"New Regionalist Metropolitan Action: The Case of the Alberta Capital Region Alliance"

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City Regions in a Globalized World

Globalization is a defining characteristic of the latter few decades of the 20th century; it is reshaping how we trade, communicate, and relate to one another. Continental trading blocks are emerging, and international trade is allowing the free movement of goods, services, labour, and ideas on a scale that was unimaginable only a few decades ago. Information flows easily and inexpensively across international borders thanks to new technologies, as do people and capital. Physical location no longer poses much of a limitation on the interactions between and among communities and individuals resulting in the destabilization of existing centres of authority and security such as the nation state. National governments find they have less capacity to influence the economy given the decreasing significance of state boundaries in the global market place. As a result, new centres of political power are emerging at various levels and the role of regional economies has increased.

While the "low" politics at the local level may have at one time been passed over for "high" politics at the national and, to a lesser extent, the provincial level, it is acknowledged that capacity at the national level is decreasing. Attention is focusing on the local, and, as the oft-quoted Neal Pierce observes, "Cities are the new units of global economic competition." (Peirce 1993, Wallis 1996) Cities, however, must be understood as a subset of the region in which they are located. Only the region has the necessary scale and diversity to compete in the global market. The region contains the totality of the social, economic, and environmental assets that comprise a healthy community such as the labour force, the transportation system, infrastructure, and social capital. Indeed,

economic and other statistics on the comparative "health" of the nation are typically aggregates of regional data.

Scholarly interest in cities and the regions in which they are located is not a new. In the past, considerable attention has been paid to institutional structures of local government, particularly as they relate to equitable and efficient service delivery. More recently governance issues, and in particular, governance issues in a globalizing world have shifted interest from institutions and normative considerations, to the less formal responses to addressing issues of regional governance that are captured under the theme of "new regionalism." This paper provides a case study of one such "new regionalist" response. It examines the Alberta Capital Region Alliance (ACRA), a voluntary, polycentric regional organization that provides the Greater Edmonton Metropolitan region with its only pan-regional venue for coordinated municipal government action and regional advocacy.

ACRA's case is of interest to students of Canadian municipal and metropolitan governance for several reasons. First, the ACRA response to governance challenges in the Alberta capital region stands in sharp contrast to almost all other metropolitan regions in Canada in that it is an example of extreme regional municipal polycentricity. Second, it stands in sharp contrast to claims that restructuring through consolidations and the creation of stronger second-tier municipal governance structures are necessary to promote greater municipal efficiency and effectiveness within metropolitan areas. How well ACRA has been able to meet regional challenges in the absence of a legislatively established pan-regional municipal government organization is a matter for consideration. Third, ACRA provides a key venue to facilitate economic collaboration amongst the region's municipalities to ensure that the region is economically competitive within a continentally and globally integrating world. Again, how well it succeeds in doing so in the absence of radical structural reform is of interest. Finally, ACRA is controversial and it is fragile. We postulate that this is due to a misapprehension among various political actors concerning the essential character of ACRA. Instead of functioning as an ill-conceived and weak version of a regional government or regional special purpose body

(one significant and oft-repeated criticism) it is likely that ACRA's true functionality rests in its ability to reify and vivify an organic concept of region within the Alberta Capital Region.

City Regions and New Regionalism

Trade liberalization, globalization, urbanization, and the down loading of responsibilities to lower levels of government place new demands on cities and the regions in which they exist. At the same time, as important centres of production, distribution, and innovation, city-regions are beginning to engage in fierce inter urban competition for mobile capital and for labour. This competition typically has been measured in economic terms and is not limited to the international arena, but includes the competition between cities and regions within the same country. But a region's overall well being is not simply a reflection of its economic prosperity. The literature is increasingly taking an expansive view of what gives a city-region a competitive advantage. Specifically, notions of "quality of life" are considered, which can include diversity (Florida 2000), cultural capital (Scott 2000), social capital (Wallis 1998, Wallis 1998a, Putnam 2000) as well as the spatial clustering of individuals or firms in a given geographic area (Gertler 2001, Porter 1999). While it is not the purpose of this paper to provide an exhaustive examination of this literature, suffice it to say studies suggest that mobile workers in the new knowledge economy thrive in a milieu that is rich in cultural opportunities, diverse demographically, and progressive in thinking. They gravitate to places where there are lots of opportunities to interact with like-minded individuals in "networks of civic engagement" (Putnam 2000). While a particular city may be able to cover these bases in its bid to be "competitive," it is far more likely that the scale of a region will allow it to make the more successful argument.

Although the focus on the city and the region as the economic drivers of the nation is fairly recent, the debate over how to affect the best coordination within the region has raged since the Second World War. Modernist notions of rational comprehensive planning demanded a focus on regional structures such as large-scale amalgamations or on the development of regional tiers of local government.

Metropolitan reformers favouring ambitious structural solutions argued that annexation and amalgamation were key to bolstering economic competitiveness. At that time, problems associated with urban sprawl and the decay of the central city were coming into sharp focus, and reformers argued that redefined government structures were key to counter "negative externalities" associated with governmental fragmentation within a given region. Only formal government was conceived as having the authority and the capacity to problem solve and affect cogent decisions at the regional level.

The drive to consolidate was tempered in the 1980s, a decade that saw the ascendancy of public choice that extolled the fragmentation of the metropolitan political authority. Fragmentation provided the citizen-consumer with choice with respect to the provision of services and tax rates in any given region. It also enhanced the market dynamic between municipal units permitting them to collaborate and compete thereby realizing economies of scale and scope and achieving certain administrative efficiencies (Sancton 2000; Bish 2001). At the same time, governments were admonished to "steer" as opposed to "row." This new way of thinking led to the emergence of "New Regionalism." A fluid concept that is frequently used but rarely explicitly defined, New Regionalism suggests that good governance can be achieved through the loose, horizontal and voluntary organization of existing institutions cooperating to achieve common ends. (Norris 2001, 161) In contrast to "Old" regionalism, New Regionalism is less concerned with creating formal structures of government that are provided specific grants of the authority and corresponding coercive capacity, and is more focused on voluntary processes and mechanisms to achieve regional goals. The New Regionalism is about the creation of networked governance in which formal government arrangements are less important than collaborations and cooperation that involves governmental as well other regional organizations.

