the future of children” in the province (CBC, 1999, June 21). By using children to illustrate the costly implications of the plan, the popularity of the MacLellan's leadership further declined (Doucet, 1999).

By 1999, the credibility of the Nova Scotia Liberal party was in shambles as voters “watched Premier Russell MacLellan struggle for 15 months to keep his minority Liberals afloat, rarely introducing bills that, if rejected, could topple his government,” (Auld, 1999; Maclean's, 1999). MacLellan polled at a twenty-five percent approval rate, and the Liberals had lost the majority of their support within rural Nova Scotia amid controversy over the provincial budget (Doucet, 1999). The Liberals failed to manage public and opposition perceptions of the Health Investment Fund, and the fragile minority government fell to a no-confidence vote on the 1999-2000 budget in June of 1999, triggering the second provincial election in two years (Dunn, 2008).

Citizens do not re-elect a government that is considered untrustworthy (Habermas, 1976). According to McMahon (1999):

The budget of MacLellan's Liberals in Nova Scotia is another vivid example of the corruption that permeates government reporting... The government was also derelict in its duties to ensure hospitals and health centres were staying on budget... Rather than admit these deficits tipped the province itself into a deficit situation, the government simply tucked the overspending into the province's debt... Nova Scotians go into an election forced by a government that badly reneged on its key campaign promise of fiscal responsibility. But voters have no guarantee the options are better. At least, they can't be worse. (McMahon, 1999)

In 1998, the Liberals had campaigned on a "Nova Scotia First" platform in which policies would reflect the priorities of citizens and be primarily created through engagement practices (Maclean's 1998). However, the public perceived that the 1999 budget reflected neither a transparent nor an accountable government. Citizens perceived the MacLellan government to be working under "a cloak of secrecy" in their management of the deficit (Halifax Herald, 1999). Negative public opinions regarding the trustworthiness of the Liberal government intensified the legitimization crisis, and polling numbers ensured that MacLellan would not win the upcoming election (Smith & MacKeen, 1999). The "deficit-ridden" Liberals were underperforming in the eyes of the public, and the instability of the government created an opportunity for the PCs to run a campaign that further eroded the reputation of the MacLellan and the Liberal party (Dunn, 2008).

The PCs leveraged the poor public opinion of the Liberal leadership to their advantage in the 1999 campaign. Hamm used MacLellan's perceived inability to balance the provincial budget as a means to win votes (Mutimer, 2005). The PCs based their platform on transparency and fiscal accountability, stating that Nova Scotia needed, "Strong Leadership...providing details on the initiatives we will take, including when, how and at what cost. A PC government will achieve a truly balanced budget in year three, if not sooner. A minimum of one third of future surpluses will be targeted to debt reduction," (Halifax Herald, 1999). To gain public support for the potential PC

leadership, Hamm campaigned on addressing the perceived problems of the Liberals. The PC government promised leadership that would bridge the democratic deficit through transparency, accountability and encouraging citizen engagement (Mutimer, 2005, p.165).

The PCs won the 1999 election with twenty-nine of the fifty-two seats, and thirty-nine percent of the popular vote (CBC, 1999, July 26). As a reflection of their poor public perception, the Liberals fell to third place in seats and the popular vote (Giasson, Marland & Small, 2014). In response to the PC's electoral success, Hamm said, "There is no easy way out of the mess we are in, but... we can ensure the choices we do make are based on compassion, consensus and public consultation," (Smith, 1999). The PCs campaigned on an inclusive government, but the means by which the party would achieve the goals promised were unclear.

### **PC Promises and the First Two Years of the Government**

The PCs made two hundred and forty-three campaign promises in the 1999 election (McMahon, 1999). The promises responded to the widespread public resentment over the declining state of health care, government transparency, and the growing provincial deficit that existed under the Liberal government (ICFI, 1999). The PCs committed to a ten percent income tax cut for all Nova Scotians in their first four years in office as a means to compensate for the implementation of the HST introduced by the Liberals in 1997 (House of Assembly Hansard, 2001, June 15). The commitment to fiscal transparency and deficit reduction guaranteed a balanced provincial budget by 2003 (Mutimer, 2005, p.166). To amend the disconnection felt by rural Nova Scotians after the proposal of the Petroleum Resources Removal Permit Act, the PCs ensured that policies would be created for local companies so that rural businesses would have more opportunities to compete for government contracts (Premier's Office, 1999). Hamm also

embraced neoliberal ideas of governance by promising to undertake a comprehensive review of non-essential government services by consulting with the public to determine if social programs could be properly provided by the private sector (Halifax Herald, 1999). This meant ending the provincial subsidies to money-losing industries such as the Sydney Steel Corporation (SYSCO) and the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO).

A point of public contention throughout the 1990's in Nova Scotia was the Liberal government's economic intervention in DEVCO and SYSCO (MacIntyre, 1997).

DEVCO and SYSCO were Crown Corporations created in 1967 to ease public distress and political repercussions from the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation's withdrawal from industry in Cape Breton.<sup>3</sup> DEVCO, established by the Federal Government, operated the coal mines, while SYSCO, established by the Government of Nova Scotia, ran the steel mill (Conrad & Hiller, 2010, p. 226).

Economic intervention by both the federal and provincial governments was to be a short-term solution to the industrial collapse, as it was assumed Cape Breton coal mines would not exist after 1981 (DeMont, 2009, p. 251). However, DEVCO and SYSCO operations continued as Hamm took office in 1999. The PCs deemed funding for both of the Crown Corporations to be a poor use of public resources and a considerable cause of bureaucratic inflation as the government was responsible for producing reports, reviews and strategies on DEVCO and SYSCO (Mutimer, 2005, p.161). The first PC budget, presented in October 1999, included an announcement that Nova Scotia would sell SYSCO to a private corporation, and withdraw government support for miners in the

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on DEVCO and SYSCO, see: MacIntyre, G. (1997). "Active Partners: Education and Community Development," *International Journal of Social Economics*, 24 (11): 1290–130

closure of DEVCO. By eliminating funding for coal and steel production in Cape Breton, the PCs quickly acted on a major campaign promise.

A continued commitment throughout the Hamm campaign was to focus on “evidence based” governing through enhanced citizen engagement practices (Mellor, 2000, July 28). The promise was a direct response to the issues of the Liberal government, as the public perceived that decisions were being made in the absence of the “Nova Scotia first” commitment. Adams (2004) states that regulated forums for public opinion are necessary to enhance democratic practices within decision making, as these provide a platform for policy to be deliberated in cooperation with the consumers it affects daily (p. 44). The PC government recognised that citizen engagement capacities in Nova Scotia were flawed, with Minister of Health, Jamie Muir, stating in a *Chronicle Herald* article, “We have to make sure that communities are able to influence... decisions. This will only occur if we change the current system,” (Jackson, 1999). A restructured system of citizen engagement would enhance practices throughout the province.

The commitment by the PCs to amend citizen engagement practices applied particularly to CHBs. A new system of health care administration would allow for the introduction of innovative solutions to reduce the demand on the costly government services while also reallocating the scarce funding resources to ensure maximum benefits for communities (Halifax Herald, 1999). This would be achieved through the implementation of the most significant PC campaign promise, which committed to restructuring health care administration through a new regionalisation plan for health care administration that aimed to address overspending and poor medical service delivery across the province.

Since their creation in 1996, the responsibilities of CHBs were unclear and did not meet the recommendations of the *Royal Commission on Health Care Reform* to move decision making away from the top-down process (Bickerton, 1999). During the election campaign, Hamm claimed that the CHBs were "designed to confuse" and MacLellan stated that he was "not going to respond to that kind of intimidation of the people of Nova Scotia on something as crucial as their health care system" (Jackson, 1999, June 20; Smith, 1999, June 24). As a means to improve CHBs and create a better dialogue between citizens and policymakers, the 1999-2000 budget revealed efforts by the Hamm government to overhaul health care administration by funding a "Task Force on Regionalisation". The final report of the task force would provide recommendations, strategies, and options for improving Nova Scotia's health care system (Department of Finance and Treasury Board, 1999). The committee signified that major changes to the organisation of public consultation methods in health care were being reconsidered and developed.

In the wake of the election, opposition parties criticised the PCs for releasing a budget similar to that of the defeated Liberal budget (Mutimer, 2005, p. 159). Hamm's campaign focused on social issues and public inclusivity, but once elected their proposed budget reflected a right-wing agenda and deficit reduction strategies (House of Assembly Hansard, 1999). Kelly Toughill of the *Toronto Star* argues:

Hamm campaigned more like New Democrats. Hamm promised more money for all-day, five-day-a-week kindergarten programs... but [the budget] nixed \$2 million for a Cape Breton charity, killed a program for the disabled, presided over Nova Scotia's first ambulance workers' strike and stopped a group of nuns from opening a nursing home... people seem baffled by the divisive new rhetoric, confused by budget reviews that no one warned was coming (Toughill, 1999).

PC promises prior to the election suggested that once in office there would be immediate improvements made to citizen engagement bodies to ensure community-driven governance, but the 1999 budget did not reflect these commitments (House of Assembly Hansard, 2000, April 13).

In response to the public backlash over the 1999 budget, Finance Minister Neil LeBlanc asserted that the PC government “required more time” to assess the financial state of the province and to implement the necessary bureaucratic cuts (Mutimer, 2005, p. 159). After auditing provincial spending, the PCs accused the MacLellan government of misreporting within its June 1999 budget. The Liberals projected a \$1.6 million surplus, but the Hamm government found there to be a \$497 million deficit (Carmichael, 1999). The PCs did not anticipate such a large deficit; therefore, funding reallocation for citizen engagement initiatives was pushed until in the next budget. However, the following 2000 budget continued to lack accountability to the citizen engagement promises made during the 1999 campaign. Political decisions made by the Hamm government did not promote community-driven governance, as NDP MLA, John Holm, noted:

Always putting Nova Scotia first... those are the words of one John Hamm. He addressed those words to the people of Nova Scotia when he sought their support to elect a Conservative Government. He said those words at the end of the majority Liberal Government. Yet now, in a desperate attempt to justify this treacherous budget, the Conservatives want to rewrite history... The Conservatives are trying to cut out and destroy all memories and records of what they actually said to get elected (House of Assembly Hansard, 2000, April 13).

Opposition parties expressed uncertainty in the Hamm government to act upon campaign promises, and public opinion began to echo this.

## Promoting Citizen Engagement during the PC Government

Before midterm, the PCs started responding to public opinion regarding citizen engagement that was ignored by the previous Liberal government. The Hamm government saw health care as a significant aspect of its campaign and responded with substantial changes to the system of administration in health care. In 1999, the release of the *Minister's Task Force on Regionalised Health Care in Nova Scotia* recommended replacing the four RHBs with nine health authorities (Department of Health, 1999). The PCs campaigned on the key issue that the existing health care system, based on the recommendations of *The Blueprint for Health System Reform*, neither reflected the priorities of Nova Scotians, nor fiscally responsible (Dunn, 2008). The Hamm government committed to reforming health care administration to ensure that policies were built from the community level up (Mutimer, 2005, p.165). In response, a new form of regionalised health care was introduced to address citizen concerns.

