

Creating Special Purpose Bodies: Berlin, Ontario in the Age of the ABC*

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Draft Version

I

Late on the evening of November 12, 1896, workers at the Hibner Furniture Company in Berlin, Ontario, were cleaning up after a long shift. In the paint shop on the factory's third floor, workers dipped their hands in benzine and began to scrape the evidence of the day's labour from their skin. Gas light illuminated the room. One worker, a boy of fifteen, was irritated by a gas flame near his face, and he reached up absentmindedly to push the flame away.

The boy's hands, still coated in benzine, immediately caught fire. He shook wildly, desperate to extinguish the flames; tiny missiles of burning benzine launched from his hands and streaked across the room. One tiny fireball landed in a bucket of benzine on the floor, which promptly exploded. The room was now in flames.

Six buckets of water sat near the door, along with a box of sand, prepared in advance for just such a scenario. A large tank and some hose stood ready for use a few steps away. But the boys in the paint shop, frightened by the intensity of the flames, fled from the room, and the fire began to spread.

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What followed was a sequence of events so extreme in their accumulated incompetence that it is tempting to picture the scene in the crackling black-and-white of a Buster Keaton slapstick: the town's alarm bell fails to ring; the fire brigade, when it finally arrives, finds its hoses clogged with mud and dirt; after ten minutes' frantic scraping and poking, the unclogged hoses release a stream of water so impotent that it does little more than to splash meaninglessly upon the factory's superheated walls; the fire brigade, overcome by heat and frustration, finally surrenders the building to the flames, training the sad dribble of their hoses on the surrounding structures as the main building burns to the ground.¹

For a despondent Daniel Hibner, the factory's owner, the fire was the latest in a long list of frustrations. "The winter is upon us," Hibner complained in an interview the next day. "Berlin's shipping facilities are not the best and I may decide to go east."² Inevitably, the vulturine enticements poured in, from Trenton, Brantford, Paris, and beyond. A town outside Montreal kindly offered Hibner a fully-equipped woodworking factory, along with a \$15,000 bonus, if he moved his business there.³ Hibner said loudly that he would need at least \$5,000 to rebuild in Berlin. The town's leaders sprang into action, and rallied to pass a bylaw providing Hibner with his requested funds.⁴

1. This account of the Hibner fire is taken from the *Berlin Daily Record*, especially 11-13-1896, 11-16-1896, and 11-17-1896. The fire is also discussed in Elizabeth Bloomfield, "City Building Processess in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930" (PhD diss., University of Guelph, 1981), 215-219; and in Elizabeth Bloomfield and Gerald Bloomfield, *A History of Municipal Water Services in the Region of Waterloo* (Waterloo: Regional Municipality of Waterloo Engineering Department, 1998), 11-12. The boy's age became a matter of brief controversy after Hibner was accused of employing too many youths, and Hibner insisted that the boy was nineteen. I believe that the initial report of the boy's age is more reliable. See *Berlin Daily Record* 11-13-1896 and 11-17-1896.

2. *Berlin Daily Record* 11-13-1896

3. For reports on these offers, see the *Berlin Daily Record* 11-16-1896, 12-12-1896

4. The story is in fact a bit more complicated: though the bylaw passed on December 14, 1896, provincial legislation required that bonuses receive two-thirds support of property owners. The vote did not pass this threshold, and an initial request for an exemption was rejected. The town tried again, and the private bills committee eventually relented and approved of the bonus in early 1898. See *Berlin Daily Record* 12-15-1896; *Berlin News Record* 03-10-1897, 12-07-1897, 12-29-1897; and Bloomfield, "City Building Processess in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930," 217-219.

So Hibner remained in Berlin. But what about the wider concerns? What about the faulty alarm system, the incompetent fire brigade? In a letter to the local newspaper, an anonymous writer proposed a solution. “The Fire and Water Committee will always remain the same as long as it is in the hands of men that have to be elected by the people,” he wrote. “If you leave it to the Council the town will burn down. What we want - if it can be had - is a Board of Fire Commissioners with power to act.”⁵ The newspaper’s editor agreed:

How to deal with the [Fire] problem is the question of the hour. Can the council successfully cope with it? We think not. Experience has taught that what is everybody’s business soon becomes nobody’s and that such an important department of the public service can be best administered by a board semi-independent of the municipal body.⁶

The Berlin town council quickly took up the cause, asking its solicitor to report on the relevant legislation. The solicitor responded with disappointing news: there was no provision in the provincial statutes for a board of fire commissioners. “When the Legislature again takes down the municipal act for repairs,” wrote the editor of the *Berlin Daily Record*, “it should cover over this opening for improvements with a Fire Commissioners patch.”⁷

In the end, then, nothing changed. Daniel Hibner stayed in Berlin. Fire protection remained the preserve of a committee of council. Life moved on. But in the town’s immediate reaction to the fire, we have witnessed a peculiar urge, an urge to remove authority from a general-purpose government and to place it in the hands of a separate, semi-independent body. What we have witnessed, in other words, is the urge to create what have come to be known as the ABCs of Canadian local government, the agencies, boards, and commissions which populate the local landscape even to the present day.

