

FUTURE OCEAN AND COASTAL INFRASTRUCTURES

AN  FI PROJECT

Knowledge Translation of FOCI Findings for Uptake into
Policy and Practice

Summary Report of the 2nd FOCI Sustainable Coastal Atlantic
Canada Dialogues Session, November 2024



Brief event summary

The theme of the 2nd Sustainable Atlantic Dialogues workshop held at Memorial University's Signal Hill Campus, on November 12, 2024, was knowledge translation (KT) of findings from the Future Ocean and Coastal Infrastructures (FOCI) project for uptake into policy and practice. Approximately 30 participants attended the workshop which included representation from ten different FOCI work packages and the Core team. The workshop afforded researchers, students, collaborators, and partners (community, academic, public and private sector) of the FOCI project the opportunity to deliberate on the findings, strategies and methods for effective policy and practice engagement, the challenges involved, and potential solutions. Participants also deliberated on effective strategies for sustaining the networks built over time for post-FOCI collaborations and engagement. The formats of the workshop included a panel discussion, breakout groups, and a popcorn session with open-ended questions to facilitate an engaging discussion and achieve the workshop's objectives. Participants recognized the need for evidence-based findings on sustainable infrastructures to influence policy decisions and practices of governmental, industry, and community partners in Atlantic Canada. Discussions emphasized the importance of consultation, collaboration, and co-creation of knowledge on the prospects and challenges of a sustainable Atlantic Canada to navigate the region towards a prosperous future. Knowledge mobilization (Grisham, et al., 2018), strategies for engaging research partners (Salsberg, et al., 2015), knowledge into action (Ward, et al., 2019), and bottom-up engagement (Pereira, et al., 2021; Mahony, 2015) were the key sub-themes of the workshop that resonate with the literature on knowledge translation (see additional resources, p.10).

Why KT from research to community partners around FOCI?

- Translating research findings into policies and practices is a global trend aimed at generating evidence-based policies and practices for social change. Knowledge transfer pushes research evidence to the corridors of politics and industry where policies are made, and good practices are engendered. By making research findings available to community partners, the usual paywall restrictions preventing access to implementable findings and recommendations are

removed. Also, most community partners are empowered when they directly engage researchers and gain informed understanding behind the findings. This makes research findings more relevant and promotes accountability to both the funders and community partners. The FOCl project addressed the diverse infrastructure needs, problems, and opportunities facing coastal communities and ocean industries in Atlantic Canada. This brought interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary researchers and collaborators together and the innovative solutions emanating from their investigations should be shared with the community partners to foster safe, sustainable, and inclusive coastal communities and industries for the future. It is difficult to understand the impact of research, meet the needs and solve the problems of research users if there is no dialogue between the two entities.

Good practices and methods for KT from researchers to community partners

- **Community partners and researchers could collaborate for better problem definition.** Usually, community partners think about the immediate problem while academic researchers look at the intersectional links the immediate problem has with other issues, demanding interdisciplinary and diverse strategies and solutions. To build a clearer understanding that will be acceptable to both parties, consensus and communication are essential.
- **Effective communication of research findings to the appropriate users should be informed by the needs of the community partners.** There are many approaches to choose from-- briefing notes, policy briefs, blog posts, newspaper commentaries, etc. The needs of the partners we seek to influence should determine the products developed. Communication is effective when both parties agree on the needs and how they should be met. Researchers should understand that findings and recommendations may not be of value to partners if they do not meet their current and future needs.
- **Foresighting is one of the strategies that help in imagining scenarios and planning for the future with community partners.** Knowledge translation is easier when theoretical models developed map out the implications of actions and inactions of partners over years. Foresighting builds understanding because partners easily

know how predictive, scientific data could define the turn of events and impact inclusive, safe, and sustainable infrastructural development in the region. There should be better ways of supporting communities to implement their long-term ideas.

- **Opportunities for dialogue and knowledge translation open with the momentum that partners are building.** Collaborators, policy actors and community partners have projects different from ongoing research activities in academic institutions. This difference creates an opportunity for researchers to directly speak to events outside of the universities and thereby create a space for interventions. The policy and industrial actors recognize different opinions and could offer a space for dialogue when researchers make themselves available. This is knowledge mobilization using a bottom-up model. In building relationships, it is important that we understand the expectations, views, and values of the policymakers and practitioners. After building trust and respect by investing time and other resources, the space for influence opens.
- **Deep collaboration is essential in knowledge translation.** University researchers can no longer build silos and only publish the outcomes of their research in academic journals. Relationship-building between interdisciplinary researchers and policy decision-makers is increasingly important; however, it requires an array of skills. To build successful deep collaboration, optimism, communication, time, patience, understanding and empathy are essential. The level of engagement and effectiveness of partnerships amongst researchers, industry and government should grow in the coming years.
- **Knowledge conceptualization, mobilization, translation, and dissemination must identify with the momentum across stakeholders.** Co-creation of knowledge through a bottom-up model is an invitation to community partners to build their understanding of the problems and required solutions with academic researchers. Knowledge does not always start from theories, policies and practices produce new knowledge which can then lead to research innovation. Also, community partners

need data and findings for their day-to-day and short-term operations and this urgency should be shared by academic researchers. Although research projects may run for months (or even years!) before some concrete, implementable findings are produced, interim reports and occasional briefings can help provide insight before the final reports are released. It is important to keep long-term conversations going and plan for short-term deliverables.