The *Health Authorities Act* (Bill 34, 2000) dissolved the four RHBs. *Bill 34* created nine District Health Authorities (DHAs), and separated the IWK Health Care Centre.<sup>45</sup> The number of CHBs increased from thirty to thirty-seven in the new system as a means to bring more rural opinions into health care decision making (Province of Nova Scotia, 2002). The rationale for the restructured system was stated to “establish new

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<sup>4</sup> The nine districts were: DHA 1: South Shore District Health Authority; DHA 2: South West Nova District Health Authority; DHA 3: Annapolis Valley District Health Authority; DHA 4: Colchester East Hants District Health Authority; DHA 5: Cumberland Health Authority; DHA 6: Pictou County District Health Authority; DHA 7: Guysborough Antigonish-Strait Health Authority; DHA 8: Cape Breton District Health Authority; DHA 9: Capital District Health Authority

<sup>5</sup> Unlike other hospitals, IWK Health Care Centre has separate collective agreement with the provincial government; one for Administrative Professionals, Support Services, Nursing and Healthcare. Therefore, the hospital must always remain independent from negotiations with the other hospitals in the province (Hildebrandt, 2015).

district health authorities... [that] will serve smaller areas and populations, and will have closer connections to their communities' health needs," (Mellor, 2000, October 28). The most significant change for CHBs within *Bill 34* was the legislation of the precise responsibilities and expectations of the boards. Establishing CHBs in law was said to be the highest priority of the RHB reform (Nova Scotia: Minister's Action Committee on Health System Reform, 1994, p.27). By providing a legal definition of the responsibilities to community members, the Hamm government argued this finally formalised the citizen engagement process within health care and resolved any confusion surrounding the role of CHBs (Department of Health, 2001).<sup>6</sup>

Hamm's first term as Premier increased the ability of citizens to participate in CHBs, and the efforts continued with VP activities. In 2001, the Hamm government reinstated the long-standing Sector Committees of VP to help address the poor economic performance of Nova Scotian industries (Communications Nova Scotia, 2004; Department of Finance and Treasury Board, 1999 & 2000). Previously discontinued in 1999 by the Liberals, the PCs reconfigured the original Sector Committees established of the 1960's to reflect new industrial growth in the province (Communications Nova Scotia, 2004; Department of Finance and Treasury Board, 1999 & 2000). Rather than

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<sup>6</sup> Under the bill, CHBs were to:

(a) foster community development that encourages the public to actively participate in health planning and service delivery; (b) construct a community profile that identifies the deficiencies and strengths of the community with respect to factors that affect health, including income and social status, social support networks, education, employment, physical environments, inherited factors, personal health practices and coping skills, child development and health services in the community; (c) prepare and maintain an inventory of community-based health services delivered in the community; (d) assess community health needs and community-based health services in relation to those needs; (e) subject to the approval of the district health authority, make by-laws; (f) provide such other advice and assistance that the district health authority requests; (g) manage, or assist in the management of, community development grants on behalf of the Minister or the district health authority, or with the approval of the Minister or the district health authority; and (h) perform such other functions as the Minister may authorize in the regulations.

have general sectors, VP could establish Sector Committees to study any sector of the economy with potential for growth and formulate economic plans respecting that particular area of interest (Voluntary Planning Act, 2001). The provincial government argued that Sector Committees would be used as the fundamental instrument to ensure citizen engagement within public policy, as the committees had produced hundreds of position and research papers under previous governments (House of Assembly Hansard, 2001, May 7). By reinstating Sector Committees, the Hamm government provided more opportunities for citizens to consult on economic and social issues.

The PC government continued to modify citizen engagement practices by overhauling the funding formula of VP and CHBs in the 2001-2002 budget. In previous budgets, funding for VP was categorised under “Economic Development” in the “Non-Department Agencies”. Conversely, funding for CHBs was categorised under “Health” in the “Public Health Services Program” (Department of Finance and Treasury Board, 1999 & 2000). Hamm argued that this method of reporting did not allow for transparency as to it was impossible to find out exactly how much the boards cost (Jackson, 1999, June 20). The funding allocation represented a fundamental problem with the previous Liberal government, which was the lack of transparency in decision making paired with the implementation of structures, such as the budget formula, that reproduce the similar the absence of transparency.

The reporting categories of both CHBs and VP were responsible for funding many agencies and did not break down funding contributions. This meant that the funding for each program within “Non-Department Agencies” and “Public Health Services Program” was combined. It was impossible to separate how much funding each program received, meaning that the fiscal accounting of VP and CHBs lacked transparency

because the exact amount allocated the citizen engagement boards could not be determined.

Within the 2001-2002 budget, the Hamm government addressed the lack of transparency in CHB funding by introducing the “Wellness Fund”. The “Wellness Fund” was intended to support CHBs with a set amount of funding, which provided clarity for CHB budget reporting. The fund allocated \$1,000,000 to the thirty-seven CHBs (roughly \$38,000 each) but left the responsibility for allocating funding of individual boards to the newly created DHAs (Province of Nova Scotia, 2002). While the “Wellness Fund” provided a modicum of transparency as the lump sum funding for all CHBs was being reported, the absence of uniform accounting and reporting practices among the growing number of DHAs and VP continued to produce issues. The changes were intended to create more transparency, but in practice, the new method of reporting did not adequately address the gaps to track the funding of either board.

### **The Limitations of Citizen Engagement Under the PCs**

From the early stages of the PC government, questions arose regarding Hamm’s sincerity toward enhancing citizen engagement practices, as opposition parties felt the party had “pushed the delete button on their election commitments” (House of Assembly Hansard, 1999, October 15). Nova Scotians re-elected the PC government on two occasions, though decision making did not reflect any changes to community-driven governance. The Hamm government made decisions that managed public perceptions of the government, but did not make tangible changes to how citizen engagement was executed. The PCs persuaded citizens to vote in their favour with promises of citizen inclusion within government decisions, as Gustafson explains:

Canadians who re-elected their provincial and federal governments were persuaded by the rhetoric about consumer involvement in decision-making and a realignment of priorities... The promises of more accessible, higher quality care are very different from the actual consequences of reform. The preoccupation with cost-containment and short-term deficit reduction coupled with minimal community consultation... is proving detrimental to... Canadians (Gustafson, 2000, p.16).

Though the government promised new regulations to ensure public involvement within policy deliberation, in actuality, the PCs implemented a centralised system of decision making focused on economic development and program cuts (Smith & Mellow, 1999). The choices of the PCs reinforced the neoliberal model of the government as they favoured deficit reduction over social program creation, which reproduced similar outcomes in the public perception of the party as the previous Liberal government experienced.

The neoliberal focus of the government was evident to other politicians in the House of Assembly, as the opposition leader, Darrell Dexter stated, “[the] budgeting and formulas... it's even less responsive to local community needs... The proposal would take decision making out of the communities,” (Delaney, 2002). The public perceived citizen engagement to be reinforcing government thinking as the process put decision making “back into the hands of downtown Halifax,” (Smith & Mellow, 1999). The distrust in the engagement process was a result of the implementation of the neoliberal governance model as negative public perceptions resulted from funding cuts to social programs and decision making that favoured the interests of the private sphere. The PCs used citizen engagement to enhance the stability of their government and did not improve the ability of VP and CHBs to influence policy deliberation.

Though VP made recommendations based on the responses of the communities with which it consulted, the government did not always consider these recommendations.

The policy deliberation process compiles information from a variety of perspectives, and sometimes the recommendations of some groups compete with one another. Policymakers must align their choices with government thinking, which does not always reflect what the public believes to be the best outcome (Berger, 2011). Such was the case with the Hamm government, as policymakers had a responsibility to allocate tax resources carefully and ensure employment opportunities, particularly in a have-not province like Nova Scotia. The recommendations of the *Final Report of the Voluntary Planning Off-highway Vehicle Task Force* conflicted with the recommendations of private interest groups. Following the 2004 release of the report, David Jackson of the *Chronicle Herald* quoted ATV lobbyist groups as stating, “[VP is] not seeing the whole picture, that's for sure... the proposed new regulations would have a significant impact on riders and dealers, and there's been little discussion about the economic impact on vehicle and product sales,” (Jackson, 2004). Though different perspectives existed on the issue, the government had a responsibility to maintain economic growth and deficit reduction on the basis of a neoliberal governance model.

There are always a variety of channels influencing policymakers, such as lobby groups, and these interests sometimes contradicted the recommendations of VP. The government must make choices that are best for the province; therefore, recommendations that value government thinking may differ from those of VP and public opinion. VP was not the only vehicle for citizen engagement as many different voices influenced policymakers, but the board was the only formal means for public interjection on social and economic policies. The Hamm government used VP recommendations to mitigate potential negative public opinions over policy decisions, but when the recommendations of the board conflicted with different, more viable choices - policymakers had to

disregard some reports. This was exemplified in the recommendations of the *Final Report of the Voluntary Planning Off-highway Vehicle Task Force* in which the government approved only a handful of thirty-nine policy recommendations (House of Assembly Hansard, 2001, November 13).

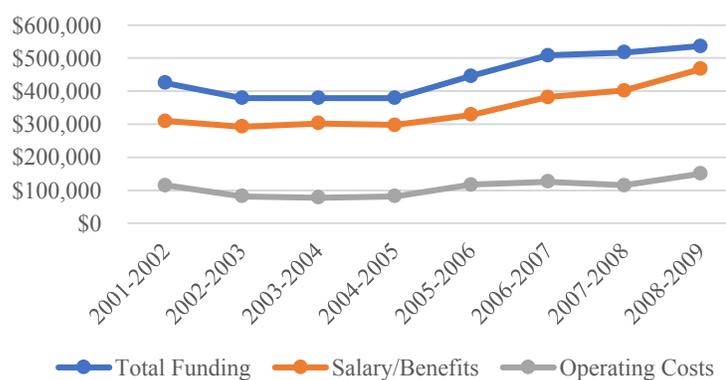
Mowbray (2011) argues that citizen engagement practices do not enhance community input, but instead reinforce the ability of decisions to be made centrally (p. 133). This means that the state favours decision makings that supports government thinking, and those choices can be guaranteed when opinions that differ are not involved in the deliberation process. By centralising the government, policy choices are less likely to be influenced by various channels of input. Citizen engagement is used by centralised governments to mitigate negative public perceptions of policies without relinquishing any decision making capacities, as citizens feel their opinions hold value to the government. This was true of the PC government as they favoured policymaker recommendations in decision making, which valued private interests. The public recognised policy choices were in opposition to the campaign promises for a community-driven government, as decision making was a top-down structure:

I found it hard to believe that a cabinet minister would, with the stroke of a pen, change [VP] agreements that had been worked out over several years. How naive I was? Case in point: The hours of work put in by the Voluntary Planning Committee for Off-highway Vehicles. After coming up with a well-crafted plan, reflecting the wishes of the majority, what happens? It was changed with a stroke of the pen and a little Ministerial Discretion (Chronicle Herald, 2007).

Administrative decisions represented the fundamental limitation of VP to act beyond a consultation board, as the policies produced deviated from the community upward model of development.

VP recommendations continued to veer away from government thinking. For example, the *Voluntary Planning Task Force Report on Non-Resident Land Ownership* recommended the protection of local access to coastal resources (Voluntary Planning Board, 2001). The government did not put the findings of the report into the legislature and continued to allow private and public land to be sold for development (Green, 2004). VP produced reports through consultation with multiple stakeholders, and sometimes the recommendations interfered with economic and private interests. The PC government responded to conflicting VP recommendations by dissolving the Sector Committees in 2005 (MemoryNS, 2012). This decision directly undermined the commitment to enhancing the ability of citizens to influence policy as Sector Committees were reinstated as a means to create more opportunities to engage with the public. Beyond attacking the structure of VP, the PC government increased administrative supervision within the remaining programs. The cost of administrative and bureaucratic employment increased, as shown in Figure 1 which indicates that from 2004 to 2009 “Salaries/Benefits” or administrative costs within VP increased sixty percent, while the “Operating Costs” remained the same.

Figure 1: Voluntary Planning Board  
Funding



Black and Fierlbeck (2006) argue that CHBs were not constructive or innovative participants in health care, as they did not maintain any control in the management of funds, resources, or programs (p. 507). *Bill 34* exemplified this, as it legislated CHBs as consultants that channelled the priorities of the public to DHAs (Bill 34, 2001). The government and policymakers had no responsibility to uphold the recommendations of CHBs. The PC government created legislation that was not accountable to public opinion. NDP MLA Maureen MacDonald addressed this issue:

I really think that this needs to be said, that this Bill No. 34, while they provide some authority to community health boards or some legislative legitimization of community health boards, they really have placed community health boards in a very subservient role in the delivery of health care. This was never envisioned by any of the previous task forces or Royal Commissions that have looked at the role of community health boards. It is certainly not the case that in other parts of the country that have moved to a regionalised, decentralised health care approach to primary health care provision that community health boards would have so little authority... The impact of this set of circumstances, then, could lead to, I think, a clear undermining of community health boards as a meaningful participant in the development of health care services at the local level (House of Assembly Hansard, 2000, April 4).