Both the New and Old regional approaches are concerned with the efficient delivery of services and policy management of regional activities. Advocates of the New Regionalism entertain a place for the Old regionalism in some matters although what form and amount of non-networked governance is appropriate is very much open to

debate. Both the New and Old regionalism are also concerned with economic competitiveness and here too there is an open debate as to the efficacy of approaches and the proper mix. Figure 1 provides an overdrawn comparison between Old and New Regionalism.

Figure 1 Old and New Regionalism Compared[1]

New Regionalism	Old Regionalism
• Governance	• Government
• Process	• Structure
• Open	• Closed
• Collaboration	• Coordination
• Trust	• Accountability
• Empowerment	• Power

New Regionalism is of particular relevance to Alberta's Capital Region, as this region is one of Canada's most polycentric or "fragmented" CMAs. This polycentricity is not a historical accident but the consequence of an alignment of political forces and hardened positions that have evolved over decades of metropolitan tensions, and failed Old Regionalism proposal and experiments. Thus today co-ordination of the activities of these disparate municipalities comes through cooperative and collaborative action. Central to this is a voluntary alliance created by the municipalities—the Alberta Capital Region Alliance. If there is a contemporary Canadian region in which the value of New Regionalism approaches might be glimpsed it is the Alberta Capital Region. In the following section the polycentric character of the Alberta Capital Region is briefly examined as a prelude to the next section that examines historical events that led to the

creation of ACRA. ACRA itself is also examined. From these explorations the paper will explore more closely the politics of ACRA and, in a subsequent analysis section, query the New Regionalism credentials of ACRA, and the Alliance's strengths, limitations and prospects. Among the prospects considered is ACRA's effectiveness in aiding the Capital Region embrace the competitiveness challenge.

Governance in the Alberta Capital Region

The Edmonton region is numerically polycentric comprising 23 municipal authorities. Seventy-one percent[2] of the Capital Region's 943,768population[3] is concentrated in the City of Edmonton. There is a mix of municipalities in the Capital Region which has a large core city, three smaller cities, three geographically large rural municipalities, a "specialized municipality," nine towns and four villages. Also within the boundaries is a first nation reservation, and major military base. The core city has two major suburban communities adjacent to it and several other smaller urban communities that are proximate. A significant portion of the Capital Region's and the province's heavy and petrochemical industries are located in the municipalities outside of Edmonton. The Specialized Municipality (Strathcona County) includes a major urban centre (the Urban Service Area of Sherwood Park) within the County's expansive rural lands. In population terms the County is the fourth largest municipality in the province. If the population of the region's three largest municipalities were combined it would account for 84 percent of the regional population.

Governance, of course, is not confined to the formal structure of municipal government. Within the Capital region there is a regional airports authority, an economic development alliance, a regional sewage commission, and a region wide water

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purchasers' consortium (EMRPC 1994; ACRGR 2000). There are a number of sub-regional arrangements involving regional solid waste management authorities, a host of sub-regional recreational authorities, sub-regional water systems, and soon to be disbanded emergency response services authorities outside the core city. School authorities are not truly regional although with school authority consolidation in the mid-1990s the authorities have become large and cater to major sub-regions of the metropolitan area. The Capital Health Authority unquestionably is regional as it too was the result of provincially directed health authority consolidations completed in the mid-1990s. In addition to Capital Health the region boasts a number of regional and sub-regional single purpose authorities. There are also numerous collaborative and cooperative arrangements which extend across a number of important municipal functions although it is perhaps worth noting that the core city often does not participate in these. No comprehensive catalog of regional non-governmental or civic organizations exists. All the same it is worth noting that recently a regional chamber of commerce was established and that a new organization, the River Valley Alliance, has been established to protect and develop the region's extensive river valley and ravine system for recreational and related activities.

One crucial and final note regarding the structure of the Alberta Capital Region is that there exists no regional authority to establish regional land use policy and to regulate regional land use. There was such a regional authority but as will be amply clear in the section that follows, regional political cleavages and radical provincial policy reform combined to eliminate these authorities. The Alberta Capital Region Alliance directly derives its existence from these developments.

Regional Planning, Regional Governance and ACRA

Over the years various study commissions aimed at creating "a more rational order" within the region. These commissions have largely gone for naught notwithstanding the fact that small municipalities adjacent such as Jasper Place were drawn into Edmonton in

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[3] The Alberta Capital Government Review *First Report* offers another statistic—81 percent—which is derived from one of this commissioned reports. See *First Report* p.9, and the referenced "A Social Profile

the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1970s the City of Edmonton energetically pursued an annexation initiative to right things once and for all. While the city's boundaries were significantly expanded in December 1980 at the end of a protracted fight, the municipality failed to gain the suburbs or any other complete municipality under its administration. Bitterly for Edmonton, none of the major industrial assessment was annexed into city limits. The bitterness was not restricted to Edmonton as the City's annexation initiative was expensive for all involved costing something in the order of $7 million combined expenditures by the involved parties (Masson 1994, 163). Ample amounts of ill will were generated in the surrounding municipalities where the City was viewed as predatory.

It was in this hard regional climate, if not in response to it, that in 1980 the Province of Alberta reconstituted the Edmonton District Planning Commission by dividing it in two. One part would become the Yellowhead Regional Planning Commission which addressed regional planning matters to the west of the Capital region and the second would become the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission (EMRPC) which addressed concerns within the broad boundaries of the Edmonton CMA. (Dale 1997) Edmonton's neighbours viewed the new commission with deep suspicion as the Edmonton council members held nine of twenty-seven board positions. This was a greater proportion than under the Edmonton District Planning Commission arrangement and it effectively meant that Edmonton city councillors (and urban councillors in general) possessed opportunities to participate directly in subdivision approval for municipalities not granted their own subdivision approval authority by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. That is, the City and urban members had direct voice in subdivision approvals in the region's rural municipalities and in small urban municipalities. With its dominant population, the City of Edmonton had its own issues since, including the fact that under legislation regional plans required ratification by two-thirds of the Commission's Board. At that time the City enjoyed over three-quarters of the region's population and to not able to have a definitive say in such important issues as the regional plan's siting of major industry rankled.

