Plotting the Roots of Local Citizen Engagement

by

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Preliminary Draft — Comments Welcome

Paper prepared for the 2008 meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, University of British Columbia, June 6.

I. Introduction

Societal actors including non-governmental organizations and governments of all stripes have expressed a renewed focus on citizen engagement over the past fifteen years. Examples abound and include Burlington, Ontario's Citizen Budget Review (1992-1995), the Hamilton-Wentworth Constituent Assembly (1994-1995), the Social Union Framework Agreement provisions (SUFA, 1999), the British Columbia (2004) and Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (2006-2007) and various initiatives by the Canadian Policy Research Networks (for example, Citizen's Dialogues). To a large extent, academic commentary on this renewed interest has focused on extolling the virtues of, detailing frameworks for and profiling specific cases of citizen engagement to derive lessons learned in order to improve policy change and implementation processes (for example, Graham and Phillips (Eds.), 1998; MacKinnon et al., 2007; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). Questions of who could be engaged, their role in engagement processes and where this engagement needs to be directed to affect changes in public policy are largely overlooked, especially as it applies to group and organization involvement in citizen engagement activities.

This paper is based on a recent examination of how to structure local public policy change in Hamilton, Ontario and examines the above issues in relation to groundwater problems. It proceeds in four parts. The first section examines the evolving meaning of citizen engagement and emphasizes the value of group and organization involvement throughout the process. This is followed by a brief profile of groundwater issues the City of Hamilton currently faces. The third section assesses the potential for local entities to address Hamilton's groundwater issues within the context of the above questions, that is, the who, what and where elements of the engagement puzzle. The assessment is achieved through an evaluation of past collaborative efforts as identified by way of a questionnaire sent to local and regional stakeholders and an analysis of primary documents. The paper concludes that progress on the issues will be stunted unless renewed attention is given to engaging regional interests. Furthermore, local governments need to be much more cognizant of the role community/environmental interest organizations can play in policy implementation processes; roles which local governments do not themselves perform adequately.

II. The many meanings of citizen engagement

A dichotomy is emerging in the citizen engagement literature, one that increasingly marginalizes the role of groups and organizations in the process. Interest organizations, an expansive term[1] coined by Carolyn Hendriks, and used in this paper, to refer to "any entity seeking specific policy or political goals from the state" including groups, organizations and government agencies (2006: 572), are said to already be quite active and vocal in the policy process and, as such, a counterbalance to their influence is required to ensure the voices of ordinary citizens are heard (Graham and Phillips, 1998: 3). Furthermore, it is argued that "citizens want in", that is, the mere representation of their interests by third parties is insufficient (Laforest

and Phillips, 2006: 71; MacKinnon, 2003: 4). The end result of this citizen engagement is supposedly better policy and a more active and "engaged" citizen (Laforest and Phillips, 2006: 67; Turnbull and Aucoin, 2006: 2) though these results are contested (for example, Cooke, 2000).

Citizen engagement, as Orsini and Phillips note, refers to “a particular type of involvement characterized by interactive and iterative processes of deliberation among citizens (and sometimes organizations), and between citizens and government officials”. Processes can be either convened by governments or citizens and citizen engagement emphasizes “genuine two-way dialogue among citizens, and between citizens and governments” (2002: 3). Sheedy et al. also detail that "[c]itizen engagement emphasizes the sharing of power, information, and a mutual respect between *government and citizens*" with "citizens represent[ing] themselves as individuals rather than [representing] stakeholder groups" (2008: 4, emphasis added). A similar point is made by Laforest and Phillips when they state:

> "the aim [of citizen engagement] is to extend participation in decision making beyond traditional actors, interest groups, social movements, and voluntary associations in order to involve the "ordinary citizen" - the citizen acting as a representative of himself or herself, not of an organized group" (2006: 67).

Note that both of these are variations and refinements of the shift in language from public participation to citizen engagement over the past decade. This shift emphasizes the "deliberative, inclusive, innovative" elements of public participation defined as "the deliberate and active engagement of citizens by the council and/or administration - outside the electoral process - in making public policy decisions or in setting strategic directions" (Graham and Phillips, 1998: 4; Phillips and Orsini, 2002: 7-8).

The above definitions appear to seriously limit interest organization participation in citizen engagement activities yet their involvement is not antithetical to the concept and their marginalization in the process is unnecessary. This article conceptualizes citizen engagement activities as those including representatives of interest organizations as equal participants alongside individual citizens in such processes. The benefits of such a conceptualization can be seen in reference to both the various kinds of citizen engagement processes and in the various kinds of governmental bodies. This conceptualization is also based on three concepts at the root of citizen engagement—individual versus collective representation, deliberation and power dynamics. Each is briefly discussed in the next few paragraphs to highlight the fact that interest organization involvement in citizen engagement activities is both consistent with and beneficial to such activity.

(II-a) value of broader conceptualization

Issues of representation, participant selection and power dynamics permeate several citizen engagement processes. In citizen juries, for instance, a group of one to two dozen individuals meet for a few days and consider evidence presented to them, deliberate amongst themselves and come to a decision at the end of the process. Such

forums may introduce new perspectives where existing ideas can be challenged and issues can potentially be carefully considered. However, since few people participate, questions of whether the composition of the citizen jury represents the desired constituency loom large. Difficulties also arise in terms of actual participant selection largely due to the time commitment involved. Few individual citizens have three to five days to give of their time even if modest remuneration is provided (though that questions the motives of participation). A similar situation exists in relation to citizen panels where up to a dozen citizens meet several times per year albeit with a less intensive time commitment involved at any one meeting. The "representativeness" of these twelve citizens is questionable as is their ability to freely give of their time *several* times per year. Citizens' dialogues also suffer from the same problems (Abelson et al., 2003; Gauvin et al., 2006).

Interest organizations can help combat representation and participant selection problems. Note that interest organizations are already representatives of larger segments of society and, by default, a wider representation of society is achieved. Interest organizations may also be more available and interested in participating in citizen engagement activities either due to their current related work or to their desire to contribute more broadly for their members or their community. Power imbalances between sponsoring organizations and citizens, another key limitation (Abelson et al. 2003: 247), may also be addressed with the inclusion of interest organizations who may be able to better challenge the information provided in such deliberations.

Issues of representation, participant selection and power dynamics can also be seen in relation to various government bodies. The Passport Office, a Special Operating Agency, could, for instance, face language and cultural barriers in efforts to engage citizens in the examination of various issues. Presumably, it would want to include recent immigrants in engagement activities to learn from their insights yet such individuals may be intimidated or scared to participate fearing reprisals. This directly goes to power differentials which interest organizations can help alleviate, which is further discussed below. Interest organizations could also aid in the identification, recruitment and selection of citizens in such activities which would help address issues of representation and participant selection.