Though regionalising health care was intended to decentralise the government, the system centralised decision making capacities by making DHAs the sole authority for policy recommendations. Armstrong (1994) argues in *Take Care: Warning Signals for Canada's Health System* that changes to health care through regionalised practices bear little relation to the needs voiced by patients and voters (p. 26). This is reflective in the changes to the mandate of CHBs established under the PC government. Though *Bill 34* formalised the responsibilities of CHBs, it did not ensure community input found its way into health care policy as all decisions were “subject to the approval of the district health authority” (Bill 34, 2001; House of Assembly Hansard, 2000, April 4).

Hamm resigned in 2006, and Rodney MacDonald became the new premier (CBC, 2006). Regarding CHBs and their role in policy formation, MacDonald said, “The [Department of Health] has, I think, a very good system of consulting with the community health boards and receiving community input,” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2002). The Premier argued the public could influence policy through consulting practices, but *Bill 34* legislated that CHBs “shall not govern or manage the delivery of health services” (Bill 34, 2001). Though the PCs campaigned to reduce the democratic deficit created by the Liberals, their working relationship with CHBs merely managed public opinions rather than creating new methods to better engagement. Armstrong (1994) has noted the complexity of decision making in health care, noting:

It could be said that every Canadian decides on their own health care... Moreover, all adult Canadians have the right to vote for the municipal, provincial and federal politicians who determine health care policy. But the actual decision-making process is much more complex, and much farther from individual or even collective democratic control (p. 20).

Though CHBs were the “eyes, ears and voice of communities across the province”, DHAs and the Department of Health had complete discretion in accepting CHB recommendations and were the only authority when creating policies (Office of Health Promotion, 2004).

Chessie (2009) argues that citizen engagement practices cannot influence policy because the government limits the responsibility of different groups for making decisions (p. 714). In Nova Scotia, this applied to CHBs as measures existed to ensure that government priorities prevailed within health policy. CHBs would report community health plans to DHAs, which were responsible for implementing recommendations (Bill 34, 2001). As the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Thomas Ward argued, “The community health boards themselves basically are not going to be in the business of managing

anything. That is really the responsibility of district health authorities to meet the requirements under community health board plans,” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2000, April 4). CHBs were to obtain community input and manage negative public opinions of the health care system through engagement activities, but they were not responsible for designing or implementing decisions (Bill 34, 2001).

The PC government was consistently unaccountable to the recommendations submitted by VP and CHBs. The PCs used citizen engagement boards to manage public opinion, and policymaking remained centrally deliberated and in the absence of dissent. The PC government did increase citizen engagement opportunities, but the ability of VP and CHBs to influence policy was constrained. Though the PCs campaigned on a model of community-driven government, citizens voiced their discontent with the execution of this promise. Citizens perceived the PCs as playing a political game, and that the party was merely using community consultation practices through VP and CHBs to enhance political stability and manage negative public opinions of the party (Chronicle Herald, 2006). Citizens saw the government as untrustworthy and unwilling to cooperate with citizens in policy creation, which created a legitimization crisis for the PC government, weakening their ability to maintain political power.

## **Conclusion**

From 1999 to 2009, there is no evidence that increased citizen engagement practices ensured that public opinion was represented within policy deliberation. The Hamm government used the legitimization crisis created by the Liberals to obtain political office. Through campaign promises and a government based on neoliberal strategies, the PCs attempted to bridge the democratic deficit and restore public faith in the state. However, the neoliberal governance model maintained the central authority in decision

making, which is reflected in the history of CHBs and VP. The state retained control over financial matters, even though citizen involvement was encouraged through bodies such as CHBs and VP.

In response to the decade of PC governance, for the first time in provincial history, the NDP won a majority government in 2009. The PCs earned just ten seats in the 2009 election, showing the displeasure of Nova Scotians toward a government that did not keep their campaign promises and ignored public opinion (CBC, 2009). However, in the neoliberal era, a political change does not mean a more accountable government. Habermas (1976) argues that, “Democracy no longer has the goal of rationalising authority through the participation of citizens in discursive processes of will-formation. It is intended, instead, to make possible compromises between ruling elites,” (p. 8). Citizen engagement practices continued to have little influence on policy deliberation, yet are symbolically used by the Liberals, the PCs and the NDP, to sustain ruling power in provincial politics.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **The New Democratic Party of Nova Scotia: 2009 – 2013**

In 2009, the NDP took power from the crisis-ridden PCs through campaign promises of deficit reduction and responsible provincial spending. The commitments included job creation by maximizing federal funding, balancing the provincial budget, and bureaucratic cuts to ensure the provincial government was spending within its means (Nova Scotia New Democratic Party, 2009)<sup>7</sup>. This chapter uses Evans's (1995) theory of embedded autonomy to examine the changes to citizen engagement in Nova Scotia from 2009 to 2013 under the leadership of the NDP. This chapter argues that the NDP implemented policies which decreased the ability for citizens to engage, which led to central control in the deliberation process as the government was the primary voice in decision making. By reorganising engagement capacities and delegating the responsibility to consult with citizens into the private sector, the NDP achieved a minimal bureaucracy and a deregulated state - in line with neoliberal theory. This meant offloading deliberation onto the private sector, while maintaining central choice in what policies and public recommendations were adopted, and which were excluded. This chapter argues that by eliminating VP's responsibilities to the public consultation process, this created the opportunity for the NDP government to centralise decision making and ensure government perspectives of fiscal responsibility into policy deliberation.

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<sup>7</sup> As the PC government, led by Rodney MacDonald, had been running a provincial deficit, spending within the province's means meant managing the budget to decrease the deficit, not increase it (Steele, 2014).

### **Neoliberalism and the Theory of Embedded Autonomy**

Harvey (2005) defines neoliberal governance as a state with strong free markets and free trade, yet one that maintains minimal bureaucracy (p. xx). The neoliberal state facilitates the circulation of capital by providing the legal and institutional infrastructure to secure private property rights and the proper functioning of economic markets (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Evans's analysis echoes the neoliberal understanding defined by Harvey, but theorises the role of the state in advanced capitalism. Evans (1995) defines "embedded autonomy" as a system in which bureaucracy must be kept minimal, yet the state still has central control in decision making capacities (p. 12). Embedded autonomy, as part of the neoliberal governance model, is argued to ensure administrative effectiveness by intertwining bureaucratic insulation and political authority (Ünay, 2006, p. 19). By reducing bureaucracy and outsourcing government responsibilities into the private sector, a state can make decisions quickly and without pressure from differing opinions during the deliberation process. Though a government may work in cooperation with private interest groups, administrative decisions must remain located within the state so they are not unduly shaped by external pressures.

### **The Campaign Promises of the NDP**

In 2009, the NDP campaigned on responsible governance through changes in provincial spending after months of uncertainty regarding the finances of the PC government (Moore, 2009, June 7). Following the economic crisis in September of 2008, the PCs withheld information regarding the financial state of the province. Though a brief fiscal update was given in December of 2008, no further information regarding spending or the next provincial budget was released until May 2009 (Steele, 2014, pg. 77). The unusual secrecy surrounding the budget prompted a widely publicised subpoena of the

Deputy Minister of Finance, Vicki Harnish, to report to the Economic Development Committee on the “economic conditions within the province” (Steele, 2014, pg. 78). The budget was delivered, however, after the 2009 election was ultimately triggered by a defeated finance bill separate from the budget, which the MacDonald government insisted on passing before the budget was released (Moore, 2009, May 5). As the 2006 provincial election resulted in a minority government for the PCs, where the party had won only twenty-three seats, the MacDonald government was easily defeated on the unpopular bill (Minsky, 2009).

Amidst the public uncertainty over the economic future of the province, the NDP entered the 2009 election campaign focused on fiscal promises. The party leader, Darrell Dexter, was committed to auditing provincial spending and implemented a ten percent cut to bureaucratic costs over four years, which was expected to save the government \$65 million each year (CBC, 2010). Through this process, the NDP claimed it could stabilise the economy and balance the provincial budget. The ambitious fiscal promises quickly boosted the popularity of the NDP, and its June 2009 victory came as no surprise to most after weeks of leading in the pre-election polls (Minsky, 2009). As the PCs had released their budget after the election had been called, which dissolved the House of Assembly, there were few questions asked about the logistics of the document or the province’s current finances (Steele, 2014, p. 79).

During the campaign, Dexter did commit to spending “\$100,000 on an independent audit to determine the state of the province's books” (CBC, 2009, May 12). The NDP followed through with that promise once the newly formed government was given access to all budget material during the transition of power. The beginning stages of the audit revealed the unrealistic measures proposed by the MacDonald government to

manage the fragile economic condition of the province (Doucette, 2009). The PC budget assumed a wage freeze across the entire public sector, and as wages were the largest component of provincial spending, it was a significant and controversial issue (Steele, 2014, p.79). The NDP won a majority government in Nova Scotia based on a fiscally focused campaign. Dexter centred the party platform on a balanced budget, but the economic realities of the province quickly became a problematic obstacle in maintaining the economic commitments (CBC, 2009, June 19).

Though the cost of maintaining the standards of health care across the province was a huge investment, the NDP pledged that there would be no funding decreases in health care administration or CHBs operations (House of Assembly Hansard, 2009; CBC, 2009, May 12). Health care had been a sensitive issue within provincial elections since the 1990's, and though the funding choice was in opposition to the fiscally focused campaign, the commitment created positive public favour for the party by relieving ongoing fears of spending cuts (CBC, 2009, May 12). Once elected, the Minister of Health, Maureen MacDonald, reiterated the importance of health care and CHBs to Nova Scotians without making any new commitments regarding funding or administrative changes (House of Assembly Hansard, 2010). The NDP continued the mandate of CHBs as the "eyes and the ears of communities" in health care administration (House of Assembly Hansard, 2010). MacDonald did address a drop in CHB funding during a House of Assembly session, stating that, "The money hasn't disappeared, it's been transferred into another envelope for wellness grants to the community health boards... there has only been a budget cut of two percent administrative cost, \$13,000 - it's very minor," (House of Assembly Hansard, 2009). Though the NDP intended to maintain health care operational costs, the audit of provincial finances made clear the impossibility

of the commitment. Once elected, the NDP would implement some wage and spending freezes within health care as a deficit reduction strategy, but these changes did not affect the funding or operational responsibilities of CHBs (Doucette, 2013, October 2).

Deficit reduction, job retention, and the economy were public concerns across the province during the 2009 election, and those issues were reflected in the campaigns of the NDP, the PCs, and the Liberals:

All three parties advocated tax cuts of different kinds to stimulate the economy... All members believe in a social welfare system... but not at the expense of a balanced budget... all three parties have shown themselves capable of both fiscal conservatism and reform liberalism (Turnbull, 2009, p. 73).

The NDP campaign promises were responsive to negative public concerns of the PCs and the successive government's management of the provincial finances after the 2008 economic crisis (Moore, 2010, June 10). The NDP guaranteed a balanced budget by mid-term while maintaining commitments to economic stimulus projects previously in place, such as investments into tidal energy exploration and implementation (CBC, 2009, June 19; Nova Scotia New Democratic Party, 2009). Dexter's platform was not rooted in the traditional left leaning policies of the NDP, with political analysts such as David Johnson of Cape Breton University, noting in *The Globe and Mail*, "I see Dexter as very much... the mould of a Pierre Trudeau character and I don't see him as a type of Tommy Douglas. I don't see a real social policy vision coming out of the Dexter NDP," (Moore, 2009, June 7). Unlike the NDP's left-leaning ideology, the Nova Scotian campaign and the trends of Dexter's government were economically centred rather than focused on social policy.

The NDP did not discuss citizen engagement in its 2009 campaign. The platform was built on seven fundamental commitments, but none included improving the

relationship the government had with the public.<sup>8</sup> Fiscal prudence paired with administrative cutbacks would fund a variety of projects intended as an economic investment, argued to be a method of enhancing job creation in rural communities while retaining youth across the province (Turnbull, 2009). Though the campaign did not especially target departments that were vulnerable to administrative reductions, the independent spending audit would determine what social programs would be cut to ensure the promised ten percent spending decrease (CBC, 2010). Within the first year of power, the NDP began the process of bureaucratic reduction and deregulation, which led to the re-evaluation of the implementation of VP.