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of the Alberta Capital Region", Community Consulting Services, November 1999.

The politics of planning commission representation was not limited to the Capital Region even though in this locale it may have been especially intense. Masson observes that there was broad dissension over the representational arrangements of the commissions through out the province (Masson 1994, 422) and that despite the fact that smaller urban and rural municipalities were over-represented on the boards, rural criticism of the bodies was most pronounced. Rural authorities lobbied for one-municipality-one-vote provisions or, during the consultations associated with the development of revised provincial planning legislation in the early 1990s, for the wholesale elimination of the commissions and mandatory regional plans. With advent of the so-called Klein Revolution commencing in earnest in 1994, the rural and other detractors of the commissions would get their wish; the second installment of Alberta's new *Municipal Government Act* (1995) did away with the structures and all mandatory comprehensive regional planning.

By 1994 the EMRPC member communities were grappling with the reality that the province was moving toward the elimination of regional planning commissions, and began to discuss how a regional entity could be created and maintained. Thus, with the new legislating in the offing, the EMPRC adopted a business plan to provide a framework for the new regional entity, initially named the Capital Region Forum (Capital Region Forum 1995). In effect this was to be a "life boat" into which the sinking commission would invest its most important ideals with the hope of saving them from the provincial edict eliminating regional planning commissions across the provinces.

The Forum's mission statement would see to "resolve regional issues and develop collective support for initiatives benefiting the metropolitan Edmonton Region" (Alberta Capital Region Forum 1996, 7). The goal of the Forum was to "promote and improve harmony and cooperation amongst" the region's municipalities, and "to promote and encourage cooperation and collaboration" (Capital Region Forum 1995, 8). Indeed, the 1995 business plan introduced the proposal under the heading "A New Era of Inter-municipal Cooperation" (Capital Region Forum 1995, 3). The Forum also dedicated itself

to promoting communication among the region's municipalities, resolving regional concerns, and advancing the region.

On paper, a key initiative for realizing the Forum's mission and key collaborative objectives would be the Regional Accord. The initial business plan declared "[o]ur core function will be to provide a stable intermunicipal planning environment through the development of a Regional Accord" (Capital Region Forum 1995, 3). A draft Accord, which was contained in the 1995 business plan, envisioned "[l]and use planning services …coordinated at the regional level to ensure that development occurs in a harmonious and efficient fashion." Further, it stated that "[o]n the basis of our shared commitment to a regional planning approach, we have moved the planning process to a more effective level of integration" (Capital Region Forum 1995, 19). As special committee was to be established to ensure the provisions of the Accord would be implemented and refined over time. In light of the tension over regional planning matters that existed in the region and a Forum boycott by rural and some smaller municipalities, the proposed Accord had a utopian ring.

Other features of the Forum included the prospect for including as Forum members major educational institutions, utility companies, chambers of commerce, Indian bands, provincial government departments and other organizations, albeit as associate members Alberta Capital Region Forum 1996; Dale 1997). Affiliation with these organizations would promote the Forum's effort to develop positive relations and partnerships. The initial business plan envisioned many partnerships between the Forum and others in the region. Also slated for associate membership status were all councillors of member municipalities. Similar to certain U.S. Council of Governments, the Forum would produce certain services for member municipalities. These were divided into two types (or "budget sectors") with the first being regional development services and the second being municipal planning and development services (Capital Region Forum 1995). Both of these services were of the type performed by the disbanded commission. While the Forum had nothing near the personnel, mandate or membership of the old EMRPC, its

founders held the hope that through the Forum these services would not be lost to the region and to municipalities requiring planning and development services.

The Forum's articles allowed for majority vote decisions, although the preferred approach was to arrive at decisions through Board consensus (Capital Region Forum 1995). The voluntary nature and commonweal purposes of the Forum undoubtedly promoted this approach but so too did the need to accommodate the fact that the old EMRPC representation formula was imported into the Forum after failures to arrive at a suitable alternative. Under this arrangement the Edmonton retained its previous nine Board votes, St. Albert and Strathcona County retained two votes each, and the remainder of municipalities possessed one vote each (Dale 1997). This decision caused six of the smaller municipalities to decide against joining the thirteen others that were members of the old commission. Significantly, three of the region's four rural municipalities were among those not joined.

Among the Forum's initial priorities were facilitation of cooperation on environmental matters concerning the North Saskatchewan River, grappling with "fringe" are issues, assaying regional information and electronic communications needs and developing a transportation inventory (Albert a Capital Region Forum 1996). The organization also sought to establish a formal process to manage relations among the members.[4]

By 1997 the Forum began to lose member municipalities, rural municipalities remained outside the organization, and there was growing discontent over a number of matters including the cost of the organization. While the organization operated by consensus, the representation formula was nonetheless a source of discomfort. Further, it was increasingly clear that some of the key issues, and most specifically, the Accord and the growth management mission of the Forum were non-starters with most members. The combination of these issues led the Board to establish a restructuring task force in March

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[4] see"Cooperation in the Edmonton Region: A Protocol for Consensus Building and Issues Resolution."

and to change the mission of the organization at its June 1997 Board meeting (Alberta Capital Region Forum 1998).

The 1997 restructuring produced a different organization although there was a measure of continuity between the old and new Forums. What was retained was the "forum" concept in which inter-municipal communication, facilitation of cooperation, and regional advocacy were central. More succinctly, the new Forum would be redefined as a "regional communications vehicle" providing, among other things, a unified regional "voice" to government. The organization dropped producing direct planning services to area municipalities and resolved to work through member organizations and other providers in the production of regional research. The research agenda was significantly pared back. For example, research into the always controversial regional tax sharing concepts was dropped, as was "needs research into natural areas" (ACRA 1998, 9). Priority attention to the regional environment would slip away. On the service side, proposed joint purchasing and equipment pooling initiatives were dropped. The Forum also scaled back the size of its administration. The Regional Accord idea was silently put aside and with it were pitched the last vestiges of comprehensive planning.