Once we are awake to the ABC urge in Berlin, we can see it everywhere. By the time of the Hibner fire, responsibility for education, public health, libraries, and parks had already been handed over to

5. *Berlin Daily Record* 11-24-1896

6. *Berlin Daily Record* 11-24-1896

7. *Berlin Daily Record* 12-09-1896

special purpose bodies. Ten years later, the town had added the water system, the gas and light system, the street railway, the sewer system, and the police force to the list. By the beginning of the First World War, the situation in Berlin resembled the one described by S.M. Baker, who wrote in *Municipal World* in 1917 that the Ontario town council had become “little more than a tax-levying body with little or no control.”⁸

Berlin’s adoption of special purpose bodies was not unusual. Towns and cities across the province were doing much the same thing in their own municipal spheres. In one respect, however, Berlin’s experience *was* unique. Among the fifty largest towns and cities in Ontario, just one municipality consistently ranked among the earliest adopters: Berlin. From library boards to water commissions, planning boards to conservation authorities, Berlin was consistently at the front of the pack, among the first (in some cases *the* first) in the province to adopt.⁹

For an unassuming town in the heart of Ontario, this is a rather peculiar claim to fame. What made Berlin so enthusiastic about special purpose bodies? Why was Berlin so eager to adopt? And what can Berlin teach us about the meaning of special purpose bodies in the age of the ABC?

II

The story begins with envy. In 1890, Berlin’s nearest neighbour, Waterloo, became the second municipality in the province to create a Board of Park Management, and in 1893, Waterloo officially opened its magnificent new park, Westside, to widespread acclaim.¹⁰ Townsfolk in Berlin, irritated by the flocks of Berlinites migrating to Westside

8. *Municipal World* 27 (1917). Quoted in John C. Weaver, “Tomorrow’s Metropolis’ Revisited: A Critical Assessment of Urban Reform in Canada, 1890-1920,” in *The Canadian City*, ed. Gilber A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1984), 472.

9. This is based on a dataset constructed by the author. Principal sources are Municipal Financial Returns at the Archives of Ontario (RG 19-142) and, for library boards, the Annual Report of the Minister of Education. The dataset includes adoption data for library boards, water commissions, light commissions, boards of park management, and conservation authorities, near-complete data for police commissions, and scattered data for planning boards. These data have been checked against available secondary sources where possible.

10. The park is now known as “Waterloo Park”. Waterloo was the second municipality in the province, after Port Arthur (1888) to adopt the Public Parks Act. For a

on weekends and holidays, resolved to build a park of their own; the town needed “something after the style of Westside park, only on a larger scale.”¹¹ A group of leading citizens assembled a petition with 264 signatures asking the town council “for the adoption of the Public Parks Act and to pass a by-law to provide for the purchase of [land for the new park].”¹²

Technically speaking, to adopt the Public Parks Act meant nothing more than to transfer responsibility for the town’s parks from a committee of council to a special purpose board. For Berlinites, however, eager to mimic Waterloo’s success, it meant something else: a spectacular new park in the heart of town. So when council introduced a bylaw in September of 1894 to adopt the Public Parks Act, and submitted the bylaw to the people for a vote, the subsequent debate had more to do with plans for the park than with the relative merits of special purpose administration. Of foremost concern was a proposal for a large man-made lake in the park, a proposal that some loved and others derided as a “slimy, odoriferous frog pond.”¹³

Still, over the din of the frog pond controversy, *some* discussion of the potential park board could be heard. A few town councillors, led by Dr. Levi Clemens, argued that a park board would be too powerful, and that it was foolish to remove so important an issue from the direct administration of council. J.R. Eden, a prominent supporter of the bylaw, disagreed:

Dr. Clemens has questioned the advisability of putting such a large undertaking in the hands of commissioners, yet the Free Library Board is a good illustration of the way such public matters are conducted by citizens appointed by the council; the Free Library Board have a right to expend a

general overview of the history, see J.R. Wright, *Urban Parks in Ontario* (Toronto: Province of Ontario Ministry of Tourism / Recreation, 1983); for the early history of Waterloo Park, see Clayton Wells, “A Historical Sketch of the Town of Waterloo, Ontario,” *Waterloo Historical Society* 16 (1928): 22–67; Margaret Zavaros, “Waterloo Park, 1890-1990,” *Waterloo Historical Society*, no. 78 (1990): 83–99.