Power differentials can also be seen in special purpose bodies such as school boards. As Sproule-Jones notes, school boards have a monopoly on the service they provide and, as such, may decide to under provide certain services such as those for atypical students (e.g. gifted, learning disabled; 1994: 78). The inclusion of interest organizations in related engagement activities may amplify the voices and efforts of individual citizens thus potentially narrowing power imbalances between school boards and individual citizens.

The inclusion of interest organizations in citizen engagement activities may also increase the legitimacy of decisions which can later help overcome implementation difficulties. This can be seen in various service agencies such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Conservation Authorities in Ontario. CFIA's decision to implement an Ash Free Zone in 2003 (clear cut all ash tress in a 10km by 30km area) to combat an insect epidemic (emerald ash borer) may have been better received by the broader community if interest organizations, especially local ones, had been included in CFIA's Science and Advisory Panel struck to study

the issue. It is this lack of inclusion which contributed to implementation problems including the cutting of the wrong trees and CFIA's inability to control the movement of firewood out of the area (Blouin, 2005; "Tree Cutting", 2005). Similarly, Conservation Authorities in Ontario are attempting to overcome legitimacy and implementation problems with the inclusion of interest organizations in source water protection activities. As officials noted, since much of what needs to be done in terms of water protection affects private property (for example, time of year restrictions for manure spreading on farms), it made sense to have citizens and interest organizations directly engaged to ensure "buy in" by the parties which may lead to better implementation on the ground (Interviews with Conservation Ontario and Upper Thames River Conservation Authority Officials, 11, 14 June 2007).

(II-b) individual versus collective representation

Benefits aside, issues of individual versus collective representation are at the root of citizen engagement activities. On the one hand, the literature emphasizes the "active engagement" of "ordinary citizens" who represent "themselves" in order to form a tighter link with governments. Consensus on individual representation is, however, elusive for, as Sheedy et al. point out, citizens can be representatives of interest organizations in citizen engagement activities as long as citizens representing themselves are also included to help narrow "the gap between governments and the public they serve and improve[e] the legitimacy of decisions" (2008: 5). Abel et al. make a similar point in arguing for the involvement of "ordinary citizens" yet, as they state, this involvement should not exclude interest organization participation (Abel et al., 1998: 9). The benefits of involving interest organizations are many, including the fact that they are sources of information and energy, a conduit between citizens and decision makers, and a facilitator for broader deliberation (Hendriks, 2006: 573).

At the heart of the matter is whether citizens can truly disengage from their interests. This may be more difficult than some theoretically conceive (Hendriks, 2006: 572). Citizens join groups such as local environmental groups, community associations and/or national groups to represent and further their interests. Far from being a blank slate when they arrive at the table, they arrive with hopes, desires and pre-conceived notions of what they believe should be done. It is through these lenses that citizens study an issue, become better informed and consider making trade-offs for the collective good. This is not unlike citizens who represent interest organizations who, as Sheedy et al. admit, "may or may not have pre-determined positions that they bring to policy discussions" (2008: 6).

Moreover, who are these so-called "ordinary citizens" that we want engaged in the process? Fenn notes that both retired industry and former financial executives were part of Burlington's Citizen Budget Review (1998: 118-19). Similarly, Abel et al called for the creation of a social union watchdog Panel of Citizen's comprised of people who were members of the Order of Canada, the Panel on Global Climate Change or from the Royal Society (1998: 40). Others, such as Robison, note that citizens who were "prominent" members of the community or who were "significant stakeholders" in the community were members of either the Miramichi amalgamation study team or its Community Advisory Committee (1998: 193). Any of the above individuals can hardly be said to be "ordinary citizens" unless "ordinary" means well-

to-do prominent citizens. Where are the average middle class citizens, the welfare recipients or, for that matter, the working poor? Why only privilege society's upper echelon? And, does the upper echelon not bring with it preconceived notions of what should be done—financial executives with their focus on financial prudence, individuals from the Panel on Climate Change with their focus on environmental factors and significant individual stakeholders with their focus on ensuring their holdings continue to flourish? The identification of relevant ordinary citizens is an issue that continues to plague the citizen engagement literature (for example, Abelson et al., 2003; Lukensmeyer and Boyd, 2004; Rowe and Frewer, 2000: 12-3; Turnbull & Aucoin, 2006: 8-9). Eliminating interest organizations from the mix does little to level the playing field, that is, counterbalancing interest organization influence by enhancing the inclusion of citizens as individual representatives in separate processes does little to address power imbalances between individual citizens and agencies or government departments which are *increased* in the process, a point further discussed below. Matters are further exacerbated if only a select group of citizens (e.g. elites) are selected for engagement activities.

(II-c) deliberation

Citizen engagement underscores the need for deliberation in policy processes. This is based on the centrality of a space for "reasoned discussion in political life". In other words, deliberation represents the unconstrained exploration of the pros and cons of issues with participants willing to move from any preconceived positions and keep in mind the greater good of the collectivity (Cooke, 2000: 948; Hendriks, 2006: 571-72).

Reasoned deliberation is, however, predicated on the free flow of information among and between participants and decision makers, that is, the information flows both ways (Phillips and Graham, 1998). This is unlike some other forms of public involvement where information flows are unidirectional such as in public communication and/or public consultation processes (Rowe and Frewer, 2005: 255)[2]. In essence, this reflects a deeper engagement in that it is a move away from token consultation to the upper rungs of the participation ladder, to use Arnstein's (1969) depiction of citizen participation, where citizens have an increasing degree of control (also see Pretty, 1994). It is only with this higher degree of citizen control and power sharing amongst all parties that meaningful levels of participation and engagement will occur (Ramirez, 2001) and that current dissatisfaction with engagement processes will be overcome (Laforest and Phillips, 2006: 68; Wondelleck and Yaffee, 2000).

Interest organizations can be an integral part of this process and the development of engagement processes to skirt or limit their participation is shortsighted. Interest organizations are a fact of life and an important part of the policy process (Cohen and Rogers, 1995). Outcomes of deliberative processes potentially have increased legitimacy with the inclusion of interest organizations. As such, it is far better to investigate ways of including interest organizations than try to minimize or curtail their involvement (for example, Hendriks, 2006).