Since its creation in 1963, VP had been restructured on several occasions, beginning as an economic planning commission but gradually participating in an extensive range of policy debates (Lamport, 1988).<sup>9</sup> Though the mandate of VP had been adapted over its forty-eight years of operation to meet the needs of the governing party and adapt to the economic conditions of the time, the NDP eliminated its citizen engagement capacities (Chronicle Herald, 2011, May 8). Based on Dexter's reputation as a political centrist, VP members assumed his goal to cut administration by ten percent

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<sup>8</sup> The seven commitments of the NDP in the 2009 election campaign were:

1. Create the secure jobs Nova Scotia's economy needs.
2. Keep emergency rooms open and reduce health care waits.
3. Ensure more young people stay and build a life here in Nova Scotia.
4. Take the HST off home energy to make life more affordable.
5. Fix rural roads and keep communities strong
6. Gives seniors options to stay in their homes and communities longer.
7. Live within our means. (Nova Scotia New Democratic Party, 2009)

<sup>9</sup> For a history of VP and the various restructurings, see Anthony Lamport's *Common Ground: 25 Years of Voluntary Planning in Nova Scotia*, which gives an overview of the board until the mid 1980's. For any changes implemented after Lamport's publication, see the individual "Annual Accountability Report" for VP available through the Government of Nova Scotia's website.

would not affect the board (Turnbull, 2009). In 2010, the NDP stopped commissioning VP for consultation activities and moved the administrative staff into the Provincial Treasury Board, a division of the Department of Finance (Jackson, 2011, May 4). The Treasury Board absorbed VP into its mandate of “establishing plans and policies for the operation of the government of the Province and ensuring that they are developed and implemented in a coordinated and fiscally responsible manner” (Executive Council Office, 2012). The government stated that “by moving Voluntary Planning, we are building a new capacity to strengthen consultation practices” (Corbett, 2010). By restructuring VP, the NDP argued that policymakers could engage Nova Scotians more often and make citizen engagement a systematic process (Corbett, 2011). This would be achieved through a government partnership with the private sector to undertake the responsibility of citizen engagement, which led to the funding of a private consulting firm called Engage Nova Scotia (Engage Nova Scotia, 2015).

The decision to eliminate VP resulted from two factors. First, eliminating operational costs and amalgamating VP staff into the Treasury Board helped achieve campaign promises of bureaucratic reductions and reduced provincial spending. As well, by increasing the capacities of the Treasury Board, more policies would supposedly be critiqued in a “fiscally responsible manner” (Executive Council Office, 2012). The second reason VP was eliminated resulted from public perceptions that the engagement process was failing. In one of the final reports released by VP, *Our Common Ground: The Future of Nova Scotia's Natural Resources*, the committee found that citizens did not feel as though they were being engaged in a meaningful manner as there were no immediate, tangible results from the process (Voluntary Planning Board, 2009). The report stated that, “It was felt that, traditionally, departments work in isolation from the public and

their concerns. By failing to incorporate citizen knowledge and concerns into decision making, the resulting regulatory changes or strategies were ineffective because they did not capture the true breadth and depth of the problem,” (Voluntary Planning Board, 2009). The completion of VP activities was a slow process, as it took years to collect, compile, and report on community findings.

Moving the citizen engagement process into the private sector through Engage Nova Scotia was intended to create an efficient, and effective forum for citizen engagement. Since reports would be produced at a faster rate and include data collected from citizen engagement activities, private sector involvement would mitigate negative public opinions of the process. Eliminating VP was intended to end the preconceived notions of engagement, by creating a more responsive and efficient system of public opinion management.

### **Centralised Decision Making and Private Sector Interests Implemented by the NDP**

The first year of the NDP government resulted in a series of spending cuts in the public sector, which varied from dissolving bureaucratic positions to the elimination of social programs, such as VP (Chronicle Herald, 2013, September 7). However, austerity measures alone were not enough to bring down the province’s debt, nor were the cuts beneficial to managing public opinions. A report by the *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives* argued that, “economic growth alone will drive down the debt-to-GDP ratio. Over time, inflation and higher levels of GDP generate greater tax revenues which reduce deficits,” (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2012). The NDP adhered to this strategy and began making a series of decisions to invest in corporations in an effort to facilitate job creation (House of Assembly Hansard, 2012, November 6). The efforts by the Dexter government to stimulate the fragile economy while following through on

campaign promises of rural revitalisation and youth retention were problematic, as very few of the investments were profitable.

In 2011, the NDP announced it would provide Bowater Mersey Paper Company Limited with a \$25 million forgivable loan to continue operations at its pulp and paper mill and an additional \$24 million for the sale of nearly 10,000 hectares of woodland (Vaughan, 2012). However, a few months before the NDP decision, union workers of the mill voted to reduce the workforce by forty percent in order to continue some operations (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, December 8). As demand for newsprint was declining by nearly seven percent per year, the viability of the mill in the long term was uncertain, and community members were displeased with the investment (Tutton, 2011). Laid-off union workers had few employment alternatives within the rural area around Liverpool, and community members openly questioned putting taxpayer dollars into a “dinosaur industry” rather than investing in new opportunities (Zaccagna, 2011). Industry professionals questioned the benefit of the investment, with forest products analyst Paul Quinn stating, “I’d be surprised if, at the end of the day, all these things are enough... It looks like they’ve done enough to try to save this mill at this point,” (Tutton, 2011). Despite public input that the mill would not be profitable or sustainable in the future, the NDP centralised the decision making to ensure that investments continued and ignored the opinions of many people in the community (Vaughan, 2012).

By choosing to invest in Bowater Mersey in the absence of citizen engagement practices, the NDP created a crisis of negative public opinion management. As addressed by Liberal leader Stephen McNeil:

Where is the information that the government and the Premier have used to make their decision?... Why won’t they share that with us; Is there something in there that potentially is going to be recovery - let’s hear it, show it to the

people of Nova Scotia - on the investment? Show it to the people of Queens, so they can determine for themselves whether or not this is a good investment (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, December 8).

The constituents of the county were unhappy with the decision, and the opposition parties questioned how the NDP could make such a drastic choice without achieving an understanding of the priorities of the citizens it affected daily. Beyond the mounting community concerns, the funding was further problematized as it did not offer any future job security to the region. The investment was unconditional and negotiated without any accountability or performance measures for Bowater Mersey (Zaccagna, 2011).

Ultimately, Bowater Mersey considered the operations to be “unable to compete as prices decline in export markets” and the mill closed six months later, in June 2012 (Vaughan, 2012). The decision came as no surprise to the company’s unionized workers, community members, and outside analysts who predicted the closure. In the absence of the citizen engagement process, the NDP government made a decision that negatively impacted the public, as well as the party’s reputation.

Similarly, the Dexter government decided to provide tax breaks and invest in the NewPage mill in Port Hawkesbury. In September 2012, The NDP made a deal with Pacific West Commercial, a Vancouver based firm, to purchase the mill and maintain operations (Chronicle Herald, 2013, September 8). The government invested \$125 million in the corporation in addition to \$37 million spent on the mill prior to the purchase (Doucette, 2012, April 13). The deal also included an understanding that Pacific West would incorporate its other mills and related assets into the NewPage mill, which would provide tax saving for the corporation in other provinces (680 News, 2012). The cost of the tax savings would be divided between Nova Scotia and the other provinces where Pacific West had existing operations.

Though the deal did retain some jobs in the surrounding Richmond County, the NDP continued negotiations with Pacific West knowing there would be some negative impacts on the community (House of Assembly Hansard, 2012, November 30). The tax breaks reduced the operating budget of the municipality and would reduce some government services, with Liberal MLA, Michel Samson, stating that, “There will be a loss of approximately \$4.8 million... I believe Richmond has an annual operating budget of approximately \$10 to \$11 million; they will be losing \$4.8 million over the next three years from their revenues.” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2012, November 30). The Canadian Taxpayers Federation openly criticised the deal, saying the commitment was too expensive and risky for taxpayers (680 News, 2012).

Similar concerns which had surrounded the Bowater Mersey investment arose within Richmond County. The public questioned the benefits of the investment before the deal was finalised, as the Dexter government stated there was, “no regret” in the negotiations even after learning that Pacific West would lay off more than three hundred direct workers of the operation (Doucette, 2012, April 13). The long-term viability of the mill also raised questions, with one constituent stating “Devco, Sysco, Newpage” referencing the imminent failure of the industry (Williams, 2012). Though the mill ensured there were direct jobs through the mill and indirect jobs through transportation industries, the NDP put the burden of corporate pressures on the taxpayers, as the mill's success was intertwined with the success of all Pacific West operations. If Pacific West failed elsewhere in the country, the investment paid for by Nova Scotians would be lost. The decision by the Dexter government to invest in corporations without mitigating the long-term concerns of the community reflected centralised decision making by the state.

The NDP provided the infrastructure through public resources to provide financial security to a corporation and ignored the implications the decision could have on citizens.

The NDP invested over \$590 million into six corporations but cut an estimated \$772 million from social welfare programs (House of Assembly Hansard, 2012, November 6). The funding choices reflect the priorities of the neoliberal state, which value the accumulation of capital over the concerns of the public. In education, the NDP reduced staff but increased class size capacities and the expectation of education workers (Brisbane, 2013). In post-secondary education, the Dexter government cut provincial funding to universities and students by nearly ten percent, even though Nova Scotia had some of the highest graduate and undergraduate rates in Canada (Jackson, 2012, October 12). The Dexter government invested public resources into corporate well-being rather than community needs (Brisbane, 2013).

The NDP made specific choices in the absence of the community when dealing with funding cuts in education and investments into an industry. The Dexter government chose to invest in corporations rather than social programs. In neoliberal theory, spending that enables the market is an investment with a payoff. Though government bailouts may not align directly with the neoliberal governance model, in the case of the NDP, corporate investments were intended for deficit reduction purposes. The bailouts would stimulate the economy in rural areas dependent on social welfare programs, and once industry was revitalised, the investments could reduce fiscal strain on the government. The NDP spending was also paired with austerity measures within the bureaucracy. Neoliberal thinking considers social programs as a drain on government resources and the tax system. In practice, eliminating VP allowed the NDP to make neoliberal choices in the

absence of citizen engagement practices, which strengthened centralised decision making capacities as policymaking served corporate interests.

### **Citizen Engagement Practices Under the NDP Government**

During the 2010 restructuring of formal citizen engagement practices within the province, VP staff were transferred to the new Public Engagement Support Unit (PESU) within the Treasury Board. The intention of this decision was to improve citizen engagement through the “fostering of collaborative partnerships inside and outside government to ensure that engagement processes tap into the unique wisdom of many communities and communities of interest” (Corbett, 2010). Through the PESU, the government would delegate public outreach capacities to the private consulting firm Engage Nova Scotia (Corbett, 2010). The PESU exists as a mysterious entity within the government as there are no published reports on the unit or any discussions within the legislature. The decision to move citizen engagement capacities into the PESU shocked VP members and volunteers, with Board Chair, Rick MacDonald, stating that he was “blindsided” by the seemingly “impulsive choice” to eliminate VP (Jackson, 2011, May 6).

The PESU, in reality, was not engaging directly with communities, but instead outsourcing the responsibility into Engage Nova Scotia. By eliminating VP through the *Government Administration Amendment Act* (Bill 52, 2011), the NDP removed the only formalised means for the public to influence social and economic policies, thus further reinforcing a pattern of centralised decision making outside of citizen engagement. Though advocacy groups existed and conducted citizen engagement activities, these were not in coordination with the government. In a review by Frankish et al. (2002) on the challenges facing citizen engagement practices in Canada, the authors identify that the

manipulation of policy deliberation practices, in some circumstances, is used to facilitate the priorities of government, often to the detriment of the public (p. 1473). Citizen engagement is used to manage public opinion of the government and create positive perceptions about the policies, even if those decisions have potentially negative implications on the social wellbeing of the state. Eliminating the responsibility of the government to consider community input removes one of the important mechanisms existing in the state to check government power.

