

Communication in Tidal Power Networks Operating in the Bay of Fundy: The Important Role of Bridger Organizations

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Recent research has shown that the development of strong information-sharing networks is essential to the success of natural resource developments, particularly in highly active, and often hotly contested, coastal areas. Tidal power in the Bay of Fundy offers a source of clean, renewable energy, as well as a means to strengthen local economies. The capture and use of tidal forces may involve many stakeholders, e.g., industry, both domestic and foreign; municipal, provincial, and federal governments; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); environmental groups; universities; and community groups, including First Nations communities. This paper will present the results of a mixed-methods case study that used participatory mapping, semi-structured interviews, and Social Network Analysis (SNA) to examine tidal power stakeholder communication networks. Interviews were conducted with representatives of 21 key tidal power stakeholder organizations across several sectors, providing communication data for over 200 organizations operating in the Bay of Fundy region of Nova Scotia. This research highlights the important role of boundary-spanning, i.e., the activity of “bridger” organizations, particularly from the NGO sector, in facilitating the transmission of information among diverse organizations. Research in several countries points to the value of intermediary, bridger organizations in promoting collaboration across complex, multi-sectoral networks. This paper will illustrate how bridgers operate, outline the activities of different bridger “types,” and describe the mechanisms used to connect organizations in multiple sectors. The implications of this research extend beyond tidal power into the core of integrated coastal and watershed governance where collaboration is vital for the development of resilient coastal areas. This paper will emphasize the importance of developing an understanding of how, and indeed if, stakeholder organizations are communicating with each other through an exploration of enablers and barriers to information sharing. Significant gaps in the network will also be addressed and recommendations will be offered about how communication pathways and collaboration among organizations may be strengthened.