11. *Berlin Daily Record* 08-25-1894. And yes, they called themselves Berlinites.

12. *Berlin Daily Record* 09-04-1894

13. This quotation is from a somewhat later date, but similar sentiments were expressed at the time. See *Berlin Daily Record*, 11-07-1894 for the quotation; for the similar sentiments, see *Berlin Daily Record* 09-25-1894, 09-26-1894.

sum equivalent to half a mill on the total assessment yet probably have never taken half that sum.¹⁴

Moreover, Eden argued, even a passing acquaintance with the North American scene made the decision an easy one; the park board “has been adopted in every city and town of any importance in Canada and the United States and gives better satisfaction than where parks are managed by a town Council”.¹⁵ At the end of September, after a month of debate, the bylaw was submitted to voters and passed.¹⁶ The first six members of the Berlin Board of Park Management were quickly appointed.

Controversy emerged almost immediately. An important argument in the leadup to the bylaw vote had been that the new board would get started on the park right away, offering employment to Berlin workers through the autumn and into the winter.¹⁷ Instead, the new board hesitated, divided between those who wanted to fix up an old park and those who wanted a new park close to the downtown. By the winter of 1894, no contracts had been signed and no progress had been made.¹⁸ In letters to the editor, Berlin’s residents voiced their impatience:

When the citizens of Berlin were asked to express their opinion on the merits of the park by-law it was understood that should the bylaw be carried the park, consisting of Mr. Snider’s property and the Athletic Club park [would] be purchased. With that idea many when to the polls and the bylaw was

14. *Berlin Daily Record* 09-26-1894.

15. *Berlin Daily Record* 09-06-1894. In this claim, Eden was mistaken; by 1894 just four Ontario municipalities had created park boards, and only one, Ottawa, was larger than Berlin. Although special purpose park districts had been created in Chicago and elsewhere in the United States, Eden made no reference to these cities during the Berlin parks debate. The Queen Victoria Niagara Parks Commission had been created in 1885, but it was a very different body, under different legislation, than the park boards created under the Public Parks Act. For a brief if incomplete overview, see Wright, *Urban Parks in Ontario*, A broader picture can be obtained, with some sweat, from a survey of the Municipal Financial Returns at the Archives of Ontario (RG 14-146), or, for the price of a pint of beer, from the author of this essay.

16. The result was 510-235. *Berlin Daily Record* 09-29-1894.

17. See *Berlin Daily Record* 1894-09-06 and 1894-09-10

18. See Board of Park Management Minutes, 1894 (Kitchener Corporate Archives), along with *Berlin Daily Record* 1894-10-24

carried two to one. . . Was it necessary to have a vote taken if the old park was to be retained? ¹⁹

Others, puzzled by this view, attempted to correct the record:

The [above-quoted] communication. . . is a reflection, it is more, it is a gross libel, on the intelligence of citizens of Berlin in assuming that the electors did not know what they were voting for. . . I can assure your correspondent that there are some people in the town who can read a By-Law when it is submitted and cast their votes intelligently. ²⁰

Debate was widespread. The newspaper reported that “groups of ‘fors’ and ‘against’ were to be seen on King Street today discussing the park question”.²¹ Before long, however, the advocates of the new park prevailed, and the Park Board began the business of acquiring land for the new park. For a moment, the anger subsided.²²

A few months later, however, controversy flared up again. Two Berlin councillors, angry about the park board’s purchases, moved to abolish the board entirely. “If the people repealed the Parks Act,” they explained, “it would take the expenditure out of the hands of the Commissioners and put it solely into the hand of Council.” The motion carried, but by the time a bylaw was drafted and submitted to council a week later, the mood had changed. The Public Parks Act contained no provision for abolition; a private act from the legislature would be required. Besides, the park board had already signed contracts to purchase the park property, and the legal expenses to extricate the town from those contracts would be considerable. Better to wait, the council decided, until the property had changed hands and the provincial government had updated the legislation, and to reconsider the matter then.²³

The critics’ moment soon passed. The new park was built and quickly became a source of local pride. “We have a park of which every citizen must feel proud,” the *Berlin Daily Record* wrote when the park

19. *Berlin Daily Record* 11-03-1894

20. *Berlin Daily Record* 11-05-1894

21. *Berlin Daily Record* 11-05-1894

22. *Berlin Daily Record* 11-27-1894

23. *Berlin Daily Record* 04-02-1895, 04-11-1895

officially opened in 1897; in the years that followed, panoramic photographs of the park would become a staple in promotional materials for the town. It would be decades before the town would again consider abolishing the board.²⁴