The absence of formal and effective citizen engagement practices has a negative impact on the stability of the state, as the public perceives that policymakers do not have an interest in community priorities. Deputy Premier, Frank Corbett, defended the choice of the NDP to reorganise VP, stating that, "It's not about control. It's about government perspective... I mean, if it's not in line with government thinking, why have it?" (Jackson, 2011, May 4). Corbett's justification of "government perspectives" as the best influence on policy creation was openly questioned and opposed by the public. For example, when Bowater Mersey closed in Liverpool, one citizen was quoted as saying, "Take Dexter's chequebook away before he bankrupts the province by financing any more losing business ventures. Oh wait, we're still holding our breaths over the old NewPage plant loans, not to mention the \$304,000,000 shipbuilding loan to the already richest family in our region," (Jackson, 2012, February 17). In the public's perspective, the NDP's rationale for funding choices, austerity measures and policies were not in the best interest of the majority of Nova Scotians. Though many citizens had negative feelings about the decision making of the Dexter government, there lacked opportunities to voice dissent. As exemplified in a citizen critique of the NDP's willingness to communicate, "Our Premier is running this province into the ground, and he rarely ever faces anybody in a free, open

environment to talk about it - he won't even go on radio shows,” (Ware. 2012). Citizens perceived the Dexter government to be making choices in the absence of public priorities and without regard to any public opinion.

As shown through the NDP investing in corporations, government thinking was fiscally centred and based on neoliberal ideology. The NDP believed that funding of the private sphere would lead to the creation of jobs, increase the revenues of the province, and reduce provincial spending on social welfare programs. As exemplified by Dexter when questioned on the Irving Shipyard investment, “I stand here as proud a Nova Scotian as you could possibly be... It means that we are going to be able to bring sons and daughters of Nova Scotians back from out west to work in the shipbuilding industry,” (Jackson, 2011, October 19). Corporate investments would provide the infrastructure to secure the accumulation of capital. The NDP made choices in line with neoliberal theory, regardless of the potential impacts on communities or public opinion management.

Adams and Hess (2001) argue that if the public views citizen engagement mechanisms as a state tool to pacify public opinion and centralise decision making, it will result in discontent (p. 14). Exactly this happened in Nova Scotia, as negative public perceptions and responses towards the elimination of VP began to surface. As the Dexter government was not adequately managing public opinion regarding policy choices, the stability of the government began to deteriorate. As stated by a constituent after the series of corporate investments by the NDP, “Stephen McNeil. You just became the new Premier of Nova Scotia effective next election date. Sometimes all you need to do in order to win an election is let the other guys screw up,” (Zaccagna, 2011). Though the PESU had undertaken the responsibilities of VP, citizen engagement was not a priority of the provincial government. The NDP delegated citizen engagement capacities into the

private sector through Engage Nova Scotia, but few activities were undertaken (Engage Nova Scotia, 2015). As the NDP devolved the engagement process into the private sector, concerns mounted in the public towards the future of cooperative policy deliberation. As Brookside resident Graham Smith said, “What a slap in the face to public engagement and to all the good citizens who have put in unpaid service on Voluntary Planning committees and task forces over the decades,” (Chronicle Herald, 2011, May 7). In response to the public outrage over changes to VP, the official opposition leader, Stephen McNeil, expressed his concerns with the fact that citizen engagement was “moving inside of government” (Jackson, 2011, May 4).

Lewis and Kouri (2004) argue that many governments market changes to citizen engagement practices as bold structures that increase public input, when in practice they perpetuate central decision making (p. 30). The NDP used the rationale of greater engagement capacities to justify eliminating the responsibilities of VP, with Corbett stating that, “Bringing Voluntary Planning in as part of the Treasury Board is the right step to take. It improves government's ability to engage Nova Scotians, while also ensuring that their input is taken into account during decision making,” (Corbett, 2011). Corbett argued the changes to VP were not about central control in policy deliberation, but increasing engagement capacities by utilising the PESU (Corbett, 2010). The NDP viewed VP to be failing communities, and by eliminating the board, citizens would be “engaged more often and more consistently... help[ing] departments and agencies identify opportunities for public engagement” (Corbett, 2010). However, citizens believed the administrative choice indicated the government’s intent to influence public policy in the absence of public opinion (Chronicle Herald, 2011, May 13).

The NDP government argued that moving VP's activities into the PESU was "supporting the public engagement needs of the Nova Scotia government related to its current priorities" (Corbett, 2010). This explanation focused on the needs of government rather than the public. The PESU planned engagement activities in collaboration with Engage Nova Scotia (One Nova Scotia, 2014). Though the partnership existed, there is no evidence that data collected through collaborative efforts were being used by the government as the PESU never released any reports or annual updates. It was perceived by the Dexter government that by funding corporations, social prosperity would be produced. While this did not align with public opinion, the NDP felt it necessary to retain central decision making, thus acting against the will of the public, and often to the advantage of corporations. The PESU was used by the Dexter government to manage these negative public opinions, as decision making was informed by government thinking rather than a variety of different perspectives. The NDP statements to improve VP by using the PESU to partner with the private sector to engage citizens was one of public relations, not of improving consultation or engagement. Though VP was flawed in its ability to influence policy deliberation, eliminating the activities of the board was an intentional choice to ensure that the government had embedded autonomy in policy deliberation.

In a critique of citizen engagement by Halvorsen (2003), it is stated that consultation practices sustain government control in decision making and deliberation (p. 541). Halvorsen's view echoes the response of opposition parties towards the elimination of engagement opportunities. Repealing the citizen engagement responsibilities of VP centralised policy deliberation, as the official opposition leader, Stephen McNeil, exemplified when speaking with the *Chronicle Herald*, "It looks to me like government is

just trying to control the agenda. Instead of actually doing what's potentially right for Nova Scotians,” (Jackson, 2011, May 4). Within the House of Assembly, the debate continued over the controversial decision, with MLA Keith Colwell stating, “[We] continue to criticise the NDP Government for its ill-advised and unfortunate verdict to rid the province of public engagement and axing the Voluntary Planning Board,” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 16). Opposition MLAs concurred that the *Government Administration Amendment Act* was against public wishes for a cooperative government in policy deliberation that protected citizen engagement practices (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 13).

Criticisms mounted as the NDP continued to outsource engagement activities into the private sector. Opposition members pressed the NDP government on the administrative choice, stating:

Whereas hiring private consultants to deliver the tough decisions while government sits on its hands is a principal trick of the NDP and the government has used this information, provided at great financial expense, to hide behind tough decisions... [by] eliminating the Voluntary Planning Board, the NDP Government is proving to Nova Scotians that henceforth private-paid consultants will guide the policy of this province, not the government or its people, (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 16).

By eliminating the consultation activities of VP, many accused the NDP of delegating citizen engagement into private consulting firms as a means to centrally control policy deliberation (Chronicle Herald, 2011, May 13). The 2009 campaign centred around fiscal responsibility and the NDP argued that reorganising VP was a cost-effective choice for government spending (Chronicle Herald, 2011, May 8). The savings could be used for deficit reduction. However, administrative claims of savings were disingenuous, as VP represented a minimal amount of provincial expenditure, peaking at nearly \$600,000 in the 2008-2009 budget (Department of Finance and Treasury, 2008).

Delegating the responsibility for citizen engagement activities to the private sector would cost the province a similar amount as VP operational funding. PC leader, Jamie Baillie, spoke on the reorganisation of VP, stating that, “The reason... the government gives for this action is that they want to save money. I'm glad they want to save money somewhere, but we're talking about \$400,000 to \$500,000... all of which has just been reallocated,” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 6). The NDP continued to fund engagement capacities through private consulting firms, giving Engage Nova Scotia an initial small grant of \$10,000 and maintained the VP administrative salaries as the staff were transitioned into the Treasury Board (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 6; Ritchie, 2017).

Though the NDP justified the decision as a means to reduce government spending, moving consultation practices to the private sector was “eliminating the voluntary method of collecting public opinion and engaging in public consultation... so [the government] get back exactly what they want to hear” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 6). Deregulating social programs into the private sector is in direct relation to the neoliberal governance model, in which a state relinquishes civic responsibilities onto another organisation outside of the government (Brown, 2003). The NDP reorganised VP to exist under the preveue of the private consulting firm Engage Nova Scotia. This ensured government perspective as decision makers had no accountability to private sector consultants, which allowed the administration to guide policy creation in exclusion from public input. As PC leader, Jamie Baillie, exemplified, “It is far easier to ignore the consultant from Toronto to whom we have just paid hundreds, or tens of thousands of dollars to do the work that Voluntary Planning did [for less],” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 6). By outsourcing citizen engagement responsibilities, the NDP

government could easily disregard recommendations produced by private consulting firms and instead administer choices that reflected government perspectives.

By eliminating VP engagement capacities, the NDP began the initial steps to privatise and deregulate state responsibilities for public consultation. Though state regulated engagement bodies existed on a small scale within CHBs, VP was the largest and most active in submitting governmental recommendations. The delegation of VP activities to private consulting firms revealed the NDP's commitment to the neoliberal governance model. The lack of responsibility to the democratic process of collaborative policymaking was recognised by the public. As Karen Lia Schlick, Co-Chair of the Eastern Shore Forest Watch, exemplified, "It is hard to see how a system of consultation that is embedded in government will result in 'more opportunities' to be heard in a meaningful way. Being heard in a meaningful way means corresponding appropriate actions," (Schlick, 2011). Once the government eliminated VP's engagement capacity, social and economic decisions could be deliberated in the absence of democratic accountability.

### **Conclusion**

The role of the neoliberal state is to provide policies that create the conditions to secure the accumulation of capital. The decision to eliminate VP's responsibility to citizen engagement reflects Evans' concept of embedded autonomy, as it ensured that the state controlled the political agenda by centralising decision making capacities and could make corporate investments. The Dexter government was not the first provincial government to get advice from VP that was not in-line with government thinking (Lamport, 1988). However, the NDP was the first to ensure that VP would never again have the capability to interfere with centrally dictated public policies.

The NDP followed a neoliberal governance model by providing the government with embedded autonomy in decision making practices. Though citizens viewed VP as “one of the province’s most important means of public engagement”, it hindered the administration’s ability to ensure government perspective in public policy (House of Assembly Hansard, 2011, May 16). However, by formally implementing embedded autonomy into government practices, the NDP exacerbated the democratic deficit. Decision making did not reflect public opinions and citizens lost trust in the Dexter government. This threatened the stability of the NDP to maintain their political office, and in October 2013, the Liberals won a sweeping majority. Yet despite the election of the Liberal government, the McNeil government continued to reduce the ability of citizens to influence public policy through citizen engagement bodies, furthering the damage done by earlier PC and NDP governments.

## CHAPTER III

### The Liberal Party of Nova Scotia: 2013 – 2017

In 2013, the Liberals earned a strong majority government, taking power from the NDP after one term. Led by Stephen McNeil, the Liberals fiercely campaigned against the Dexter government, centering their platform on transparency in government spending and bridging the democratic deficit between citizens and policymakers (Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2013 ).<sup>10</sup> The Liberals used negative public opinions of the NDP throughout the campaign to their advantage, such as Dexter’s “years of corporate handouts” and “devastating” cuts to social programs (Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2013). As a means to manage public opinion and the legitimation crisis of the successive government, the Liberals promised, among other things, to restructure citizen engagement practices in health care and economic policy planning. The Liberals, as in the 1990’s, once again promised a “Nova Scotia first” in all governmental decisions (Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2013).

As a means to replace the formal citizen engagement process that existed in VP, the Liberals developed a new contract with Engage Nova Scotia, previously established

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<sup>10</sup> The 2013 Liberal platform included promises to:

- Stand up to Nova Scotia Power and implement energy solutions that benefit Nova Scotians, instead of the monopoly’s bottom line.
- Get Nova Scotia back to work by making it easier for businesses to grow, prosper and create the jobs we need.
- Get our province’s finances under control and treat taxpayers’ dollars with integrity after years of corporate handouts.
- Invest in our future by reinvesting in education after years of devastating NDP cuts.
- Create a more accessible and responsive health care system that puts the needs of patients first.
- Invest in our communities so that seniors, people with disabilities and those in need get the services and care they require. (Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2013)

by the NDP, which included greater responsibilities for the organisation to consult with the public on social and economic issues. Similarly, in health care, McNeil promised to implement a new form of regionalised health care administration to regulate the entire province. In doing so, CHBs would have less bureaucratic interference when submitting recommendations and policymakers would be more responsive to community concerns. Once in power, the Liberal promises of “Nova Scotia first” proved to be disingenuous. This chapter argues that by replacing the DHAs with a province wide health care administration and by privatising aspects of citizen engagement through Engage Nova Scotia, the Liberal government further centralised decision making capacities. In keeping with neoliberal governance, the Liberals ensured the primacy of the government perspective in policy deliberation through citizen engagement practices that merely managed negative public opinions of the Liberal Party.