Under the new Articles of Association (ACRA 1997) the Alberta Capital Region Alliance was formally established in name. The transition was now complete. The new articles introduced a governance structure in which one-municipality-one-vote provisions were accepted at the Board level. ACRA's Board would henceforth be comprised of the mayors and reeves of member municipalities and selected others with non-voting status. All elected officials of member municipalities would possess full voting privileges in the General Assembly and the Assembly would take on certain new responsibilities that would give its members some voice in the strategic direction setting of the Alliance. The region's CAOs were made non-voting members of the General Assembly and took up important roles in the governance of ACRA including sitting on the Management Committee. Non-municipal associate memberships, which were never pursued under the Forum, were quietly dropped. ACRA, however, would become more energetic in

developing partnerships and becoming involved with other regional organizations in the following years.

ACRA became much more interested in addressing prosperity and partnership matters. ACRA's 1998 Annual Report focused on the work of the Transportation Task Force and initial efforts at fostering a regional growth partnership. At the end of the year ACRA and the University of Alberta formed an informal "Partnership Council" dedicated to exploring research opportunities. In addition to engaging the University, ACRA pursued external relations with the Metropolitan Edmonton Economic Development Team (MEEDT) and the Tourism Partnership Council, and an initiative titled Edmonton Salutes (ACRA 1999).

As a result of these changes and given the high priority ACRA placed on expanding its regional membership, membership began to grow. A new provincial initiative, however, was unquestionably central to bringing all the region's 22 municipalities into the ACRA fold by the end of 1999. In December 1998 the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced the creation of the Alberta Capital Region Governance Review (Alberta Capital Region Governance Review 2000). Even though the policy problem or problems behind the review were never fully articulated, the minister was adamant that the "status quo will not do." In all likelihood the problem was the total absence of rural municipal participation in the Forum and the general lack of any development control or (at that time) convincing regional economic development initiative in the region. The Capital Region was unfavourably compared in the press with Calgary, with suggestions that the southern city was more economically dynamic and competitive owing to its de facto "unicity" status.

Lou Hyndman, a regional grandee, former provincial Tory cabinet minister and recently retired University of Alberta chancellor was selected to head the review. Hyndman's mandate was to "recommend approaches to the governance of the capital region which will address the broad range of challenges and opportunities the region will face over the next 30 years or more" (ACRGR 2000, 7). Hyndman's Final Report was released late in March 2001 although completed in December 2000. While several factors

likely contributed to the report's suspended release, one most certainly had to be the controversy that surrounded proposals on various representational and voting options that would attend Hyndman's provisionally proposed Edmonton Capital Regional Council. So outraged was Edmonton City Council by these proposals that the City Council temporarily withdrew from the Review. The issue was the old one that had been at least partially defused by the ACRA consensus formula. Edmonton wanted representation by population while other municipalities wanted an arrangement that would be otherwise.

In the end, Hyndman proposed a two parallel track approach to strengthening the region: a partnership track and a shared service track. Shared services would build on the extensive bilateral and multilateral shared services arrangements that the Review discovered across the region. Specific focus, however, would be placed on creating region-wide production and delivery systems addressing information sharing, geographic information systems, fire and emergency services, transportation and basic utilities. The centrepiece of the "partnership track" was a regional partnership agreement that would:

- specify how shared priorities and policies will be developed and implemented,

- recognize the anchor role and predominance of the City of Edmonton,

- provide representation for every municipality in the region, and

- feature a predictable, known and understood voting formula that enables formal votes to be taken on motions where consensus is not possible (ACRGR 2001).

Hyndman turned the task of creating the voting formula (which he also suggested should reflect population, diversity and geography) back to the region's municipalities but proposed that participation in the agreement would be mandatory. In other words, he proposed a new tier of government.

With all the effort that went into the Review one would have expected the province to act expeditiously—it didn't. Indeed, it really didn't on Hyndman's recommendations at all. True, the province officially accepted all but two of the Review's recommendations. One of these was that proposing the creation of a formal regional partnership agreement (i.e., a new tier of regional government). In early 2002 the Municipal Affairs minister of

the day encouraged the region's municipalities to provide a report within a quarter with an action plan and timetable to move forward on partnerships in service delivery (ACRA 2000). ACRA would be the vehicle to develop the action plan and timetable. While the Alliance did indeed submit a response to the minister the upshot was that by this time the Governance Review report was resting on a dusty shelf.

ACRA was harmed in some measure by the Governance Review as the conflict excited between Edmonton and the other municipalities opened old and deep regional relationship wounds. However, ACRA also benefited from the Governance Review. Municipalities that were not members of the Alliance were driven into its arms as they recognized that ACRA functioned as an alternative venue for debating the regional governance problematic. Something of a parallel (albeit informal and often hidden) discussion over regional issues occurred under the auspices of the Alliance. This extended sidebar conversation underscored to many that ACRA could indeed function as a forum for discussing regional issues. Hyndman himself came to realize the value of ACRA in this regard. He was also apparently quite taken with the New Regionalism ideation of several academic speakers participating at an ACRA/University of Alberta sponsored symposium on regionalism. This was most evident in proposals for a shared service track and the hope that the region's municipalities would collaborate in shared service production. All the same, proposals under the mandatory participation "partnership track" was clearly the stuff of the Old Regionalism.