Less clear, however, is whether or not this engagement should be in addition to existing processes. Certainly, some of the citizen engagement methods, such as

citizen panels and citizen forums, suggest as much with their narrow model of individual citizen representation. Yet, as noted above, the point of citizen engagement is to *involve* citizens. In no way does this involvement mean to the exclusion of existing processes or interest organizations. "Ordinary citizens" can be actively brought into existing decision making structures just as citizens can represent themselves and/or group interests in citizen panels and the like (perhaps a better term would be stakeholder panels since citizens are stakeholders in the community in which they live and work). Fenn's (1998) case of the Citizen's Budget Review in Burlington in the 1990s is an example of this interwoven relationship.

Make no mistake, combining both citizens as individual representatives and citizens as representatives of interest organizations in engagement processes will not guarantee successful engagement activities (e.g. policy impacts; Phillips and Graham, 1998: 226). Yet there is no reason to think that conducting separate engagement processes for citizens and interest organizations alike will lead to success stories either since decision-makers will have to aggregate the results from both processes after the fact. Whose views will they give preferential treatment to? Furthermore, even if a Pareto optimal solution could be found, it is not unreasonable to think that transaction costs could be higher in following separate processes and the legitimacy of the final decision may yet be undermined due to the process followed. Note that each (interest organizations, citizens) could claim that the views of the other (along with the related process) were given undue weight in the final decision. The above is also predicated upon agencies and government departments having no interest of their own which is not the case (Olson, 1965). Separate processes and their conflicting outcomes would simply allow decision-makers to press forward with *their* agenda.

(II-d) power dynamics

Power dynamics must not be overlooked (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962) and permeate citizen engagement processes. In fact, power dynamics are one of the principle reasons for renewed interest in citizen engagement activities. As previously noted, arguments in favour of citizen engagement activities emphasize that they are a counterbalance to the influence of interest organizations (Graham and Phillips, 1998: 3). Lost in this argument, however, are the power dynamics that exist between citizens and their government and those between different agencies or government departments, which can be far from equal. This lack of equality can be to, to a large extent, dependent on the constitutional framework yet this only underscores the role interest organizations can assume in counterbalancing the influence of various agencies and government departments. This role is much like the one citizens perform in counterbalancing the potential influence of interest organizations. In other words, it is not simply a matter of citizens and interest organizations providing a check on each other’s influence in the policy making process, it is also about providing a check on the potentially undue influence of agencies and government departments in such processes, something for which ministerial responsibility and regular elections are poorly suited as are citizens as individual representatives in citizen engagement activities.

Governments typically possess superior resources and their influence can be daunting. This is especially true when governments are the facilitators of citizen

engagement processes and are less than forthcoming with information. Control of the process in terms of who to include as participants, when and how often to meet, and the financial resources devoted to the process are all forms of power which governments can manipulate to their advantage. But so is information (Abelson et al., 2003: 242). Specifically, what information to provide, its form and when to provide it allow decision makers potentially undue influence. As Gauvin et al. point out, decision-makers are not neutral entities and many fear losing control of the policy making process (2006: 13; Turnbull and Aucoin, 2006: 11-2; see also Laumann et al., 1985).

This is where interest organizations come in. Note that most citizens as individual representatives have limited resources and time to devote to researching issues. They rely to a great extent on the information provided by decision-makers.[3] But what checks exist on decision makers to ensure their impartiality? The answer is that there are very few unless citizens as representatives of interest organizations are formally included side by side with citizens as individuals in engagement processes. Simply put, the capacity of interest organizations to gather information and study issues in terms of time and resources is typically greater than citizens as individuals. As such, the direct inclusion of interest organizations in citizen engagement activities allows for decision-maker information and related positions to be readily contested in engagement processes rather than through the media. In short, citizens as representatives of interest organizations act as a check on decision-maker power, something they are potentially better suited to when compared to individual citizens.

To summarize, interest organizations are increasingly marginalized in the citizen engagement literature. The emphasis is on bringing citizens as individuals "back in" in direct government to citizen linkages. However, citizens as representatives of interest organizations have much to offer including being sources of information. The exclusion of interest organization representatives does not ensure citizen impartiality since people come pre-programmed with ideas and ways of interpreting issues due in part to their environment and life experiences. This was seen in the examples provided where elite individuals were selected as "ordinary citizens" for citizen engagement activities. Furthermore, interest organizations are not going away, they are a fact of life. Their integration into citizen engagement activities allows for a much more robust engagement and has the potential to increase the legitimacy of the process. After all, decision-makers possess their own agendas and interest organizations can act as a check on their power.

Embedded in this framework is the question of whether the inclusion of interest organizations as equal partners in citizen engagement activities is simply advocacy on their part. As defined by Orsini and Phillips, whether or not it is depends on whether the involvement of interest organizations was initiated by governments. If it was wholly uninvited by governments, then “it is usually referred to as *advocacy*” (2002: 3). Yet this interpretation is narrow since it unnecessarily limits citizen engagement activities to the middle steps on Arnstein’s ladder of participation. If citizens are to reach the top rungs of the ladder, which reflects the deepest engagement including the sharing of power (Arnstein, 1969), and if interest organizations can be involved in all stages of the policy process (Orsini and Phillips,

2002: 15-22) then parties outside of government need to have the ability to be active participants in agenda setting which includes initiating engagement processes. After all, governments may not realize the significance of an issue or be unwilling to initially address a problem. As such, the need to differentiate between engagement and advocacy on "who initiates" criteria disappears. This is even more so given the fact agencies and government departments are powerful entities with vested interests as previously noted above.

To use Laforest and Phillips' analogy, while it may be true that citizens are more "hard-wired" in the policy process, questions remain as to their influence. As they state, "[t]he wiring may exist, but the power is not always on" (2006: 83). This point is not disputed, rather the point of this article is to remind decision-makers that citizens are but one more peripheral and part of the larger network and the exercise needs to be one of ensuring its insertion, integration and compatibility for optimum use of the *mainframe*.

III. Groundwater and Hamilton

At a broad level, the importance of groundwater should not be minimized. We depend on it for our sustenance, to grow our food crops, to dilute our wastes and for basic environmental functions (e.g. water cycle). Of the total water available globally, only 2.75% is freshwater with the rest being saline water in the oceans. Of this 2.75%, only 0.68% is groundwater found to a depth of four kilometers (Hiscock, 2005: 7-9). Canada is seen as a water abundant country containing twenty per cent of the world's freshwater resource though the majority of this is tied up in glaciers (Boyd, 2003: 13-5). Groundwater is an important part of this resource though it is not clear what volume of water is contained in Canada's aquifers (Rivera, 2004). Groundwater is also a superior source of drinking water. It has "…few suspended solids, small concentrations of bacteria and viruses, and often only minimal concentrations of dissolved mineral salts" when compared to surface water supplies (Schwartz and Zhang, 2003: 3).