### **The Demise of Dexter and the NDP**

The 2013 provincial election proved to be the end for Darrell Dexter as Premier, and the NDP government. When elected, the party inherited a fragile economy and an unexpected \$590 million deficit (CBC, 2009). The true fiscal state of the province was unclear to the NDP during the election campaign due to misrepresentations in the PC budget regarding the wage freeze of all government employees (Steele, 2014). The NDP were unaware of the unrealistic measures taken to manage the provincial budget by the PCs when Dexter campaigned on tax cuts, responsible government spending, and a balanced budget within two years of power (Doucette, 2009, November 16). Once the omission by the PCs was realised and the deficit jumped to the projected \$590 million, the ability for the NDP to fulfil fiscal campaign promises became difficult.

The problems faced by the NDP in managing the governmental spending was by no means due to just the provincial deficit. Rather, it was the result of several structural problems facing the province of Nova Scotia. For example, the Dexter government experienced a loss in oil and gas revenues (Taber, 2013). The NDP intertwined provincial revenues with the private sphere by investing in corporations, which resulted in significant drops in revenues for both the public and private sector due to shifts in oil markets. The loss of royalties from the natural resource sector hindered the ability of the NDP to fulfil campaign promises, such as deficit reduction and balancing the budget by midterm, which damaged Dexter's reputation (CBC, 2013, April 4). The Dexter government invested in the private sector and funded corporate bailouts as a solution to create economic growth which would generate income for the province. The NDP created an interconnectedness between the private and public sphere through corporate investments as a means to revitalise failing industries and maintain provincial revenues. Since government and the private sector were operating in tandem, when the industry began failing, then the government also felt the repercussions from the loss of revenues.

The economic conditions of the province further hindered the government's ability to stay accountable to campaign commitments as "[Dexter's] popularity with the public was quickly tested when he went back on promises... a measure he says had to be taken to turn around the province's poor fiscal state," (CBC, 2013, October 8). Though the NDP released a balanced budget before the 2013 election, opposition parties claimed the document was not in the best interests of citizens, but rather an effort to "manipulate a political result," (Doucette, 2013, September 6). It was assumed that the austerity measures taken to balance the budget were only implemented to give the appearance that the government was fulfilling campaign promises, while managing negative public

opinions. As Steele argues, “Perception is reality. Since people vote based on what they believe to be true, it doesn’t matter what is actually true,” (Steele, 2014, p. 66). A government can maintain the stability of political power if citizens believe that policies are working in their favour and prioritising public opinions, even if decision making is being made centrally. Dexter was unsuccessful in the management of public perceptions. Citizens lost faith in the NDP government as being “better prepared to govern at the beginning than they did at the end” (McLeod, 2013, October 11). The NDP was better prepared to govern when elected because the 2009 campaign promises that brought the party to power garnered positive public perceptions, while the decisions made while in office did not.

In Rowe and Frewer’s (2004) review of citizen engagement practices, it is argued that for a government successfully to retain political power, citizens must be satisfied with policy outcomes (p. 516). Nova Scotians lost faith in the ability of the NDP to govern as the public perceived the party as untrustworthy after a series of broken election promises, creating a legitimisation crisis. For example, the NDP promised the government would “take the HST off home energy to make life more affordable” but instead implemented a two percent increase to the HST (Jackson, 2012, October 12).<sup>11</sup> Dexter stated that he knew citizens “were upset about some things”, but the poor polling numbers of the government reflected deeper public discontent (Tutton, 2013, October 8).

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<sup>11</sup> Other instances of broken campaign promises by the NDP included the commitment to for the government to spend responsibly and “within our means” but Dexter made the risky choice to invest in corporates, such as a \$260 million forgivable loan to the already profitable Irving Shipyard in Halifax to help it prepare for the \$25-billion federal shipbuilding program (Jackson, 2012, October 12). As well, the NDP promised to “keep emergency rooms open and reduce health care waits” but cut funding to health care (Patten 2013, March 27).

Projections of the election results revealed it would be “extremely difficult for the NDP to rebuild the level of support they had” (Global News, 2013).

Internal conflict exacerbated negative public perceptions of the NDP as some caucus members questioned the party’s leadership, “Significant elements [of the party] have abandoned Dexter, maybe for valid personal reasons... There is a real confidence question within that caucus,” (MacDonald, 2013). Historical tensions within the caucus and the voter base were prevalent as the actions of the NDP contradicted the traditional left leaning mandate of the party, which favoured investing in social welfare policies (Steele, 2014). The NDP was a neoliberal government in which fiscal policy was inextricably linked to welfare policies, as a social investment could only happen if there were first capital accumulation through fiscal policies. At the expiry of Dexter’s term, loyal members of the party withdrew their support of the NDP (Steele, 2014). The NDP performed poorly in the election, and Dexter did not secure the seat he had held for fifteen years (CBC, 2013, October 10). Stephen McNeil earned a sweeping majority government, and the Liberals gained political office in Nova Scotia for the first time since 1998.

### **The Campaign Promises of the McNeil Government**

The Liberal campaign responded to discontent created by the NDP government. The party hired Toronto’s Gandalf Group to do an extensive voter poll of public interests and opinions, leading to the first campaign that was an “evidence-based plan instead of just following their gut instincts” (McLeod, 2013, October 11). The Liberals utilised citizen engagement activities to create a platform in line with voter wants, or managing public opinion to their advantage to mitigate the legitimization crisis of the successive government. The Liberals campaigned on the NDP’s record of broken promises, such as

the HST increase and corporate investments with public resources (Jackson, 2012, April 2). McNeil's electoral platform focused on tax breaks and improvements to public education, paired with economic growth and governmental transparency (CBC, 2013, October 9).

McNeil vowed to make Nova Scotia "the most open and transparent province in Canada" by allowing citizens to have a dialogue with departments (Schneidereit, 2015). Under previous governments, the public was not able to have direct contact with policymakers to comment on decisions (Steele, 2014, July 17). VP and CHBs were operational, but the boards existed as intermediaries between the public and policymakers. Within the NDP government, the PESU collaborated on citizen engagement activities but these were outsourced to Engage Nova Scotia, placing the responsibility to facilitate community engagement in the private sector (One Nova Scotia, 2014). If citizens wanted to comment on policy decisions with a government official rather than Engage Nova Scotia, they had to go through Communications Nova Scotia, which channelled public opinion and publication requests to departments, which was the only available means to express community input directly to the government (McLeod, 2013, September 23).

Communications Nova Scotia controlled information as it regulated which government reports would be released. PC leader, Jamie Baillie, argued that Communications Nova Scotia had "been used more as a shield to the government than as a way for Nova Scotians to get the truth of what's going on," (McLeod, 2013, September 23). Though Communications Nova Scotia had existed for some time, the NDP frequently utilised the department as a means to manage public opinion (CBC, 2013, March 22). Evidence of the increased use of Communications Nova Scotia by the NDP can be shown

through the departmental funding, which in 2002 was \$3 million, but in 2012 had tripled to \$9.2 million, a greater rate of increase than similar sized departments (Tutton, 2013, Match 22; CBC, 2013, March 22). In the absence of VP, citizens had to contact Communications Nova Scotia (CBC, 2013, March 22).

By using Communications Nova Scotia to manage public opinion instead of a citizen engagement body such as VP, the NDP could be less transparent and accountable for their decisions. For example, citizens began questioning the \$260 million forgivable loan to the Irving Shipyard to secure the shipbuilding program, even though the federal government stated the decision was based on provincial merit (Jackson, 2012, October 12). Communications Nova Scotia defended the decision with the “Ships Start Here” advertisement campaign rather than actual evidence and a reason for the investment (Tutton 2013, Match 22). The department also regularly responded to negative tweets about the government on Twitter, and released a series of political advertisements and slogans (CBC, 2013, March 22). The increased spending given to Communications Nova Scotia signified that the NDP government valued spending money on communications to manage public opinion rather than spending money on delivering services that citizens prioritised. The Dexter government made decisions based on government thinking and operated centrally, without transparency, accountability or responsibility to citizens. The Liberal campaign promised citizens they would amend Communications Nova Scotia by channelling public opinions directly to policymakers, resolving concerns that the government was not accountable to citizens and did not take public input into consideration when making decisions (Vaughan, 2013, November 28).

A central issue of McNeil’s platform was improving the regionalised system of health care administration, a contentious issue to which the NDP did not adequately

respond during its years in office (Doucette, 2013, September 25). For example, the 2009 NDP campaign promises centred on maintaining health care standards, but cut funding to all DHAs by three percent (Jackson, 2012, March 27). As well, the NDP agreed to costly negotiations with the NSGEU over health care workers that led to criticisms that Dexter was “spending money on administration... [when he] should be investing that money in frontline health care” (Thomson, 2013). When addressing health care in a CBC article, McNeil stated that, “We can continue to do the same thing we've been doing or we can do what would be prudent,” (Doucette, 2013, October 2). The Liberals promised to restructure the costly system of health care administration, which represented roughly forty-six percent of the provincial budget, by merging the nine DHAs into two central administrations, the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) and the IWK Health Centre (Capital Health, 2014; Gorman, 2013).

The NSHA reduced administrative costs and centralised decision making in health care by reducing the bureaucratic interference that existed in DHAs when proposing policies. The new structure would increase the accountability in health care decision making as the recommendations submitted by CHBs would be managed by one decision making body, rather than passed through a series of policymakers from the DHA to the Department of Health. McNeil stated that the NSHA would ensure that “the needs of the patient... always come first” (CBC, 2013, October 9). The NSHA would manage public opinions better than the DHAs, as citizens would perceive that their input would have greater influence in the smaller administrative system.

The NSHA would provide better care for patients through an improved partnership with communities (Knox, 2015). As the health care administration was smaller than DHAs, the NSHA could engage with communities more frequently and more

efficiently. The NSHA was responsible for “determining health services priorities, through engagement with the communities they serve” as a means to put “Nova Scotia first”, a key campaign promise made by McNeil (Nova Scotia Health Authority, 2015; Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2013). More engagement opportunities would be operated through the savings from the restructuring of a new form of regionalisation, which the Liberals claimed to be a \$13 million forecast of annual savings (CBC, 2013, October 9). Though McNeil commented on a variety of monetary savings within the campaign, the Liberals pledged to focus on the people of Nova Scotia rather than on finances (Maclean’s, 2013, October 6; MacLeod, 2013, September 23).

The Liberals fulfilled Habermas’s theory of legitimation crisis by positioning themselves as the solution to crises exacerbated by the NDP. In health care, by dissolving the DHAs and forming the NSHA, the Liberals would purportedly reallocate funding previously spent on administration into frontline services. A smaller administration would also create a greater ability for citizens to influence policy decision making. The Liberals addressed public concerns that health care funding being spent irresponsibly and did not represent the wants of communities. In social policies, McNeil ran a safe campaign based on general assertions, such as “reinvesting in education after years of devastating NDP cuts” (Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2013). Unlike the 2009 NDP campaign, the Liberal promises offered no significant spending initiatives, which ensured that campaign promises could be met and not hindered by private market fluctuations (Maclean’s, 2013, October 8). By bridging the disconnect that existed between citizens and governmental choices, the Liberals gained the confidence of the public and won a majority government (CBC, 2013, October 8).

## **The Liberal Government and Enhancing Citizen Engagement**

In 2014, the government passed an amendment to the *Health Authorities Act (HAA)*, which intended to change the trajectory of health care administration in Nova Scotia (Bill 1, 2014). Regarding the *HAA*, McNeil wrote, “Nova Scotians told us they wanted a strong, unified health-care system. They want us to spend less on administration, and focus on front-line care... Most of all they want to know that the health-care system puts their needs first,” (Department of Health and Wellness, 2014). The amendment aimed to strengthen citizen engagement practices through a greater partnership with the CHBs (CBC, 2014). Gustafson (2000) argues that voters are persuaded to support a government through promises of consumer involvement in health care decision making and a realignment of administrative priorities (p. 16). This is exactly what the Liberal government did with the *HAA*, as many political analysts considered health care to be the deciding factor for voters in the 2013 election (Doucette, 2013, October 2). By campaigning on community involvement and reduced bureaucratic costs in health care, McNeil created voter confidence in the party which led the party to success.