It was during the active period of the Governance Review that ACRA begin to find its footing within the mission and objectives declared in 1997. In 1999, the Alliance embraced several new strategic initiatives that would set the tone for its efforts in future years (ACRA 1999a). Competitiveness was clearly at or near the top of the agenda, written formally into the Forum *cum* Alliance's "1997 Three Year Strategic Business Plan." The organization's new mission statement specifically mentioned "developing initiatives benefiting economic competitiveness of the Edmonton metropolitan regions"(ACRA 1996a) as a central purpose; as well as providing a forum for developing strategic alliances and facilitating collective regional action. Project Germany, an effort

inaugurated in 1998 that flowed from Edmonton mayor Bill Smith's Task Force on Manufacturing, would be an important regional effort to attract German and Austrian businesses (IFEU 2001). ACRA members supported and participated in the initiative, and the Alliance served as a forum in which municipal stakeholders monitored the project's progress.[5] The Alliance focused further on economic development through devising a Regional Growth Partnership. This effort was quickly joined with MEEDT's efforts and the even more ambitious Economic Development Edmonton (EDE)[6] Greater Edmonton Regional Economic Development initiative. Consequently, ACRA began to support and help foster the Greater Edmonton Competitiveness Strategy, an initiative led by EDE but involving the region's businesses, municipalities with federal and provincial government participation. On its own, ACRA worked to engage elements of the business community through various informal representations.

Transportation was another important focus for the Alliance and this received a great boost, as did the Alliance itself through an opportunity delivered by both serendipity and sensible regional leadership. In 1998 the minister of Transportation allotted significant funds to both the Calgary and Edmonton regions. Local leaders in the Capital Region were quick to point out, however, that the region was short-changed by a parity measure in the neigbourhood of $10 million. The minister responded that funds would be made available to the Capital Region if municipal leaders could agree on priorities. Perhaps to their own surprise, the municipal leadership convened within ACRA agreed that a regional ring road (Anthony Henday Drive) was their unanimous choice for a transportation funding priority. Moving this project ahead became the centrepiece of ACRA's multi-year strategic transportation plans, the first being presented to the government in 2000. Among other transportation projects taken up but the Alliance during this period was a coordinated municipal transit review and a regional roads inventory.

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[5] Project Germany is a partnership involving more than 45 public and private sector entities. During its initial pilot project period major funding contributions came from federal government departments (40%), provincial government departments (24%), municipalities (18%), and private sector companies (18%). Source: IFEU, "Project Germany Pilot Project: Evaluation Results." December 4, 2001.
[6] In 2004 Economic Development Edmonton officially changed its name to Edmonton Economic Development (EED). In this paper the EDE reference will be used throughout to designate the organization.

Since the central purpose of the 1997 reform was to remake the organization as a "communications vehicle" for the region, the Alliance dedicated efforts toward communications and advocacy. Obviously there was a blending of these efforts and those relating to economic competitiveness and regional transportation. However, the Alliance was active on several fronts seeking to promote its existence, effect inter-municipal communications, and to press certain ideas upon government. Key strategies adopted during this period included developing partnerships with senior levels of government and with regional businesses. One of the more unusual efforts was to sponsor a "Pride of the Region" evening (a massive party) during the 8th IAAF 2001World Championships (2001c). A regional web site, monthly newsletters, and other promotional materials were also distributed by the organization.

Other priority strategies focused on improving municipal services in the region and developing regional leadership (ACRA 1999a). Both of these appeared in the 1997 plan but in the first matter, the Alliance suspended initiatives so that they did not conflict with the Alberta Capital Region Governance Review. Thus proposed research into service sharing, exploration of collaborative opportunities for emergency response services, waste management and water services sharing were shelved, as was research on service sharing precedents. A service sharing study later would be commissioned through the Western Centre for Economic Research at the University of Alberta. The 2000 business plan proposal to "create mechanism to conduct state-of-the-region reports" was not followed up, and proposal for developing a regional GIS inventory that would enable location analysis services was held but later initiated through generous provincial seed funding. One initiative that did go forward but was dropped for lack of consensus was a regional flat rate telephone proposal. This scheme proposed flat rate calls across the whole of the region (and beyond) but with a small additional cost to Edmonton residents. The City rejected the notion seeing no benefit to its residents. Regional leadership development activities included partnering with the University of Alberta to establish a Partnership Council and holding a number of well attended educational symposia and conferences.

In the post-ACRGR period the Alliance retained its membership, took up certain shelved initiatives and maintained its strategic priority focus on transportation, economic development, municipal services, regional leadership, and communications and advocacy (i.e., external relations). Some of these initiatives reflect foci recommended by the Governance Review, which ACRA supported and the province funded. A ten-year transportation plan has been completed and the Alliance appears to have successfully lobbied the province to complete Henday Drive by 2011 (Santec 2002). Major work has begun and a contemplated 3-P partnership may hasten completion. A regional transit review was completed in 2002. Economic development initiatives continue with continuing links with regional chambers of commerce, the Greater Edmonton Competitiveness strategy, Edmonton Capital Region and Tourism and the renewed Project Germany. The regional GIS project has gained profile and importance within the Alliance's priorities for the 2003-2005 period and is increasingly seen as a key economic development tool (ACRA 2002a). The province has put additional funding into the project. This project is envisioned "to enable the region to quickly assemble '*competitive intelligence'* to serve as the region's primary tool to promote itself." (ACRA 2003a). It will include a "site locator" that will provide businesses with opportunities to survey properties and their characteristics on a region-wide basis. It will also apparently include layers addressing transportation models and other regional services amenable to GIS mapping. Parenthetically, and to understand the change in strategic focus that existed in the early days of the Forum, it is interesting to note that the GIS initiative contains no environmental inventory layer.

Among recently inaugurated municipal services initiatives there has been the development of a regional water emergency response plan and a regional emergency response plan (ACRA, 2004a). Further, upon completion of a study on shared services, the Alliance appears interested in returning to a facilitative role in which it will promote "opportunities for cooperating including the identification of shared services that are affordable, realistic and cost effective" (ACRA 2002a, 6). A best practice inventory is also planned as well as new research into regional issues. In league with this the Alliance

continues to foster the prospective development of a regional studies centre which likely will be located at the University of Alberta.

Regional leadership development and the Alliance's external relations focus overlap in significant ways. For example, the 2003-2005 Business Plan now cites gaining recognition of municipalities as a meaning order of government as a strategic priority. Alberta's two municipalities associations are actively pursuing this cause, but with the new Business Plan ACRA (technically a company) is also entering the fray.

The Politics of ACRA

Before evaluating ACRA in terms of its new regionalist credentials and its adequacy in addressing regional issues, it is useful to more directly consider the organization's politics. ACRA politics can be viewed through two lens: the regional planning politics lens and the central city versus suburban and fringe politics lens. Each lens provides a somewhat different view of the political context although admittedly sometimes overlapping views.