Specifically, Hamilton's traditional urban character masks its rural population's diversity and, especially, its dependency on groundwater.[4] In other words, while Hamilton has a population of about 500,000 people, approximately 23,000 residents (5%), largely rural, depend on groundwater as their principal source of water. Furthermore, of the approximate 15,293 water wells in the city, 82% of them are used for private domestic purposes while 10% are used for agricultural purposes (for example, irrigation, livestock). Agricultural water use should not, however, be minimized since, of the total groundwater used, the agricultural sector consumes 70% while private domestic water use only accounts for 7% (SNC Lavalin and Charlesworth & Associates, 2006: 1-8). Groundwater is clearly vital for both sectors though for different purposes.

Hamilton groundwater issues of which two are briefly profiled were identified by way of a newspaper search for the period 1996-2006.[5]

(III-a) water permit application notification and consultation procedures

Large water takings (>50,000L/day) in Ontario have since 1961 required a provincial permit. Inadequate notification and consultation procedures exist in permit-to-take-water (PTTW) applications. Hamiltonians (as other entities in the province) typically found out a PTTW had been approved after it was a *fait accompli*. Basically, they were not aware that a PTTW was pending nor were they aware of how and or when to comment in the process (e.g. Stevenson, 2000; Cassiani & Marr, 2000).

Currently, Ontario Regulation 387/04, the Water Taking and Transfer Regulation, stipulates that a Director must notify the jurisdiction of the proposed water taking along with the local Conservation Authority (CA) and anyone else he/she deems fit for multi-year PTTWs. In response, the jurisdictions and CAs have thirty days to respond to the posting (OMOE, 2004; OMOE, 2005: 35-36). Note that the public is not notified in this process. In fact, the public has to regularly check the Environmental Registry online where PTTW applications are posted in order to know that an application has been made. Local governments and CAs also do not notify the public of an application nor do they seek the public's input in the process. The process also assumes that the public knows where to look for PTTW applications and that people are technologically savvy in order to access the material. These are rather large assumptions and need to be addressed.

People need to be given ample notification and consultation time. A longer PTTW application comment period is required, perhaps something in the neighbourhood of 90 days to allow people a better opportunity to become aware of and respond to PTTW applications. Moreover, a broader notification procedure is required which can be achieved, for instance, through wider postings via municipal, CA (and interest organization) websites, which many people access on a regular basis. Notification could also be made via local newspapers, libraries and municipal and CA "bulletin boards" in order to allow those that are not technologically savvy to be informed. These are simple, reasonable and feasible changes in that they do not unfairly slow down the process, especially given the importance of the groundwater resource to all involved.

(III-b) excessive water use

Groundwater shortages have been experienced throughout Hamilton and have been a particular problem for the hamlet of Carlisle where, at times, demand for water outstrips supply by a factor of twelve. Basically, Carlisle residents have tended to drain the water tower (supplied by groundwater) faster than wells can fill it leading to drastically reduced water pressure to the point of not being able to brush one's teeth or having dry taps (Fragomeni, 2002; see also Ghafour, 1999; Mentek, 1999; Evans, 2000).

What is all this water being used for? Essentially, the water is being used to water residents' landscapes, that is, their lawns. Carlisle has many "executive" style homes on lots of one acre or more that have elaborate and thirsty landscapes. While the four communal wells and water tower are sufficient to maintain water for all homes based on provincial standards, the standards do not allow for excessive outdoor water use. Consider the fact that residents often drain Carlisle's water tower

within two hours, largely when landscape irrigation systems are operating (Phillips, 2005a, 2005b).

Changes in water use practices are needed and Hamilton has responded. The city has drilled a new well and made pumping station upgrades with further water tower upgrades to be done. But this misses the point since it only increases the supply of water (Shrubsole, 2001). In contrast, little has been done to reduce the demand for water which can lead to significant water savings. For instance, action could be directed at informing and educating people on efficient water use and to make water consumption prices proportional to usage. This could be achieved through various measures including print material that details drought tolerant plants, a demonstration garden that highlights such plants, charging higher prices for seasonal water use, and appeals to resident's vanity (e.g. shaming) via the publication of neighbourhood or pumping district area water use on a "Water Wasters" webpage (Tate, 1990; Brandes and Ferguson, 2003; Brandes, Ferguson, M'Gonigle & Sandborn, 2005; Arora & Casson, 1995; Khanna & Damon, 1999; Harrison, 2001).

IV. Addressing Hamilton's groundwater issues - who, what, where...

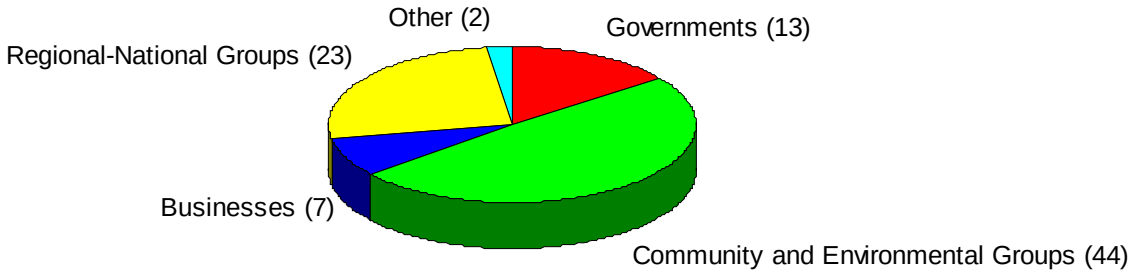
The fact remains that interest organizations are both consistent with and beneficial to citizen engagement activities. Yet, the need exists to identify relevant interest organizations, their potential role in citizen activities and where the thrust of this engagement should be directed to affect changes in policy to address Hamilton's groundwater issues. These questions—who, what, where—were explored through an examination of past collaborative efforts in the environmental sector as identified by way of database searches, a questionnaire and primary documents as detailed in the next sections.

the "who"

To determine who should be engaged, the need exists to take stock of the potential engagement partners and their previous level of engagement. This was done in two steps with the first being the assessment of environmentally active groups in Hamilton. This included any group that was active environmentally from 1996-2006 and included government departments, provincial groups and local groups. As such, a business association that had participated in tree planting projects qualified as did local naturalist clubs.

Community database searches[6] revealed a total of 89 environmentally active groups (and manually verified) in Hamilton which were categorized as shown in Figure 1. This sheer number of environmentally active groups suggests the presence of an active environmental community with the potential to address environmental issues including groundwater problems since an active core infrastructure of interest organizations exists from which to engage and build on. Note that changes in policy can still occur without this core group infrastructure, yet will likely take longer to achieve since more time will be required to build support.

