

Multi-level Governance in Canada: the Vancouver Essay

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Prof. Hutton is responsible for writing the Vancouver essay for this major collaborative project.

Summary:

The research is designed to answer one central question: How do state actors and social forces interact to create public policy in Canadian municipalities? The practical corollary is to engage in a debate about how to improve these important policies.

Canada's municipal systems are in a period of flux that borders on the revolutionary. Major structural changes provide new opportunities for innovative research. More visible are widespread problems--economic polarization, homelessness, derelict lands, deteriorating infrastructure, and the social exclusion of various minority groups. Under the pressures of globalization, demographic and technological change, and shifting public values, governments at all levels initiate policies to address these problems. We want to discover what causes differences in these policies across provinces and municipalities. Ultimately we aim to evaluate policies and to contribute to improving them.

Our scholarly purpose is to explain variation in public policy. We posit two explanatory factors. First is the structure of intergovernmental relations; that is, the patterns of interaction between officials and politicians based in different levels of Canada's complex system of multilevel governance. The special focus is upon municipal-federal relations, an area where interaction appears to be increasing sharply, but one which has been generally neglected. Second are the social forces active in the municipality and beyond. This category includes community organizations, business associations, trade unions, interest groups, voluntary associations, and members of social movements. These social forces make policy demands, take some decisions, implement policy, and represent clients and citizens. Their relations with state actors must be grasped in order to explain policy.

We aim to take a broad comparative approach, studying how policy is made in provinces with a range of institutional structures, in municipalities with different networks of social forces, and in six policy fields--emergency planning, federal property, immigrant settlement, municipal image-building, infrastructure, and urban Aboriginal policy. This is a large project. Our team numbers 66 researchers from every province, and eight from other federations. In order to grasp the views of social forces, and to understand the different policy fields, we must confront our research questions from a wide variety of perspectives: economics, political science, sociology, geography, history, and other disciplines.

The bulk of our research will be in the *provincial studies*, because each province's system of municipalities is unique in structure, financing and demography. Each provincial team will study the municipal system, the biggest city, two policy fields, and how the provincial government mediates municipal-federal relations. The *federal studies* parallel these, with overview papers, studies of each policy field from Ottawa's viewpoint, and studies of five other fields where the federal government is

intervening in new ways. Last are *comparative studies* of municipal-federal relations in nine other countries, work that will illuminate the Canadian case and reveal structural options.

This project requires a major exercise in collaboration. Many devices will integrate the work, including websites, workshops and conferences, and we have designed a tight, coherent management structure to ensure comparable and reliable research results.

Our research will interest the international academic community, for we will speak to general issues about new modes of public management, collaborative government, the power of business in local affairs, and public participation in policy making. In Canada, the information and analyses we will produce should have major impacts on scholarship in several disciplines. We will also introduce many students to the study of municipal matters. More practically, we will disseminate our results widely, so as to help Canadian citizens understand the larger context of the policies they witness near home. We also hope to stimulate decision makers to question their current relations with each other and with social forces, and to improve public policy in Canadian municipalities.