- **Engagement must start at the project conception stage and continue until the end. Without inclusion and consensus building over time, it is difficult to translate knowledge.** Researchers need to have a pool of research users whose activities are connected to the research. It will be easier to communicate and disseminate findings of research studies if the potential research users participate from the ideation stage.

Challenges and possible solutions to implementing KT from researchers to partners

Workshop participants identified many challenges associated with knowledge translation from researchers to community partners. Some of the challenges and suggested solutions are tabulated below.

Challenges	Solutions
<p>Difficulty in drawing findings from research publications because journal articles and books are too complex to understand for the general audience. Messages are composed using complex sentences.</p>	<p>Arrange small workshops and conferences to discuss research and policy; clarify key research findings, misinterpretations and other concerns.</p> <p>Use radio and social media platforms to present research findings.</p> <p>Use podcasts, media reviews. Use question and answer sessions on TV and radio.</p>

	Produce policy briefs, briefing notes, and other documents useful for quick decision making etc.
There is reduced funding for research available. Change in government leadership can also impact research priority areas and funding opportunities.	<p>Each government has a policy agenda, and this is connected to sectors of the economy. Finding common ground and foresighting are among possible opportunities for remaining relevant.</p> <p>The partnership with government ministries and departments and personnel should continue even when there is a regime change. This relationship opens potential future funding to researchers.</p> <p>Sustainability and infrastructures are common global research areas difficult for any government to ignore. Linkages are important in remaining relevant.</p> <p>The partnership with the provincial government is crucial as a regional priority hub for research.</p>
Researchers' ability to reach government policy makers with data may be supported or limited depending on the government in power	<p>Researchers could incorporate deep collaboration with policy actors in their projects. Relationship building is critical especially through researchers who need no introduction before engagement continues.</p> <p>Research results should be shared in ways that are clear, easily digestible, and useable.</p>
Partner interests in seeing changes/impacts as quickly as possible stands against the ethics of research and creates a gap between researchers and partners.	<p>Impact may be slow and imperceptible, but it is happening.</p> <p>Short-term information provision and tentative findings that can aid decisions could help. However, constant communication and involvement of research</p>

	<p>users in the whole process could spring believability. Most research users will wait when they are included in the process from ideation to results generation. Communicate the importance of using finalized and objective findings to solve problems as against inconclusive data.</p>
<p>Short-term needs of funders and other funding constraints force researchers to jump from one issue to another and flow with unstable priorities.</p>	<p>The potential implications of unsustainable policy summersault and shaky structures could be communicated. Strong and ethical relationships built over time could convince policy actors and industry partners to embrace transparency and objectivity.</p>
<p>Existing political structures and systems that partners, researchers and communities work with have limitations, making them unsuitable for current and future goals of safe, sustainable and inclusive coastal and ocean-based communities.</p>	<p>Universities have research units that interface with policy actors and thereby accommodate the political pressure and demands. These impartial and professional units can withstand and work with structures and systems to evolve objective and ethical terms of engagement.</p>
<p>It is sometimes discouraging to find that despite research findings pointing to areas of concern, policy actors are struggling to understand the urgency communicated through research findings.</p>	<p>Researchers and community partners should allow public policy experts to do knowledge translation, thereby using the most effective language in communicating urgency. The same policy expert could translate the policy system to the researchers to arrive at a common ground for implementation.</p>
<p>Research findings are sometimes politicized, misinterpreted and misappropriated to serve the interests of the political class.</p>	<p>Research data are published in other public outlets which can stand as evidence when truth is compromised. As scientific advocates, researchers are expected to defend the integrity of science while relating with policy actors.</p>

	Researchers and policy actors should spell the terms of engagement, expectations and commitment to global best practices.
Research projects are usually organized and executed using a top-down model. This downplays inclusion and prevents community partners from taking active roles in social change	Funding and projects brought into communities should be set up so that <i>the community takes over for agentic mobilization</i> where the researcher is no longer the central facilitator.

Sustaining collaboration after FOCI

For the future, researchers and their community partners can begin to look at the dimensions of sustainability (social, environmental/ecological, and economic) the same way they looked at infrastructures. The economic well-being of the coastal communities is as important as their environmental and social well-being. Researchers and non-governmental organizations can look ahead at the full impact of developing scenarios and communicate this to government. One way to help communities and other research users is by foresighting because of its strength in imagining scenarios and planning for the future. Now that the government is focusing on fisheries and oceans, opportunities for interdisciplinary knowledge mobilization and proactive collaboration with state and community actors to meet their needs will continue to open.

There are prospects in connecting housing to the sustainability spectrum and promoting engagement, now that housing is a full-blown national crisis of interest. Apart from focusing on the governments, target industries funding research. A lot can be done when governments, industries, and academics work together. Some of the institutions and agencies would not change and this calls for optimism at a time that the political future is uncertain.

Methodology

Presentations, panel discussions, breakout groups, the popcorn session and open-ended question and answer sessions from the participants were recorded, analysed, and interpreted to produce this report. Those formats facilitated an engaging discussion and

afforded FOCI work package members, the Core team, their partners (community, academic, public and private sector), students and other attendees the opportunities to deliberate on research uptake for policy and practice.

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Additional resources

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