Figure 1: .
Environmentally active interest organizations, Hamilton, 1996-2006.



A questionnaire[7] was sent out to all identified parties and probed patterns of interaction between interest organizations through the assessment of collaboration levels for the years 1996-2006. A questionnaire was chosen due to its cost effectiveness and ease of administration. However, other methods such as interviews with interest organization officials may also be used and may reveal additional or more nuanced patterns of interaction. In addition, the questionnaire assessed linkages *between and among interest organizations*, yet there may be links *between personnel* that are neither perceived as organizational nor well known by a respondent completing the questionnaire. A response rate of 33% was obtained which is considered good since, as Klandermans and Smith remind us, few questionnaires elicit a response rate greater than 30% (2002: 17).

The environmentally active nature of interest organizations was reinforced by the results of the questionnaire as shown in Table 1. Note the high number of environmentally related projects and educational activities which suggests possible links from which to build greater awareness of groundwater issues in Hamilton. This could focus on working with these groups to inform and educate citizens on commenting procedures in PTTW applications and in reducing water usage.

Collaboration levels were also quite revealing. A full 93% of projects (results not shown) were collaborative in nature. This is not surprising since few interest organizations have the resources to independently carry out a project and suggests that they currently capitalize on each other's strengths (for example, funding, manpower, expertise, experience) in order to achieve their goals.

The identification of interest organizations and knowledge of the fact that they are environmentally active is helpful yet discerning exactly which organizations to engage among the many identified ones remains problematical. Not all groups can be or are willing to be engaged at any particular time, so how does one select participants to affect the policy process? Do the same interest organizations need to be engaged throughout the various stages of the policy process or can different groups participate in engagement activities at various points in the policy process? The former question is further unravelled in the next few paragraphs while the latter is examined in the next section.

Table 1: Number & Type of Projects*

Community/environmental Groups (avg 7 projects; range 3-> 30)	**Governments** (avg 5 projects, range 3-13)
17 Environmental: e.g. plant sales, Trees Count, Stream Watch, Wise Water Use 10 Transit issues: e.g. Commuter Challenge, Active & Safe Routes to School, Ham. Transit Users Group 7 (tie) Community Building: e.g. community kitchen, swap-o-ramas 7 (tie) Education: e.g. various public awareness campaigns	19 Environmental: Rehabilitation/Restoration (10): e.g. Fletcher Creek Ecological Preserve, Grindstone Creek Restoration General (9): e.g. gardening & tree plantings, Anti-Idling Blitz, Blackout Challenge
Businesses	**Regional-National Groups** (avg 5, range 3-10)
3 Environmental: e.g. tree inventory, heritage tree identification	5 Community Building: e.g. Autumn Treasures Art Show 3 Education: e.g. Haldimand-Norfolk Cultural Assoc. Training, Hamilton Education Roundtable 2 Tourism: e.g. Journeys of Discovery

*Single category projects not shown.

One way of determining who to select for engagement activities is to assess the frequency of collaboration among interest organizations to ensure representation of interests from the various levels of governance (e.g. municipal, intra-regional, provincial…). This is important for issues such as groundwater where authority for its governance is often fragmented and where management efforts typically entail multiple jurisdictions (as illustrated in the groundwater issues discussed above). Such collaboration analyses potentially reveal important linkages and/or the lack of such linkages and can help guide the selection of interest organization participants in citizen engagement activities.

Figures 2-4 (at end of paper) show results from the Hamilton questionnaire where respondents were asked to list the number of projects in which they had collaborated with other interest organizations. Note that a thicker line in the Figures indicates more frequent collaboration levels. While the Figures may be mesmerizing at first glance, it is the general line patterns that are important here. For instance, Figure 2 shows that most of the community/environmental groups (green dots) collaborate with each other, that is, most of the lines are drawn to other community/environmental groups with fewer lines drawn to governments (red dots) and very few lines drawn to regional-national groups (yellow dots) and businesses (blue dots). Similarly, Figure 3 shows that governments appear to be much more engaged with each other than with local community groups and/or regional-national groups while Figure 4 shows that regional-national groups collaborate mainly with each other and governments. Results for businesses (not shown) indicate that they have a minimal level of collaboration with most interest organizations.

As can be seen from the Figures, a "break" in collaboration exists between community/environmental and regional-national interest organizations. The

implications of this for addressing groundwater issues in Hamilton are significant. It underscores the need to ensure representation is cast well beyond a narrow constituency to include a broad array of interest organizations at various levels (for example, local, regional, provincial). As such, a more diverse pool of information, expertise and experiences can potentially be utilized in deliberations.

For example, for PTTW consultation and notification problems previously discussed, legislative and regulatory changes need to occur at the provincial, regional and local levels. The inclusion of both regional-national and community/environmental interest organizations in engagement activities enriches the dialogue and potentially facilitates a greater understanding. Regional-national entities can bring a wider understanding of issues to the table and a better understanding of policy processes at the regional-national level, especially in consideration of their dense links to governments, than most community/ environmental interest organizations. At the same time, community/environmental entities bring first-hand knowledge and expertise of the situation on the ground so a richer understanding of implementation issues can be obtained, as well as, are a repository for innovative ideas. Contributions from both regional-national and community/environmental groups may lead to more effective groundwater policy that affects all Hamiltonians.

Furthermore, governments are not neutral idle entities in this process. As Figure 3 shows, they need to recognize their lack of linkages with both community/environmental and regional-national interest organizations. In essence, they need to tap into the rich networks and knowledge base both offer.

the "what"

What role could interest organizations assume when in citizen engagement activities? For example, could one interest organization—a community group or a government department—facilitate the process while another, such as a regional organization, largely fulfills an information and education role? Furthermore, who is to provide the necessary leadership? Or, can interest organizations perform these and other multiple roles simultaneously? Answers to these types of questions provide clues about how to structure engagement.

It is argued here that a diversity of roles is required to make the process work. If, for instance, most of the roles community/environmental interest organizations perform are education related, then one can readily observe the need for leadership, coordination and facilitation roles. A lack of leadership in the process may mean limited success will ensue regardless of the amount of educational material (information) provided. Similarly, a lack of co-ordination may un-necessarily prolong engagement activities since particular aspects may need to be revisited often.