By 1897, when Berlin's new park finally opened, another issue, water, had moved to centre stage. Some years earlier, Berlin's town council had sent a delegation to nearby Guelph to investigate that town's state-of-the-art Holly system, and had asked Berlin voters in 1888 to endorse a plan for a municipal water system in Berlin. The bylaw had been rejected, and council had instead signed a contract with a private company for a ten-year franchise. In 1896, the Hibner fire had placed the water issue back on the local agenda, and as the end of the ten-year franchise neared, the water question quickly became the issue of the day.²⁵ By May of 1898, after months of investigation, Berlin's town council had decided that "the Water Works system is a Klondike for its owners", and introduced a by-law to Berlin's residents for the purchase of the system.²⁶ The town's leading manufacturers, desperate for a reliable water supply, mobilized in support of the bylaw. When anonymous letters questioned whether leading industrialists would pay for their share of the water, the industrialists signed a public letter pledging never to seek exemptions on their water rates. The town's mayor, himself a major manufacturer, demonstrated his confidence in the profitability of the water system by pledging to purchase the works if the

24. The controversy lasted until the end of 1895 before finally subsiding. In December 1895, the park board's chairman, exhausted by the endless criticism, offered to purchase the park himself for \$10,000 and manage it privately. For details, see Charles F. Brown to Mayor and Council of Berlin, 12-02-1895, available in the Board of Park Management Fonds (Kitchener Corporate Archives). For the newspaper quotation, see *Berlin Daily Record* 04-27-1897. For examples of the park in promotional materials, see the "Souvenir of Berlin" series, 1914 and 1916, available online at the University of Waterloo Archives

25. See Bloomfield and Bloomfield, *A History of Municipal Water Services in the Region of Waterloo*, for an excellent overview of the history of Berlin/Kitchener's water system. See also Bloomfield, "City Building Processes in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930," 203-223. For a detailed treatment of wider developments in Waterloo County, which follows Bloomfield closely on the early history in Berlin, see Janice Badgley, "Public Decision Making on Water Supply Planning and Management: A Case Study of the Waterloo Region" (master's thesis, University of Waterloo, 1991).

26. *Berlin News Record* 05-03-1897

bylaw was defeated; another group of manufacturers proposed to purchase the works and share half of its profits with the town.²⁷ These performances were apparently convincing; the bylaw passed.

The question of administration, however, remained open. During the municipalization debate, several civic leaders had recommended commission management. George Rumpel, the Mayor, had written an open letter to Berlinites outlining his position on the matter:

The water works plant will not be managed by the Council. The only way it can be managed successfully is by a Board of Water Commissioners, who would receive instructions not to grant free water to anyone. This plant would be managed in the same way as Parks are managed by our Park Commissioners, which plan has worked very successfully.²⁸

If the water system was to be managed by a commission, however, another vote was required. Thus, in November of 1898, council submitted a water commission bylaw to voters. In a public meeting in the town's uninsulated market shed, ratepayers shivered while Mayor Rumpel expanded upon his earlier points:

If the [water commission] bylaw is not endorsed, the work will fall upon the Fire and Water Committee of the Town Council, who have already all they can do. The Commission must be composed of fair, economical men, and then the town will be sure to derive a revenue for the works.²⁹

S.J. Williams, a leading manufacturer who had emerged as a popular and feisty orator, added rhetorical heat to the frigid environs:

Lay aside all feelings of popularity in favor of business ability...Let us have the works in charge of a Commission, rather than have them buffeted and kicked around by the Council.³⁰

27. For the exemption issue, see especially *Berlin News Record* 05-13-1898 and 05-26-1898; for Rumpel's offer, see *Berlin News Record* 05-19-1898, and for the other offer, *Berlin News Record* 05-26-1898

28. *Berlin News Record* 05-13-1898

29. *Berlin News Record* 11-04-1898

30. *Berlin News Record* 11-04-1898

The waterworks system was a paying enterprise, these men argued, and a commission would ensure that it was operated as such. Besides, water commissioners would have just one iron in the fire, and could focus their attention on water alone.³¹ For the few citizens who turned out to vote, at least, the arguments were convincing. The bylaw passed, and the town's first Water Commission was elected in January of 1899.

The Water Commission was immediately and extraordinarily successful. Despite considerable new investments in the system, including major extensions, the commission recorded large profits from the beginning.³² The attempt to keep up with demand would eventually become a struggle, but the commission's early years were marked by optimism and success.³³ Each year, Berlin's residents could expect to see a newspaper headline declaring that the water commission had once again enjoyed a profitable year. Indeed, the only significant debate in the commission's earliest years was the question of who would control the commission's abundant profits.³⁴

With the early difficulties of the park commission now in the distant past, and the glories of the water commission prominent in the newspapers, municipal ownership under special purpose administration quickly became the order of the day. Local leaders had been calling for municipalization of the gas and light plant for years, and when the private franchise expired in 1903, Berlin's residents voted to purchase the works. When the inevitable light commission bylaw was submitted to voters, its successful passage was unremarkable. The only curiosity, according to the *Berlin Daily Telegraph*, was the number of votes against the proposition. Some voters, the newspaper surmised, simply vote against everything; and "it is not improbable that others voted against it either through failure to comprehend the ballot or through ignorance of the effect of the measure."³⁵ Opposition to special purpose management as such had become barely comprehensible.