In addition to health care, the economy was an important factor in the election for many voters. In 2014, the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy released a report entitled *Now or Never: An Urgent Call to Action for Nova Scotians* (One Nova Scotia, 2014). The objectives outlined by the commission had multi-party support, and McNeil was involved in the creation of the report (One Nova Scotia, 2014). The commission concluded that three basic challenges were impeding economic growth in Nova Scotia: the economic health of the province, demographic trends, and the ingrained

attitudes within the culture of Nova Scotia (One Nova Scotia, 2014). Speaking on the third issue, the Chair of the Commission, Ray Ivany, stated:

Overcoming the psychological barriers of division, distrust and discouragement may be just as important as raising capital, producing more products or finding new markets. Indeed, we may need to accomplish the former transformation before we can make much more progress on the practical aspects of economic development (One Nova Scotia, 2014).

The report highlighted the ongoing democratic deficit of the provincial government as citizens considered decision making practices to be unaccountable to public needs. In response to the report, McNeil stated in the annual State of the Province Address, “Together we can celebrate our collective successes as Nova Scotians when we can look at that report in a decade from now and say, ‘You know... we did it’” (Stephenson, 2014). To grow the economic sector, administrators had to first respond to negative civic attitudes towards the government and reestablish that public opinion had a significant role in policy deliberation. The report recommended bridging the democratic deficit by contracting the private consulting firm Engage Nova Scotia to be the formal means of public consultation on economic issues for the government.

Independently created in 2012 by a small group of individuals, Engage Nova Scotia aimed to combine citizen engagement practices with economic development initiatives (Lumpkin, 2017). The mandate of the organisation was to “work with Nova Scotians to foster a culture and practice of trust, collaboration, optimism and citizen engagement” (Engage Nova Scotia, 2016). Engage Nova Scotia wanted to reimagine citizen engagement within the province. Rather than creating task forces and sector committees, Engage Nova Scotia focused on returning consultation initiatives to the community. This would be achieved through traditional engagement activities such as town hall meetings, training sessions to help citizens be self-reliant in growing local

economies, utilising survey options with individuals, and organising community events to help bridge networks between the public, private and volunteer sectors (Engage Nova Scotia, 2016).

The concern of Engage Nova Scotia was the economic future of the province, similar to VEP. For example, by hosting training sessions in business success and entrepreneurial opportunities, citizens would have the skills to create new, viable industrial growth. This would primarily happen in rural communities as a means to move beyond traditional employment options, such as natural resource extraction and refineries. The organisation stated that by creating a working relationship between the government and citizens, Nova Scotians would work together to help build the provincial economy and population (One Nova Scotia, 2014). In theory, the work of Engage Nova Scotia would facilitate new jobs and fulfil the Liberal campaign promise to “get Nova Scotia back to work by making it easier for businesses to grow, prosper and create the jobs we need” (Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2013).

Engage Nova Scotia had been initially funded by the NDP with a small grant of \$10,000, but the Liberals created a new working relationship with Engage Nova Scotia that significantly increased the organisation’s role in public consultation (Ritchie, 2017). Though the NDP funded Engage Nova Scotia, the government did not commission any projects. In 2015, McNeil formalised the partnership of Engage Nova Scotia with the provincial government (Office of Planning and Priorities, 2015). The contract granted the organisation an estimated \$400,000 annually in provincial funding. The Liberals pledged a base grant of \$200,000 but included a clause that the government would match private sector donations to Engage Nova Scotia for up to \$200,000 (Office of Planning and Priorities, 2015). This provided an incentive for Engage Nova Scotia to foster working

relationships within the private, public, and civic sectors. The organisation would act as the liaison between the public and policymakers to ensure that governmental decision making reflected civic needs (Gorman, 2015).

Engage Nova Scotia was a private sector adaptation of Stanfield's VEP of the 1960's, which gathered public opinions to find alternative economic stimulus programs (Clancy, 1997). Though the two were similar, there were also significant differences. VEP had a close working relationship with the Department of Finance and Economics, as the department legislated VP's responsibilities, requested projects, and accepted VP reports (Lamport, 1988). In contrast, the activities of Engage Nova Scotia were not legislated and had no specific obligations or responsibilities to any department (Engage Nova Scotia, 2016). Engage Nova Scotia acted for the government by creating forums for the public to discuss policy deliberation and economic planning. By contracting Engage Nova Scotia, the Liberals sought to bridge the democratic deficit in citizen engagement as a viable replacement for VP had yet to exist.

Though Engage Nova Scotia played an important role in the government, the absence of legislative authority was problematic. For example, because Engage Nova Scotia was contracted, there was doubt in the ability of the organisation to replace VP's working relationships with departments and act in a non-partisan manner. Tim Bousquet of the *Halifax Examiner* commented that, "The point of Engage NS is for has-been politicians to get together and slap each other on the back while wooing the populace with their wisdom and giving the Liberal government some talking points about increasing meaningless 'engagement'," (Bousquet, 2015). Many critiqued the organisation as a political tool used to respond to the recommendations of the One Nova Scotia Report without actually relinquishing power to engagement capacities (Brighton, 2015).

The McNeil government made choices that responded to the disconnect between citizens and the government that existed under the NDP leadership. The Liberals addressed health care concerns by creating a vehicle for public participation in the administration. Though the NSHA minimised health care administration and created better communication channels between CHBs and policymakers, the restructure also allowed decisions to be made more centrally in the absence of public opinion. For example, the DHAs had the authority to make policy decisions at a smaller, localised level (Office of Health Promotion, 2004). The NSHA made decisions for the province as a whole, a system in which recommendations that reflected a smaller population could be overlooked as they did not affect the larger citizenship (Corfu, 2017). The McNeil government addressed the negative public perceptions of health care administration that existed under the NDP government, but the new regionalised system created new problems.

Similarly, in social and economic policy planning, the Liberals formalised a system of citizen engagement that was diminished under the Dexter government. By contracting Engage Nova Scotia to take on some of the responsibilities of the former VP, the Liberals managed public opinions regarding the lack of citizen engagement opportunities. McNeil made policy choices that seemed to encourage participatory democracy. However, as Habermas argues, responses to legitimisation crises are political choices intended to stabilise the governing power in the eyes of the citizenry (Habermas, 1976). Addressing the concerns of the public do not necessarily create positive outcomes for citizen engagement capacities. Though Engage Nova Scotia and changes to CHBs mitigated negative public opinions of the government and the legitimisation crisis, in practice, the amended systems of citizen engagement did not necessarily change the

trajectory of policymaking away from reinforcing government thinking.

### **Neoliberalism and the McNeil Government**

When the Liberals took power in 2013, McNeil made a series of decisions to increase citizen engagement practices, governmental accountability, and transparency. In practice, these choices were in line with a neoliberal governance model because the objectives were addressed by privatising the government and reducing social policies. In doing so, McNeil centralised the government. In health care, eliminating the DHAs and creating one administrative body governed by the NSHA reduced provincial spending and bureaucracy, but also consolidated decision making capacities. CHBs experienced administrative dominance in decision making under the NSHA, as there existed a greater level of bureaucratic control with less cooperation, making it more difficult for public input to outweigh administrative priorities (Corfu, 2017).

Rosener (1982) recognises that a conflict exists between the objectives of bureaucrats and the public when creating policy (p. 342). When policymakers evaluate recommendations, often the perspectives of professionals are valued more than that of citizens (Rosener, 1982). The NSHA regulated policies based on its mandate of a province-wide administrator, and decisions were to be made based on this government thinking (Corfu, 2017). Health care decisions disproportionately benefited some citizens over others, as specific rural concerns did not have the ability to influence a province-wide mandate. As exemplified in a CBC interview with Dr. Craig Stone, “We are screaming from the trenches that what the McNeil Liberals put in place is not working... When locals identify problems, the Health Authority offers numbers and statistics. Power has to be returned to local places,” (Conners, 2017). Though the NSHA was established

based on the foundation of Nova Scotia first, the single regulatory body disenfranchised more communities than it benefited.

The health care administration under the NSHA was recognised as problematic within the first year of transition. The NSHA was supposed to allow for better communication between citizens and administrators, yet it offered the opposite:

Timely decisions are lost in complicated and irrational top-down program bureaucracies... The goal of less administration has actually resulted in far greater confusion and more layers of approvals. The NSHA expects patients to fit its distribution of services, policies, and procedures, without explaining the rationale, or adequately involving patients and providers in the planning, implementation, and review. How is this patient-centered? (Jayabarathan et al., 2017).

Though CHBs still operated within the NSHA, they had a weakened ability to influence government decision making. The NSHA was a system of top-down bureaucracy in which citizens were required to navigate more layers of administration, lessening the ability of the public to interject recommendations into the decision making process.

McAllister (1998) contends that CHBs in Nova Scotia have no real power to influence policy because they are designed merely to alleviate negative public opinions of decisions by creating a forum in which citizens believe their perspectives are heard by policymakers (p. 3). More than fifteen years later, McAllister's assertion of administrative control in health care decision making applied to the NSHA, which continually rejected proposals from CHBs (Barnard, 2016). For example, in 2016, a Richmond County CHB proposed a new method for administering palliative care in rural areas (CBC, 2016, July 12). The proposal looked to modify the current system implemented in rural communities that provides palliative care coordinators who work with physicians to provide care to an individual patient if needed (Corfu, 2017). The system did not provide structure to support acute management in the home, and many responsibilities fell onto palliative care

nurses, who were not available after business hours, as the doctor providing the service had to manage medical oversight like medication monitoring (Barnard, 2016). The proposal sought to reallocate funding and resources within the NSHA to better serve patients in palliative care, and alleviate some of the strain on medical professionals (Corfu, 2017).

The NSHA rejected the Richmond County submission and responded to the CHB by stating that recommendations must find an “approach that can best meet the needs of the people in Richmond County as well as other communities across Nova Scotia” (Barnard, 2016). The statement by the NSHA exemplified the limitations of CHBs, as recommendations from the boards addressed local issues and the NSHA was concerned with implementing policies that could improve the administration as a whole, not small, specific problems. The Richmond County CHB responded that if the palliative care issue resonated beyond rural communities then “there would be strong discontent with the health authority for not considering an interim solution” (Barnard, 2016). The problems created by a single provincial health authority were recognised by citizens and frontline staff, who felt the NSHA did not have a functional system for citizen engagement (Jayabarathan et al., 2017).

Localised recommendations had no place in policy decisions targeted for the entire province. For example, on the South Shore, mental health workers were allowed to collaborate with sexual assault specialists as a means to address the lack of resources in the region, but the program was altered following the NSHA merger because the authority wanted to make things “equal across the province” (Corfu, 2017). Understandings that existed in DHAs were terminated as the NSHA wanted to apply a one size fits all approach to health care, making localised issue obsolete. Many accused the NSHA of

being unwilling to communicate with citizens in the decision making process as the administration was “too centred on the needs and interests of the institutions and the health care providers, rather than on the needs of patients,” (Barnard, 2016; LeBlanc, 2016).

The government centralised decision making capacities by implementing the NSHA. The NSHA’s citizen engagement practices were less robust than those of the DHAs. Indeed, “part of the reason the number of health authorities was expanded under past governments was the justifiable criticism that a centralised system too often ignored local ideas, successes and concerns” (Chronicle Herald, 2014). McNeil’s claims that the NSHA would increase opportunities for the public to engage were disingenuous because CHBs merely managed public opinion. The creation of the NSHA was a neoliberal choice by the Liberals because the singular administration reduced public spending while maintaining the ability of the government to make choices in the absence of public opinion.

McNeil’s intentions when contracting Engage Nova Scotia came under attack, as a former Liberal leader, Danny Graham, was hired to Chair the organisation. The initial response to the decision incurred public backlash, such as Jim Moir of Vogler’s Cove:

Hiring your bosom buddies running something called Engage Nova Scotia to hold senseless conferences to talk about "building collaboration" and setting up a "foundation for measuring progress" is nothing but a joke! And I think I speak for the overwhelming majority of Nova Scotians in stating that we are sick and tired of paying for the incompetence of successive governments that promise to do better and then give us more of the same old excuses as to why we are in such a mess (Moir, 2015).