The roles interest organizations assumed were identified through an examination of their mission statements, core activities and from the completed questionnaires and are shown in Table 2. The roles were based on a modified version of those identified by Folke et al. (2003: 368) and were categorized into either facilitators-networkers, leaders-stewards, educators, mediators-policy brokers-advocates, economic, and/or recreational. The results indicate that the vast majority of interest organizations perform more than one role. Community/environmental and

regional-national interest organizations largely perform an education role and a mediator-policy broker-advocate role which is indicative of their ability to disseminate information and to seek out solutions to problems of interest to their membership. In comparison, governments overwhelmingly assume a leadership-stewardship role with most leaning towards stewardship in terms of executing specific community functions such as water and sewer services (and as noted by their focus on rehabilitation projects; see Table 1).

Table 2: Interest Organization Functional Roles*

Group Type	Fac.-Net.	Lead.-Stew.	Educa.-Know.	Med./Brok./Advoc.	Econ.	Rec.
Community/Environmental	8	13	29	23	1	8
Regional-National	9	7	21	17	0	1
Governments	0	12	5	2	1	5
Businesses	1	1	1	1	6	0

* Fac.Net. = Facilitating-Networking (Guiding others through change processes; organizers);
Lead.-Stew. = Leadership-Stewardship (Help trigger change; lead others through change);
Educa.-Know. = Educators-Knowledge Carriers (Knowledge transmission; expertise);
Med./Brok./Adoc. = Mediators-policy brokers/advocates (mediate conflicts; broker compromises; advocate positions);
Econ. = Economic (Primary role is to create economic activity);
Rec. = Recreational (deliver environmentally related products/service to membership).

The results underscore the centrality of community/environmental and regional-national interest organizations in citizen engagement processes. Both the knowledge they possess and their ability to mediate conflict and broker compromises are superior to either governments and/or businesses. Similarly, the results suggest governments need to take a step back from leading and facilitating citizen engagement processes and to draw on the resources of the aforementioned interest organizations. While governments need to be at the table and participate, they certainly do not need to control it and, instead, governments can work to develop ways of fostering such processes, as challenging as this may be. This finding is consistent with those of Sullivan et al.'s examination of local government reform in the United Kingdom which found, among other things, that authorities (in this case local authorities) were poor leaders of citizen engagement activities and were largely unable to foster collaborative capacity among stakeholders (2006). At the same time, the results also echo calls made by Kaye for the need of more community ownership of engagement processes (2001).

the "where"

Where citizen engagement activities need to be directed at has been alluded to in the previous sections. In its simplest form, engagement needs to be directed where authority resides for the issues at hand.

In relation to Hamilton's groundwater issues, this is at the local, regional and provincial levels. Authority for PTTW applications resides at the provincial level in

Ontario. Since changes in consultation and notification procedures do not appear to be on the province's agenda, the need exists for an interest organization (for example, regional-national or community/environmental) to engage citizens through various forums. This engagement should include a wide array of interest organizations (governments, community/environmental groups, individual citizens...). At the same time, there is nothing preventing regional entities (for example, Conservation Authorities) and municipal governments from ensuring a wider distribution of PTTW applications to allow citizens ample time to respond. Printing off a copy for posting on their bulletin boards and adding the information to their websites is simple enough. This is an area where perhaps community/environmental interest organizations may need to take the lead through various engagement processes to address the issue.

Likewise, addressing Hamilton's excessive water use needs to be largely done at the local level. Little progress on this issue has been made to date and the need exists to engage the local community. Yet this engagement needs to be broad enough to include a diverse array of interest organizations including regional-national ones in order to capitalize on their strengths, some of which perhaps are lacking in other participants.

V. Conclusion

This paper has examined questions of who is engaged, their roles in engagement processes and the efforts of citizen engagement to affect changes in public policy, areas which academic commentary often overlooks, as applied to Hamilton, Ontario groundwater policy. It suggested that interest organization involvement in citizen engagement activities and in the literature was increasingly marginalized. Through the brief examination of three concepts—individual versus collective representation, deliberation, and power dynamics— that underpin this narrow interpretation, it found that the involvement of interest organizations was both consistent with and beneficial to such activity.

This paper has explored the who, what and where questions of citizen engagement in relation to interest organizations as applied to groundwater problems facing the City of Hamilton, Ontario. The question of who to include needs to move beyond the mere identification of interest organizations and random selection to one that considers patterns of group interaction to ensure a full representation of interest organizations in citizen engagement activities. This consideration needs to include representation from the relevant levels of governance as this analysis has shown. The question of what role interest organizations could assume in citizen engagement activities needs to be carefully considered for effective engagement and to minimize unnecessary delays. This investigation has shown the significant education, conflict mediation and policy brokerage roles both community/environmental and regional-national interest organizations can perform, roles which governments do not, themselves, adequately fulfill. This brings into question whose information gets considered and who settles disputes in citizen engagement activities. Note that the determination of who could be engaged and their role in the process can be achieved through the assessment of interest organization collaboration patterns as was

demonstrated in this paper. Lastly, questions of where to direct citizen engagement efforts can be largely answered by examining where authority for a given policy area resides.

And, the prognosis for Hamilton's groundwater problems? Mixed at best. For instance, it is evident that little progress will be made in addressing PTTW notification and consultation issues by community/environmental organizations since they largely interact with each other only and not with regional-national organizations and/or provincial levels of governments where action needs to be directed and where regional-national organizations have the densest links or interactions with the provincial government. Recall that a "break" in interaction between community/environmental and regional-national interest organizations exists. As such, community/environmental and regional-national organizations need to engage with each other, that is, work together to capitalize on the advantages each have while minimizing their disadvantages to address groundwater policy changes.

In addition, an important part of addressing Hamilton's excessive water use is informing and educating the people of the city to conserve water. Yet, as the results show, governments do not adequately perform this role (noted by their largely stewardship role) whereas community/environmental interest organizations with their dense interaction and connections among themselves are well positioned to perform these functions. Governments need to tap into these dense local networks in order to drive the water conservation message home.

In short, interest organization involvement in citizen engagement activities need not be marginalized. Their participation is both consistent with and beneficial to such processes. Furthermore, the examination of interest organization collaboration patterns and the nature of issues have much to offer in terms of determining who to engage in citizen engagement activities, what role participants can have in engagement processes and where engagement efforts can be directed. In essence, we are plotting the roots of local citizen engagement.