31. *Berlin News Record* 11-09-1898

32. Bloomfield, "City Building Processes in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930," 223.

33. See Badgley, "Public Decision Making on Water Supply Planning and Management: A Case Study of the Waterloo Region," for a detailed treatment of the later struggles.

34. E.g. *Berlin News Record* 01-06-1902, *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 02-03-1903.

35. *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 05-05-1903

So confident were Berlinites in the merits of special purpose management that the town decided in 1903 to go on the offensive. Berlin's sewer system had recently begun to encounter major difficulties. The basic problem was simple: unlike most towns, Berlin lacked a body of water into which it could dump its sewage; its industrial effluent, including the stinking, toxic waste of the local tanneries, flowed into local fields and streams instead. In earlier years, Berlin had been proud of its sewage treatment system – a local resident had invented a temporarily effective system of sewage filtration beds – but by 1903, the problem had returned with a vengeance. What was required, of course, was a special purpose commission to improve and then manage the system.³⁶

The town soon discovered that there was no provincial provision for a sewer commission. Seven years earlier, when the town had briefly considered a board of fire commissioners, this had been enough to stop the momentum. By 1903, however, commitment and confidence had grown, and a group of local leaders travelled to Toronto to request a private bill. Facing an unexpectedly hostile private bills committee – “there are already too many commissions,” one disgruntled member said – Berlin's representatives pressed their case. Perhaps, if the committee is opposed to a sewer commission provision, it might allow such commissions exclusively for municipalities with complex filtration systems? The committee finally relented, and Berlin's representatives returned to town in triumph.³⁷

So confident were the town's leaders that the citizens of Berlin would endorse the proposed sewer commission that the vote to create the commission and the vote to elect its first members was held on the same day. “It has been taken for granted,” said the newspaper, “that the property-owners will endorse the placing of the sewer farm in the hands of a Commission and, in order to save time and expense, it has been decided to elect a Commission at the same time.”³⁸ The prediction was correct. The bylaw passed, and the first sewer commission in Canada was elected in Berlin in January of 1904.

36. For the earlier pride, see *Berlin Daily Record* 08-29-1895; for the difficulties in 1903, see *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 01-14-1903, 06-25-1903; for commission management, see e.g. *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 02-14-1903.

37. *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 05-21-1903, 05-22-1903

38. *Berlin News Record* 01-02-1904.

After 1904, the frantic pace subsided. Perhaps, with education, health, libraries, parks, water, gas, hydro, and sewers under special purpose management, little remained to “commisionize”. Of course, when the town purchased the street railway system, it too was placed under special purpose management.³⁹ Only one municipal department remained conspicuously uncommissioned: police.

Police commissions had become fairly common in Ontario by the early 1900s, largely because provincial law required them in cities. Towns were free to decide how to administer their police force, and in 1907, Berlin’s council decided to transfer its force from a committee to a commission. The decision was controversial – critics argued that a commission was a needless expense for a medium-sized town.⁴⁰ But advocates of a police commission, who argued that “the town should guard against the possibility of interference with its police”, ultimately prevailed.⁴¹ In the years that followed, the police commission would be the source of ongoing debate, and two attempts to abolish the commission, on the grounds that it was expensive, unrepresentative, and unelected, nearly succeeded.⁴² By 1910, however, it was clear that Berlin was moving toward cityhood (in which case a commission would be required), and the controversy surrounding the police commission gradually subsided.

III

How can we explain this enthusiasm for special purpose bodies in Berlin? The first answer is also the simplest: diffusion. Once the special purpose model had been introduced into Berlin’s municipal sphere, it quickly spread: the library board supplied a model for the park board, and the park board a model for the water commission; once the water commission was established, it was easy to imagine a light commission and a sewer commission as well. At each stage in this process, the most recent body provided the basic template. Appointed

39. Over time, however, management of the street railway in fact bounced between council and the light commission. I will return to this instability below.

40. *Daily Telegraph* 03-17-1907, 03-18-1907.

41. *Berlin News Record* 03-19-1907.