It is hardly surprising that with the legacy of contention and conflict inherent within the old regional planning commission system, three rural municipalities and a small number of small urban municipalities did not join the new Forum. They were on the losing end of the inaugural debate that could not establish a representation regime other than that assigned to the old planning commission by the province. The rural municipalities argued for a one-municipality-one vote arrangement. Edmonton, on the other hand, argued for representation by population. The old commission representation was the saw off but again, an unsatisfactory one.

What clearly occurred with the transformation of the Forum to ACRA is that rural and other recalcitrant municipalities were willing to join the Alliance in exchange for a change to the representation system. Specifically, they were willing to join the Forum-*cum*-ACRA with the City's representation reduced to but one of the 22 municipalities. The City, and the other major municipalities for that matter, seem to be willing accept

this change understanding that ACRA would not exist as a venue in which regional growth development would be managed. This compromise suited almost all parties' near-term interests. Likewise, the acceptance of representational scheme wherein the Village of New Serepta (with a population of under 400) would have essentially the same formal voting power as the City of Edmonton with nearly 650,000 population, only could be acceptable if voting was unimportant. This is precisely why a consensus approach dominates the conduct of ACRA business notwithstanding formal provisions for majority voting within the Alliances articles.

The consensus approach is of a particular character. Consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity, at least not insofar as New Serepta is concerned. Within ACRA the preferences of the mayor of the City of Edmonton count for a great deal. There are several reasons for this but most particularly three. First, Edmonton contributes substantially to the finances of the organization. ACRA might survive financially without a city contribution but the burden would significantly shift to other municipalities. Second, most regional initiatives must include the central city if they are to succeed. Simply, it is better to have the mayor and City within the Alliance as opposed to outside as the region's other municipalities need to obtain Edmonton's compliance on any scheme of sizeable ambition. Anyway it is cut, Edmonton has a veto on major matter and with this understood, the mayor is given broad lease to exercise it without open controversy within the Alliance. Finally, there is realization that neither the provincial government nor major regional business players would accept ACRA decisions if Edmonton did not provide some sort of positive support. Thus there is more than meets the eye concerning the putative consensus approach of Alliance decision making.

The politics of Edmonton's participation in ACRA deserves additional comment. Although the mayor and the municipality have an effective veto over important regional proposals, the returns to the central city in matters of greatest importance to do not appear to be especially high. This can be understood when examining the dimensions of "the metropolitan problem" as defined by Williams and colleagues some thirty five years ago (Williams *et al* 1969, 137-139). The metropolitan problem actually comprises three

problems: maintaining the system, unequal distribution of resources and services, and border relationships. Maintaining the system involves fostering spatial specialization within the regional economy while also providing " the basic service necessary for the development of each subarea and means through which they may be accessible to one another…" (Williams *et al* 1969,137). That is, the problem is to differentiate (in matters such as industry siting, land preservations, and residential allotments) while providing regional transportation and communication infrastructures that facilitate accessibility. Also necessary and related is the provision of basic utilities that are efficient only within broad scale economies. The problem of unequal distribution of resources and services recognizes the obvious: wealth or the lack of it often becomes concentrated within municipal boundaries creating social and other inequities. Municipal boundaries can "balkanize" the metropolitan region and one common result is to place the incidence of the burden for high cost facilities and services on the central city. Depending on the size of the city, the composition of its population, and its finances such a burden can seriously weigh on the municipality while surrounding municipalities and their citizens are able to escape costs through the convenience of local boundaries. This problem is compounded where comprehensive planning regimes have deliberately settled industrial and other high revenue producing commercial entreprises outside but proximate to the central city so that housing and commercial services are located within the central city border. Finally, and related to the foregoing, the border relationship issue involves problems of spillovers, "free riders" and diseconomies of scale and scope. Spillovers and free riding are by no means isolated to metropolitan politics but these problems can gain intensity particularly if the spillover effects are serious and free riding is rampant. Scale and scope economy issues are also not restricted to metropolitan systems but they are perhaps the most pronounced within them.

All aspects of the metropolitan problem are evident in the Capital Region and considerable controversy has revolved around each. Edmonton's bold annexation move of 1979 was calculated to deal with all of them through the creation of what effectively would have been a unicity structure. The Alberta Capital Region Governance Review touched upon these same issues making clear that there was a need to address regional

growth management, service sharing, and free-rider problems in the region among other things. While the City favoured an authoritative regional body that would address the metropolitan problem, it was loath to enter into any arrangement that it could not control.

Edmonton's participation in suffocating the Review's recommendations should not suggest that it had abandoned concern over elements of the metropolitan problem. Similarly, Edmonton's continued funding of ACRA and its embracing Hyndman's shared services proposals should not be taken as reflecting a political "sea change" at city hall. In March 2004, the City returned to the regional issue with its administration defining policy four options upon which to base a regional strategy (Edmonton 2004). Options ranged from going it alone to adopting a formal regional policy in which the City acts as a good neighbour and regional leader. Other options included "cooperative competition" and what best might be described as a bald "utilitarian" approach ("What's in it for us?"). Discussions amongst council members made it quite clear that there was little consensus on the best strategic approach. Individual councillors subscribed to options across the whole range with some favouring a direct and aggressive competitive approach and at least one (but perhaps no more) favouring Edmonton taking an active leadership role in the region. The bulk of council sentiment rested in the middle options with the utilitarian approach ("If it is in our interest, we're interested") seemingly the most favoured but not rejecting collaboration in areas where pay-backs are less than fully guaranteed.