Engage Nova Scotia was contracted to ensure that rural and urban areas had an active voice in addressing the economic issues, but doubt surrounded the ability of Engage Nova Scotia to genuinely consult with the public. Kevin Lacey, Atlantic Director of the

Canadian Taxpayers Federation, argued that “[Engage Nova Scotia] has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from taxpayers and yet there are no tangible benefits the taxpayers have received for it,” (Previl, 2017). There were some benefits of Engage Nova Scotia, as the organisation did cultivate engagement opportunities and supported the creation of new advocacy groups (Graham, 2016). However, these initiatives were perceived by its critics to hold no tangible effects on the policy deliberation process. Though Graham stated that the Engage Nova Scotia was reporting public recommendations to the government (Graham, 2016), no evidence can be found to prove that the organisation increases the ability of the public to influence policy deliberation. The public began to view McNeil’s choice to fund Engage Nova Scotia as a technique to stabilise the government and give the façade of citizen engagement within decision making practices (Ritchie, 2017). Engage Nova Scotia earned a tarnished reputation of ineffectiveness, which worsened with claims of patronage.

As the 2017 election approached, revelations surrounding the specific funding details of Engage Nova Scotia’s contract surfaced. An amendment to the original 2015 contract sparked a review of the funding for the private consulting firm. McNeil committed to match private contributions up to an additional \$200,000, but in the first year, Engage Nova Scotia failed to raise \$200,000 in private sector investment, prompting the Liberals to revise the contribution clause (Chronicle Herald, 2017). By removing the private sector limitation from the funding formula, this allowed the provincial government to match any funding donated to the organisation, including other governmental contributions from districts and municipalities (Chronicle Herald, 2017). Many accused the government of allowing Engage Nova Scotia to “double-bill” in provincial funding (Ritchie, 2017). NDP MLA, Maureen MacDonald, voiced opposition

concerns with the funding choice, stating that, “How can the Premier justify this new expense when plans to cut government programs are well underway... It’s as if the Premier isn’t aware of the day-to-day challenges many Nova Scotians are currently facing,” (MacDonald, 2015). The funding of Engage Nova Scotia was met with a negative public opinion as the government cut other social programs as a means of deficit reduction.

Citizens actively protested funding reductions by the Liberal government, such as the Nova Scotia Film Tax Credit, yet the government continued to spend money on Engage Nova Scotia (Gorman, 2017). Discontent towards the use of public resources existed in the House of Assembly, with MLAs, such as Sterling Belliveau, noting, “This government cut funding to nursing homes... the budget for seniors' long-term care equals less than \$6 per day per meal, for the most vulnerable people in our society - and yet Danny Graham is paid over \$13,000 per month,” (House of Assembly Hansard, 2017). Many questioned McNeil’s funding choices, with Kevin Lacey, Atlantic Director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and PC leader, Jamie Baillie, accusing the government of patronage (Previl, 2017). Citizens and politicians expressed concerns with the funding the Engage Nova Scotia and questioned the ability of the organisation to elicit change in policymaking (Gorman, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Choices by the Liberal government under the leadership of McNeil were justified as a means to increase citizen engagement and ensure that Nova Scotia was the most transparent and accountable province in the country. The decisions of the Liberal government failed to enhance engagement, and in actuality, changes in health care and economic planning left citizens in isolation from the decision making process. The

Liberals embraced the neoliberal governance model through reorganising consulting practices through a private and public sphere partnership, which further ensured central control in the government. The NSHA was concerned with provincial policies, and though CHBs were given the responsibility to engage citizens, policies were created in a top-down process to valued provincial solutions over local needs. Similarly, Engage Nova was a product of the neoliberal thinking as the government devolved the responsibility to consult with the public into the private sector. Engage Nova Scotia proved to be a government technique to manage public opinion as it offered no ability to aid citizens in influencing public policy.

Both measures by the McNeil government were active choices within the neoliberal governance model, ensuring government perspective in decision making by deregulating all responsibility to public opinion while embedding autonomy in centralised administrative control. Like the PC and NDP before them, the Liberals only further inhibited the ability for citizens to influence policymaking. Though elected on the platform of social inclusion and transparency, once in power, McNeil created a façade of engagement to stabilise the government and reinforce centralised power.

## CONCLUSION

### **The Future of Citizen Engagement in Nova Scotia**

The actions of different Nova Scotian governments from 1999 to 2017 illustrate the limitations of citizen engagement in the neoliberal era. This analysis shows the history of VP and CHBs, and reveals the fundamental flaw of the engagement process to be the ineffectiveness in promoting cooperation between the public and policymakers. VP and CHBs fostered public consultation, but the ability of the boards to implement community perspectives into policymaking was limited. This is because citizen engagement is used by the government to manage public opinions, rather than to create collaborative policies. The government must have central power, or the ability to deliberate without interference from differing opinions, in decision making. This ensures government thinking that prioritises the accumulation of capital and deficit reduction. Citizen engagement is used to mitigate negative public opinions of the state when implementing choices based on government thinking, which aids in the stability of political power. By implementing citizen engagement practices, the public perceives that their opinions are valued in the governmental process, when in actuality, the government will always make decisions based on the needs of the state. This thesis concludes that citizen engagement in Nova Scotia through VP and CHBs is a process of public opinion management used by the PCs, the NDP, and the Liberals to defuse dissent when making decisions that enable the accumulation of capital, which creates a state that deliberates centrally.

The PC government implemented a series of decisions that negatively affected citizen engagement practices. In health care, the PCs inhibited the ability of CHBs to influence policymaking by legislating their responsibility to the government as a data

collection apparatus. Similarly, the government utilised VP to engage in public participation activities but did not respond to the recommendations of citizens in public policies. The PC government devolved the responsibility to consult with the public into the community, but maintained central control in decision making. This meant that the government could make choices in isolation from the public, regardless of the effect on civil well-being or democratic principles. The PCs legislated the responsibilities of citizen engagement practices, but in doing so, weakened the mandate of the boards so that they became merely consultants rather than partners in deliberation. In CHBs and VP, the recommendations submitted to the government could be rejected without reason or accountability to the citizens that participated in the process. The PC government managed public opinions by creating forums for dialogue through VP and CHBs, but made decisions based on financial consequences rather than the public good.

In neoliberal theory, the state makes choices to enable policies that provide the infrastructure to secure the accumulation of capital. The NDP privatised aspects of the public sector by eliminating state regulated citizen engagement practices conducted through VP and devolving the responsibility to public consultation into Engage Nova Scotia. The NDP funded the consulting firm Engage Nova Scotia. In doing so, the NDP reduced bureaucratic costs and could make decisions “in line with government thinking”, fundamental principles of neoliberal theory (Jackson, 2011, May 4). The NDP significantly reduced the ability for citizens to participate in policymaking and did not replace VP with a public sector apparatus. Devolving citizen engagement into the private sector indicated a neoliberal governance model, as the NDP decentralised state responsibilities and could make decisions that benefited fiscal policies, which allowed for decisions to be made without accountability to public recommendations. The onus and the

cost of the consultation is delegated to the private sector, and the government can maintain central decision-making.

The Liberals further devolved the responsibility for citizen engagement into the private sector by developing a working relationship with Engage Nova Scotia and formalising the organisation's role in the government as a means to collect and manage public opinion. Unlike VP, Engage Nova Scotia was independent from the government, and its responsibilities were not legislated, which meant their practices were not accountable to the government. Neoliberalism situates managing public opinion in policy deliberation as a necessity, as government policy priorities are valued more than the recommendations of citizen engagement capacities. By working in collaboration with Engage Nova Scotia, the Liberals created a system of citizen engagement that gave the façade of cooperative policy deliberation, but was a means to pacify public opinion. This meant that citizens felt that their perspectives were being channelled into the policy deliberation process, even if that was not the case. Engage Nova Scotia mitigated discontent while allowing the government to create policies based on the needs of the market. In health care, the government implemented a singular health care administration across the province. This reduced bureaucratic costs, which created a centralised control in policy deliberation. The government also managed public opinion through CHBs, as the boards continued to engage citizens at the local level, but the NSHA had to reject proposals because the administration was to produce policy solutions for the entire province, rather than focus on localised issues.

There are no certainties on how to alleviate the limitations of citizen engagement, but the fundamental flaw in the process is the ineffectiveness in promoting cooperation between the public and policymakers (Abelson & Eyles, 2002; Chessie, 2009; Hurley,

Lomas, & Bhatia, 1994). This is exactly the experience in Nova Scotia, as citizens did not feel that their voices were represented in public policy through the participation process. Citizen engagement does not foster cooperative policymaking because the public sector does not consider community perspectives to be equal to professional opinions.

In CHBs, plans developed by the communities acted upon by healthcare professionals, DHAs, the NSHA, or the Department of Health. In VEP, VP, and by extension, Engage Nova Scotia, policymakers were unwilling to work alongside citizen engagement boards. Exemplified in the *First Plan* of VEP and the *Final Report of the Voluntary Planning Off-highway Vehicle Task Force*, even if the recommendations from citizen engagement boards are well researched and could dramatically improve policy, policymakers refuse to incorporate the plans. Cooperation does not exist in citizen engagement practices. The government uses participation to manage public opinion rather than utilise local expertise that could benefit every public policy. Until policymakers consider citizen engagement to be equal to the recommendations of professionals, analyses such as this thesis help to address the systematic problems in the current implementation of public participation and guide better practices in the future.

Citizen engagement in Nova Scotia continues to be a prominent issue today. McNeil and the Liberals were successful in the May 2017 election by running a responsive campaign that mitigated the ongoing concerns of the government (Leger, 2017). The Liberals secured a narrow majority government on promises of “building a stronger Nova Scotia” by cooperating with communities and the private sector (Nova Scotia Liberal Party, 2017). Though McNeil again promised a cooperative government, the future of citizen engagement in the province remains in question. Don Mills, CEO of Corporate Research Associates, states that, “It is time for our political leaders... to do

what is right for the province, not what is best to ensure re-election. Otherwise, citizen engagement and voter turnout will continue to decline. And we will all be the worse off for it,” (Mills, 2017). Though discontent exists, Engage Nova Scotia still manages public consultation practices. In health care, despite claims by the NSHA that it consults with CHBs, recommendations from the boards are rejected (Jayabarathan, Mcnamara, Martel, & Ross, 2017). The next four years will determine whether the Liberal government will carry on the trend of disassembling on citizen engagement practices in Nova Scotia. Hopefully, this thesis will initiate a dialogue with those whom public policies affect the most and inspire citizens to maintain an active voice in the government, whether that exists in a formalised or independent capacity.

Nova Scotia is not unique in its challenges with the citizen engagement process. The question of how to implement public participation effectively has been debated not only in Canada but on an international level. The United Nations *Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* submitted twelve “Illustrative Goals” intended to be fundamental in the achievement of sustainable development and would create global transformative shifts (United Nations, 2013). The goals highlight the importance of good governance and effective institutions by “increasing public participation in political processes and civic engagement at all levels” (United Nations, 2013). The *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development* stressed that effective governance at the local, national, and global levels must represent the voices and interests of all citizens, resolving that every state must enhance participation and effective engagement of civil society (United Nations, 2012).

Citizen engagement is an important component to ensure that government is accountable to the public it serves. In the absence of public participation, the government

can make choices that may negatively affect all aspects of daily life, and greatly hinder the people whom those policies govern. A democratic state must utilise cooperative decision-making to ensure that political choices reflect the priorities of the public. The neoliberal era has caused increasing deteriorations to the citizen engagement model, making policy deliberation an undemocratic process. Decision-making in a neoliberal form of governance is dominated by administrative perspectives to ensure that governmental choices enable the market. The neoliberal governmentality targets the individual as a responsible agent and citizens must stimulate the engagement process by taking “responsibility for their lives and investing in their own self-care,” (Anjaria & Rao, 2014, p. 412). If citizens do not take an active role in the deliberations on policies that dictate their day-to-day actions, we risk living in a society that does not value community priorities. Citizen engagement practices must be upheld as people cannot be bystanders in their own lives.

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