42. *Daily Telegraph* 01-04-1908, 03-04-1908, 03-07-1908, 03-20-1908, 12-05-1908; *Berlin News Record* 12-30-1908.

bodies were therefore thought to be ideal as long as the library board or the park board supplied the template, but once the water commission was created – it too was to be appointed, following the model of the park board, until Berlin’s civic leaders learned to their disappointment that an elected body was required by law – only then did elected bodies become the new model.⁴³ The town’s police commission, which broke from the general pattern, provides an exception proving the rule: it was precisely because the police commission was so different from the most recent models – it was unelected, it did not require voter endorsement, its members were unfamiliar and distant – that it provoked such heated controversy.⁴⁴ Internal diffusion was the engine of innovation in Berlin: having discovered an organizational model that worked, Berlinites were inclined to use it again and again, and were decreasingly likely, over time, to make a serious investment in seeking out alternatives.⁴⁵

This simple explanation accounts for the available evidence in Berlin. But there is something unsatisfying about it. Like many other stories of organizational diffusion, it leaves an important question unanswered: why did Berlin’s leaders learn *these* lessons from their early encounters with special purpose bodies? After all, the town’s early experience with ABCs was hardly free of controversy. And Berlin’s civic leaders were aware from the beginning of the multitudinous administrative tangles into which new their special purpose bodies inevitably cast them.⁴⁶ Why did they advocate special purpose bodies again and again, even in the midst of their frustration with the ones that already existed?

The answer lies in what David Strang and John Meyer have called

43. Before Berlin’s leaders realized that the water commission would have to be elected, they insisted that it should follow the appointed park-board model. See *Daily Telegraph*, 05-03-1898; *Berlin News Record* 05-05-1898, 05-13-1898, 10-18-1898, 11-04-1898. For evidence that appointed boards were quickly forgotten, see *Daily Telegraph* 06-11-1903 and especially 03-22-1907.

44. See e.g. *Daily Telegraph*, 03-20-1908, 12-22-1908.

45. For a survey of recent diffusion scholarship, see D. Strang and S.A. Soule, “Diffusion in organizations and social movements: From hybrid corn to poison pills,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (1998): 265–290.

46. See Table # below. See also *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 11-12-1904, 02-18-1905, 06-27-1908.

“theorization”.⁴⁷ If an organizational innovation is to diffuse successfully, social actors require an adequate *theory* of the innovation, a theory that emphasizes its salient features and allows them to “see through the confusing evidence of others’ mixed successes and detect the true’ factors at work”.⁴⁸ In Berlin, what was needed was a theory of special purpose bodies, one that allowed Berlin’s civic leaders and active citizens to articulate the advantages of those bodies while forgetting or explaining away their drawbacks. What theory did they use?

To answer this question requires that we momentarily step out of Berlin and into the wider scholarly literature on special purpose bodies in Canada. Although this literature is lamentably sparse, we can extract two possible “theories” from the available sources. The first candidate, which might be called the Wilsonian thesis, emphasizes the role of special purpose bodies in separating politics from administration. Exhausted by patronage and ward-healing, the story goes, local leaders (especially middle-class professionals) insisted that important municipal functions ought to be removed from council and transferred to semi-independent agencies, boards and commissions.⁴⁹ The second theoretical candidate, which we will call the insulation thesis, places more emphasis on the self-interest of local elites than on the ideals of administrative reform. On this view, special purpose bodies arrived on the scene just as local elites were losing control of their councils. As low-level merchants, workingmen, and even the occasional socialist gained seats on town councils, business elites moved to insulate themselves against a loss of control by carving out, and then taking up

47. More specifically, we are referring to Strang and Meyer’s notion of “theorization of diffusing practices”. See Zavaros, “Waterloo Park, 1890-1990,” especially 492-495, 497-500.

48. *Ibid.*, 499-500.

49. For examples of this approach, see Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow’s Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880-1920,” in *The Canadian City*, ed. Gilber A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1984); Warren Magnusson, “Introduction,” in, ed. Warren Magnusson and Andrew Sancton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Katherine Graham and Susan Phillips, *Urban Governance in Canada* (Toronto: Harcourt, 1998), 155-157; Weaver, “Tomorrow’s Metropolis’ Revisited: A Critical Assessment of Urban Reform in Canada, 1890-1920,” 2-3 (though see the next note for Weaver’s more considered view).

positions upon, special purpose bodies.⁵⁰

Were these theories deployed in Berlin? Let us begin with the Wilsonian thesis. In Berlin's earliest debates about special purpose bodies, we find little more than a smattering of remarks along Wilsonian lines. In 1894, for example, a local citizen argued that a park board would mean that "there can be no cry of favoritism"; in 1898, another prominent citizen claimed that a water committee, as opposed to a water commission, would be "kicked around by council".⁵¹ But it is not until 1907, when town council took up the question of a police commission, that a Wilsonian argument appears with more clarity:

[A Berlin alderman argued that] the proposed change was in accordance with the civilization of the times, which is governed by the legislative and the administrative. The former bodies, elected by the people, make the laws, and latter, appointed by the government administer and enforce the law. The police belong to the administrative class, and are entitled to protection in the enforcement of their duties.⁵²