Discussions also made clear that support within the Council was by no means unanimous for ACRA and that many councillors and the civic administration believed that most aspects of "the metropolitan problem" were unresolved. Councillors complained that surrounding municipalities benefit from the very existence of the city and do not pay their fair share for its operations or adequately share revenues from industrial and commercial enterprises located in the area or on the City's borders. It was asserted that regional residents use the core city's major cultural facilities, road systems and other infrastructure while paying little or nothing in tariffs. Suburbanites and others across the region were charged with being able to avoid costs associated with social housing, policing and special services required by the needy and by a more

heterogeneous and volatile local population by simply living on the other side of a municipal border. ACRA was portrayed by its detractors as either being ineffective in addressing these issues or, more severely, existing as an impediment to resolving these matters. The latter point was founded in the accusation that the existence of the Alliance blunts the City's ability to make direct representations to the provincial government. Some councillors blame the province for this circumstance, stating that the province requires the City to negotiate with region's municipalities thus binding Prometheus. All and all the official mood in the central city is sour on the region notwithstanding professions and some timid support of regional initiatives including paying a large share of ACRA's meagre core budget.

ACRA Considered

The New Regionalism character of ACRA has been suggested in various sections of this paper but this claim has not been systematically considered. It is clear from the most cursory review that ACRA is certainly not an Old Regionalism entity to the extent that it is not about government, structure, accountability or coercive power. Indeed, when contrasted with the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission, it is clear how *un*-Old Regionalism the present arrangement is. Where the Commission had teeth to approve general plans and subdivision applications, ACRA has no ability to exert formal powers over member municipalities. Further, the structure and voting rules of the Commission were such that there was a deliberate metering of power (in what was hoped to be a delicate balance accommodating the politics of regional planning in the region). While ACRA's voting rules clearly involve their own metering (the City and other larger municipalities are neutered), the very voluntary character of the Alliance, Edmonton's informal veto, and the consensus nature of decision making eliminate any prospect of coercive power. The Commission was clearly "closed" to the extent that it operated within specifically legislated sections of the *Planning Act* and under provincial regulations and guidelines. ACRA is also "closed" to the extent that it has restricted its membership but, as a Part 9 Company, it can admit any organization as a member and has augmented its municipal membership since the signing of new Articles of Association.

Whether the Alliance is fully a New Regionalism structure by Wallis' account is a different question. On paper at least the Alliance (and perhaps even more so, the Forum), would seem to be New Regionalism organization. The network governance ideal facilitating cooperation between and among the region's municipalities is very much evident in the Alliance's mission statements. Moreover, as is evident from declared objectives repeated in more than one of its three-year business plans, the Alliance seeks out partnerships with other regional organizations and major regional entities. ACRA claims success in linking to chambers of commerce, regional single purpose entities such as the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority, Edmonton Economic Development, MEEDT and others. Thus, it is putatively open. Enfranchisement of all councillors of ACRA municipalities as voting members of the General Assembly created a more open membership although perhaps at a cost to openness reflected in representation by population. But arguably such representation by population calculations is not especially important in the New Regionalism scheme that seeks above all engagement of regional interests and organizations. New regionalism relies on trust and empowerment as substitutes for tight measures of accountability and power. It is clear that the organization does seek to empower its members and other regional organizations. A case in point concerns economic development activities where the Alliance provided a useful forum for Project Germany, a project that only makes sense within a regional conceptualization. Consensus and partnering appear to be the policy and delivery "technologies" favoured over structure although structure is important in the constitution of the ACRA Board and its Management Committee.

Although ACRA conforms in many ways to the New Regionalism ideal, it by no means fully achieves the ideal. First, although putatively open, ACRA may not be as open as the original Forum insofar as provisions for including associate members from commerce, utilities, educational institutions and other regional entities were dropped. ACRA is at the moment a council of governments that seeks out relations and partnerships with non-governmental entities but eschews providing them places at the ACRA table. Perhaps this limitation is a temporary one though there appears to be little expressed interest or enthusiasm for opening the membership to other regional

organizations. Second, while trust among members is the cement of all voluntary alliances and thus it is at the heart of New Regionalism approaches, it remains largely absent in the Alliance. Years of strain flowing from planning politics, annexation initiatives, and governance reviews exciting divisiveness have not helped matters in the slightest. The architects of the Forum understood the problem at the onset declaring in the original Business Plan "underlying apprehension and mistrust have caused some regional municipalities to indicate a reluctance to participate in any regional organization" (Capital Region Forum 1995, 4). This comment initially applied to the region's rural and a few small urban authorities. More recently it reflects the City of Edmonton's ambiguous position.

A list of ACRA's accomplishments could be rehearsed in an effort to state its present value but this has, in part, already been done. A more interesting analysis is to consider the Alliance's value to the municipality that presently finds it of least value—The City of Edmonton. There are three apparent reasons why Edmonton has participated in ACRA and will likely continue to participate in the Alliance. First, ACRA has proven that it can be a useful venue for addressing some aspects of "the metropolitan problem." Specifically, the City gained valuable support in pushing the province for completion of the first and most important sections to the Anthony Henday Drive ring road. Moving the road up on the province's priority list (or, at least, fixing it on the list) has been an ACRA victory and also one for the City. Regional economic development initiatives including Mayor Bill Smith's Project Germany and EDE's Greater Edmonton Regional Economic Development initiative have directly benefited from ACRA's existence. While it may have been possible for EDE to engage economic development organizations across the region, ACRA's preliminary efforts to promote regional economic development created a ready structure within which regional economic development agencies could collaborate.

Second, participating in ACRA does not involve much effort or that much investment on Edmonton's part. Edmonton's seat at the table nominally requires participation by the mayor and a few interested councillors. Most Edmonton council members don't bother to show up at General Assembly meetings even when the events are held down the street

from City Hall as was recently the case. The city manager participates in perfunctory fashion. Given the obvious power of these actors and the City's centrality in the region all of this is tolerated if not accepted. In other words, the low cost of being a player makes continuing Edmonton participation worth it.

Third, there is a downside to not participating. The provincial government has been willing to entertain Edmonton and Calgary proposals for special consideration as central cities; the most notable recent example is the five cents a litre transfer of gasoline tax to these largest municipalities. Buoyed by success on several fronts, Edmonton and Calgary have forged something of an alliance of their own. The strategy has been deliberate with the City going so far as to view collaboration with Calgary and with the region in zero sum terms. Working with Calgary makes considerable sense and may produce additional reward. However, in other matters the province requires that the City collaborate with its neighbours if it wants to access funding and, perhaps even, provincial political largesse. Edmonton therefore deals with the region with an eye to the province.