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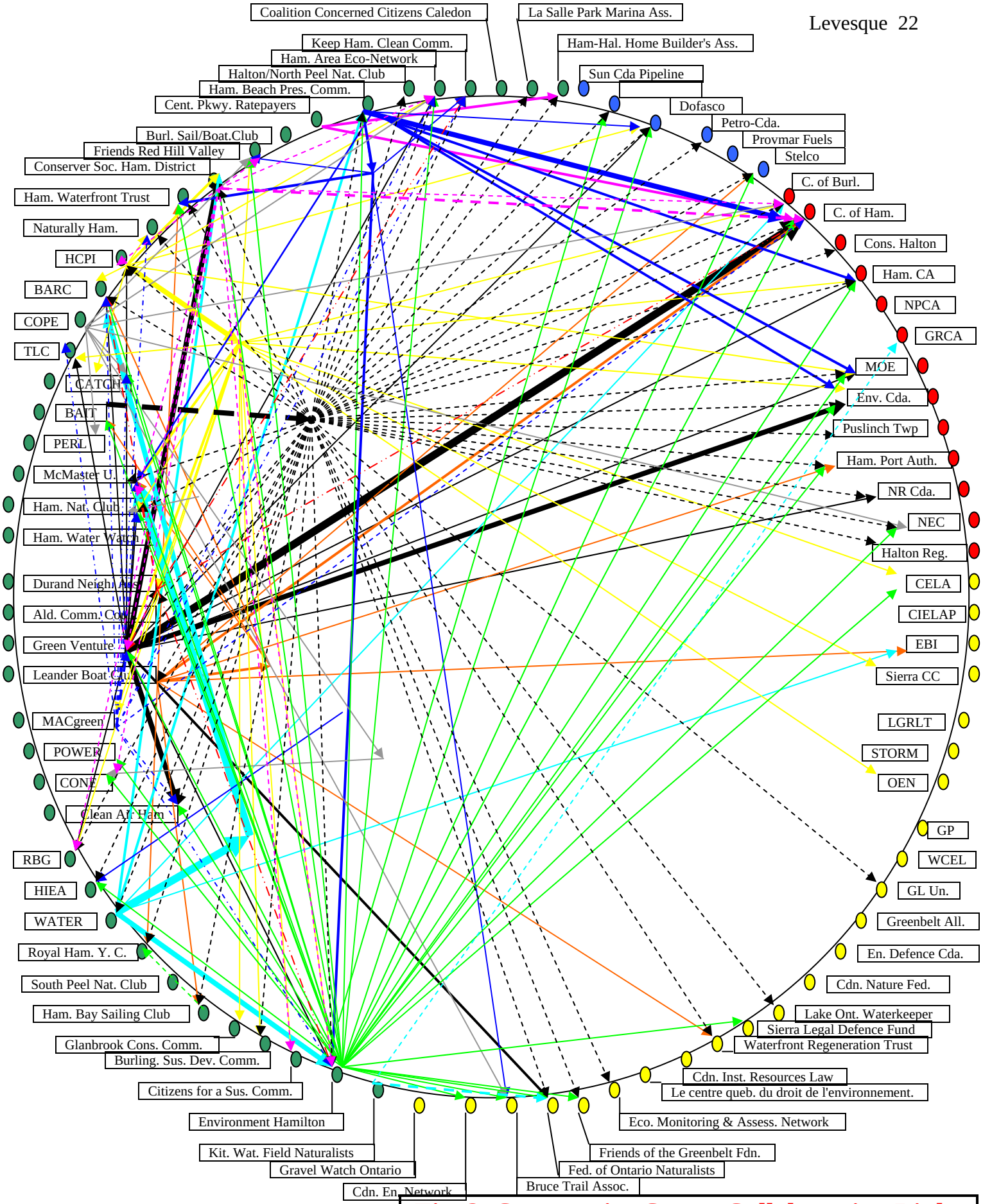