The Wilsonian thesis, then, was certainly available in Berlin during its period of ABC enthusiasm.⁵³ As a theoretical candidate, however, it faced several challenges. First, while partisan politics did occasionally enter the municipal sphere in Berlin, often in the form of coded endorsements of local candidates by known Conservatives or Liberals, the local scene as a whole was already highly depoliticized in partisan terms. Berlin's two newspapers, while viciously critical of one another on provincial and federal issues, consistently agreed on local matters. Editorials in support of local reform in the two newspapers were often

50. For a powerful example of this approach, see Weaver, "Tomorrow's Metropolis' Revisited: A Critical Assessment of Urban Reform in Canada, 1890-1920"; John English and Kenneth McLaughlin briefly suggest that this view applies in Kitchener; see John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1996), 113.

51. *Berlin Daily Record* 09-06-1894, *Berlin News Record* 11-04-1898.

52. *Daily Telegraph* 03-17-1907

53. In 1894, the *Daily Record* reprinted an editorial from a Toronto newspaper advocating a politics-administration separation. But the argument in that editorial was not seen again until 1907 or so. See *Berlin Daily Record* 12-10-1894.

interchangeable. The basic argument, as in many Canadian municipalities before and since, was simple: local government is an inappropriate arena for partisan politics.⁵⁴

Patronage in the municipal sphere was also limited in Berlin. It is true that council controlled a handful of plums in the areas of fire services, policing, public works, and assessment. But the steady centralization of the Mowat era, ably documented by S.J.R. Noel, had transferred the juiciest fruits into provincial hands, where they would remain. After the Mowat era, the patronage opportunities available to local politicians in midsize municipalities like Berlin were highly circumscribed.⁵⁵

In practice, this meant that a Wilsonian argument, built on a critique of patronage and partisanship, had little purchase in Berlin. In larger cities, where intellectual fashions arrived earlier and problems of patronage were more pronounced, the Wilsonian thesis may have been more attractive.⁵⁶ But Table 1, which presents a summary of the public arguments about ABCs in Berlin between 1895 and 1908, suggests that the Wilsonian thesis was rarely deployed in Berlin. Of the 107 arguments for and against special purpose bodies recorded in Berlin's local newspapers between the years 1895 and 1908⁵⁷, few could be called "Wilsonian"; notice, for instance, the blank spaces beside "Politics v. Administration", the principal Wilsonian category, during debates about fire, water, light, and sewer commissions in Berlin. There is, of course, one exception: in the case of the Berlin police commission, where patronage and enforcement were indeed concerns, the Wilsonian theory became a significant line of argument, with four recorded public

54. See e.g. *Berlin Daily Record*, 12-30-1895, *Berlin News Record* 08-30-1897, *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 11-03-1908, 12-12-1908.

55. See S.J.R. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791-1896* (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1974), Ch.13; S.J.R. Noel, "Oliver Mowat, Patronage, and Party Building," in *Ontario Since Confederation: A Reader*, ed. E.A. Montigny and A.L. Chambers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); J E Hodgetts, *From Arm's Length to Hands On: The Formative Years of Ontario's Public Service, 1867-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

56. See note #52 above. For an interesting account of Toronto's patronage debates, see John C. Weaver, "The Modern City Realized," in *The Usable Urban Past*, ed. Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilber A. Stelter (Ottawa: Macmillan Canada, 1979).

57. Either in editorials or in reports on public meetings, council debates, and so on.

Table 1: Arguments For / Against Special Purpose Bodies, 1895-1908

	Park	Fire	Water	Light	Sewer	Police	Gen.	Total
1. Bus. Principles	2		5	5			1	13
2. Pol. vs. Admin.	1					4		5
3. Cont. / Spec.	3	2	5	3	9	2	2	26
4. Recruitment	1	2	2	1				6
5. Expertise		1	1	1	1	2		6
6. Past Experience	2	1	2		3	1		9
7. Assumed			2					2
1. Competence	2					1	2	5
2. Control	4						4	8
3. Spending			1			4	2	7
4. Penny-pinching	2							2
5. Undemocratic				1		4	2	7
6. Excess					1	2	5	8
7. General / Other				1	2			3
Total	17	6	18	12	16	20	18	107

Items marked in red indicate modal categories.

Sources: *Berlin News Record*, *Berlin Daily Telegraph*

arguments.⁵⁸ It was largely absent from other debates.