Finally there is the *realpolitik* question of "as opposed to what?" At present, in Alberta, it is clear that there is really little in the way of alternatives to regional collaboration of the sort fostered through ACRA. There will be no regional government in the Capital Region and annexation on any significant scale is a non-starter. Although it is clear that ACRA cannot presently serve as an effective venue for discussing, much less resolving controversial elements of the Capital Region's "metropolitan problem" it exists as a venue in which such discourse can be fostered. Certain City officials understand this point, as do officials from many of the surrounding communities.

Yet to focus on the "metropolitan problem" (which truly concerns problems of municipalities relating to other municipalities) may miss a crucial if not the most significant functionality promoting ACRA's existence. Regionalism is not something that many citizens naturally think about, and the same can be said about most governmental policy makers. This is understandable for a variety of reasons. But if globalism and economic integration are indeed here to stay and metropolitan regions, not just central cities, are the proper economic and social units of analysis, then the reification of the

region is of great importance. Such a project involves fostering a collective regional consciousness among regional leaders (and within portions of the regional citizenry), and the knitting together of governance networks and other elements of a regional social fabric (Wallis 1994, Wallis 1994a). This project clearly goes beyond the narrowly defined metropolitan problem, which does not view the region within the large global context, and beyond the ideation and solutions provided by the Old Regionalism.

ACRA can be at centre stage in this large, nascent project of regional reification. Its very existence as a forum in which regional issues can be articulated and practicably considered within a regional context, if not acted upon, should contribute to fostering a regional consciousness. Too be sure, serious disputes arise within ACRA that can be harmful to regional progress, and sometimes others does not necessarily provide foundations for enduring relations. The larger effect, however, of contemplating regional issues and opportunities in their fullness and attempting to facilitate solutions through governmental as well as non-governmental organizations should be of considerable positive effect.

This essay is not the place to specify a strategic program that will assist in operationalizing regionalism in the Alberta Capital Region.[7] All the same, at the moment if there is anything that might assist ACRA in this it is likely to be entertaining even greater openness in the Alliance's membership. While jettisoning the "council of governments" foundation might not be prudent in the near future, bringing other regional organizations to the table in some formal capacity would underscore the region-building functionality of the Alliance. It might also help discipline governments in a positive way to loosen widen their narrow, jurisdictionally focused perspectives.

An ACRA without a mandated service delivery function is something that the City of Edmonton is on record opposing (Edmonton 2002). It may be, however, precisely such an organization that has the greatest opportunity for success given the character of Alberta Capital Region politics, and given the need to reify the region in the manner discussed

above. The regional alliance has a long way to go as does the region. Moreover, it is clear that progress on certain matters such as shared service delivery, regional growth management and regional tax sharing are most likely going to need to be handled outside ACRA through bilateral and multilateral arrangements or through provincially imposed solutions. In the event of these developments, ACRA's functionality as a regional forum and an agent of regional identity will remain.

Conclusion

Globalization is changing trade, communication, and social relations, it is changing the way in which we govern ourselves. This is occurring as a result of the shifting locus of political and economic power "downward" from the national and provincial levels of government to the regional and municipal levels. But a change in how we govern ourselves is also happening with respect to the shift of emphasis from institutions of government to the networks of influence that are captured within governance models that can be described as "New Regionalist" in character. While New Regionalism is a fairly fluid concept, its basic tenants are that good governance are best achieved through loose, horizontal, and voluntary co-ordination among existing organizations to achieve goals that are in the collective best interest of the region. The New Regionalism also asserts that the metropolitan region, and its hinterland, are the proper focus of urban and competitiveness studies, and that the elements of good governance and economic competitiveness include social vitality and creativity.

An example of this networked model of governance is found in the Alberta Capital Region Alliance. As a response to 21st century governance challenges ACRA is significant, if not unique, in the Canadian context as its very existence stands in sharp contrast to the formal structural solutions that have recently been pursued in a number of other provinces. The "solutions" to the regional governance problem have been imposed by provincial governments through amalgamations or the development of second tier municipal government structures. In contrast, the Alberta capital region stands out as an

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[7] See Dodge (1996) for what is perhaps the best prescription of a comprehensive approach to inventing a region.

extreme example of municipal polycentricity, and little effort is being expended to change this fundamental regional characteristic.

This is not to suggest that ACRA is without critics. Its structure and voting rules are meant to be a compromise but appear to please only some members. Moreover, ACRA's voluntary nature, its consensual decision making, and Edmonton's informal veto power leaves the organization open to charges that it is ineffectual and lacks "teeth." While its largest member provides financial support for ACRA, its attitude toward the organization can best be described as benign neglect. The region's bitter history of annexation attempts and perceptions of fiscal injustice exacerbates these problems by robbing the organization of a fundamental ingredient: trust amongst participants. And with respect to the governance model, ACRA is also deficient in that membership is narrowly defined and includes only governments to the exclusion of non-government entities.

While these criticisms are justified, ACRA has enjoyed some success. These include linking with and creating linkages among chambers of commerce and regional singe purpose entities and providing the forum for the conception and legitimization of regionally based economic development and transportation projects. If city regions are indeed the most fundament economic and social constituents of a new global order, then the importance of this point should not be underestimated.

But ACRA's most stellar accomplishment also may be its least obvious. One of the central assumptions of New Regionalism is that the regional cooperation and coordination is best achieved in an environment of empowerment wherein participants recognize the mutual benefits of coordinated regional action and work together to achieve common goals. In this, ACRA has achieved something of significance: it provides a forum for this to happen. It provides a venue where issues of regional importance can be discussed and debated. As such, it is the venue where the concept of "region" was seeded and from which a regional consciousness can take flight. While it is clear that ACRA as an effective expression of the New Regionalism ideal is still very much in its infancy, its greatest contribution is that its very existence gives legitimacy to the concept of region. From this new understanding of how collective interests are defined a new regional identity has the possibility of emerging and it is this identity as it is expressed in a regional social fabric that will underpin future successes.

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