Fig. 2 Community Group Collaboration Links

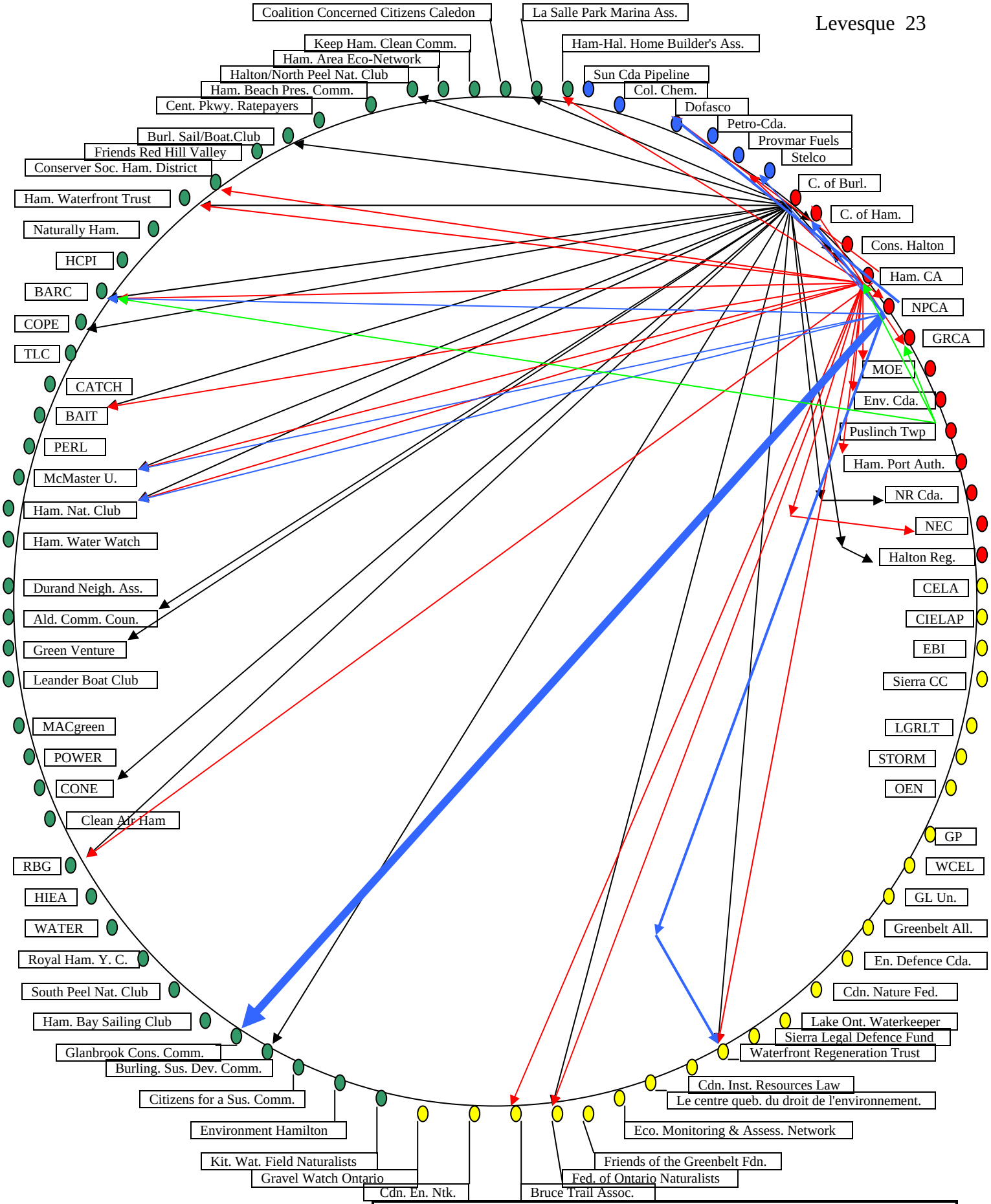

Fig. 3 Government Collaboration Links

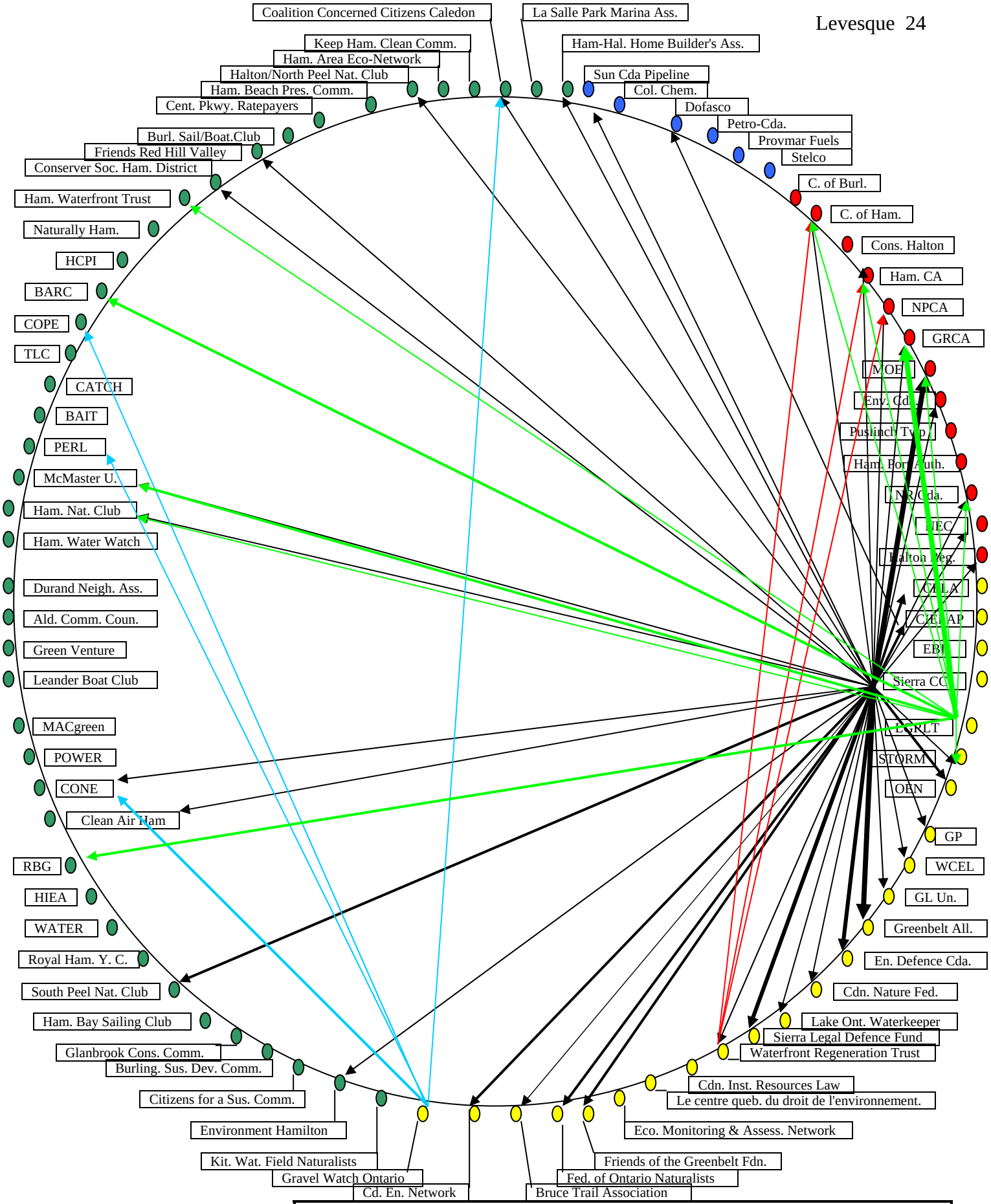

Fig. 4 Regional-National Group Collaboration Links

[1] "Interest organizations" is a broad term and includes "elite and active policy actors such as stakeholders, pressure groups, lobby groups, representative organizations, secondary associations, activists, scientists, government agencies, and corporations" yet *excludes* political parties (Hendriks, 2006: 572). As Hendriks notes, many scholars such as Petracca (1992) would not consider "many of these entities as "interest organizations," especially government agencies" (2006: 595 note 9). Yet Petracca's stance is surprising given the fact he makes reference to Laumann et al.'s (1985) study of the advocacy explosion in Washington which includes the active advocacy by some governmental entities (Petracca, 1992: 6-14; Laumann et al., 1985: 470). The same is true of Truman's definition of interest groups where governmental entities are seemingly omitted yet some discussion exists surrounding the recruiting and coordination of resources in emergency situations by governments (1960: 33-55 especially 33-37, 55). Presumably this includes governmental entities making specific claims on other agencies both within and outside of the government.

[2] As Rowe and Frewer point out, in public communication, the flow of information flows from the sponsor to the public representatives while in public consultations the flow of information is unidirectional from public representatives to the sponsor (2005: 255).

[3] Note that this depends on the issue at hand and, at times, the reverse is true as can be the case in the development of effluent regulations on industries where information provided by interest organizations is often utilized. The point is that if interest organizations are not directly involved in citizen engagement activities (i.e. seated at the table side by side with individual citizens), this information gathering and processing occurs *outside* of the engagement process, often through the media which unnecessarily increases the complexity of the engagement.

[4] This is especially so since amalgamation proceedings in 2001 brought the former City of Stoney Creek, the Towns of Ancaster and Dundas, as well as, the former Townships of Flamborough and Glanbrook into a new City of Hamilton.

[5] The newspapers searched were the Hamilton Spectator, Burlington Post, Flamborough Review and the Stoney Creek News.

[6] The databases were the Inform Hamilton and the Halton Community Services Database, as well as, the Hamilton Business Directory. Searches were done in the Fall of 2006 and revealed 72 interest organizations with searches of their websites revealing a further 17 organizations.

[7] Questionnaire available from author upon request.