Let us turn, then, to the insulation thesis, our second candidate. Did Berlin's business elites believe that special purpose bodies would cement their dominance during a period of rapid political change? Unlike the Wilsonian thesis, this is not a question that we can answer by referring directly to the arguments in Table 1. Even if the insulation thesis did provide the theoretical justification for special purpose bodies in Berlin, the underlying elitism of the thesis would lead us to suspect that it was rarely articulated in the public arena. We have little access to the smoky backrooms of Berlin's business elite, so we will

58. For references (with varying degrees of explicitness) to problems of patronage and corruption within the Berlin police force, see *Berlin News Record* 03-19-1907, *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 01-03-1908, 03-04-1908, 03-07-1908, 03-20-1908. See also John C. Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City: Essays on Urban Politics and Policy 1890-1920* (Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1977), 2.

have to make our way by seeking more circumstantial clues.

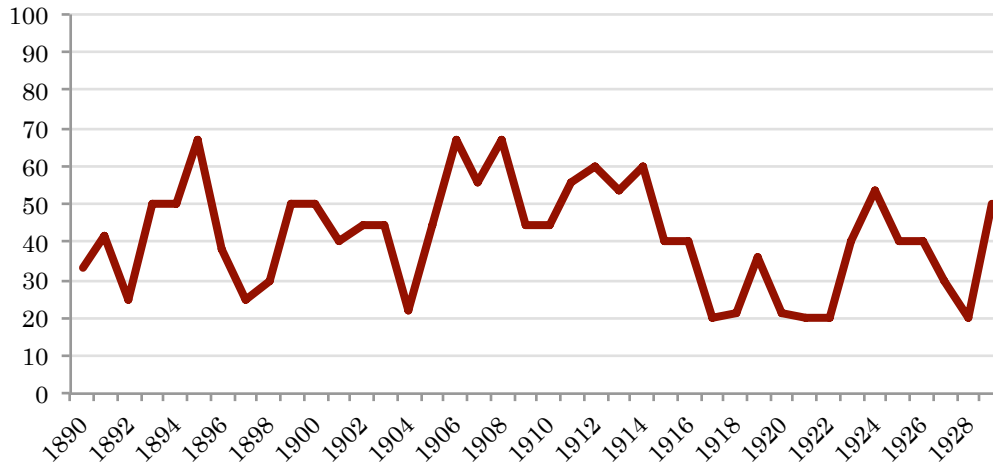
To build a case for the insulation thesis, we would first want to show that Berlin's special purpose bodies were, in fact, dominated in their early years by business elites. If they were not – if business leaders were unable to dominate the new special purpose bodies – the insulation thesis would hardly have remained compelling. Here the evidence is straightforward enough. In the first year of the park board, the water commission, the light commission, and the sewer commission, fully 83% of those appointed or elected also served at some point on the council of the Berlin Board of Trade, the town's most well-known and widely-respected organization of local business leaders. If we expand from the first year to the first three years, or even to the first five, the proportion of members with Board of Trade Council experience remains near 80%. In fact, nearly 40% of those appointed or elected to the park, water, light, and sewer boards in their first five years also served on the *executive* of the Berlin Board of Trade, an even more exclusive club.⁵⁹ Given that the Board of Trade Council was composed of between eight and fifteen members each year, and had an executive of just four, these figures illustrate that the presence of Berlin's business leaders on the town's ABCs was highly disproportionate. Berlin's most prominent businessmen visibly dominated the early membership of the town's special purpose bodies.

A second clue in support of the insulation thesis would be a decline in business prominence in other local spheres, including, most importantly, the town council. Here the evidence is less clear. It is certainly true that Berlin's labouring classes became prominent civic actors around the turn of the century, and that candidates endorsed by the Berlin Trades and Labour Council were frequently elected in the early 1900s.⁶⁰ It is also true, as Elizabeth Bloomfield has shown, that the dominance of "overlapping elites" in faded quickly as the nine-

59. These figures have been compiled from the following sources: The Board of Park Management Fonds, Kitchener Water Commission Fonds, Sewer Commission Minute Books, and the Berlin Council Minute Books (Kitchener Corporate Archives); The Kitchener Chamber of Commerce Fonds and the Kitchener Library Board Minute Books (Kitchener Public Library Local History Archives); the *Berlin News Record* and the *Berlin Daily Telegraph*.

60. See e.g. *Daily Telegraph* 01-05-1904, 04-05-1904.

Figure 1: Percentage of Town Council with Bd. of Tr. Council Service, By Year



teenth century gave way to the twentieth.⁶¹ But there are problems of timing here. It was in the late nineteenth century, after all, that the board of park management and the water commission were created, and we have argued above that those bodies provided the basic template for Berlin’s later ABCs. And the late nineteenth century, according to Bloomfield, was still a period of considerable overlapping-elite dominance.⁶² The enthusiasm for special purpose bodies thus appears to have arisen in Berlin before business elites could have felt threatened by the town’s labouring class.

Figure one illustrates the promise and the perils of the evidence in more detail.⁶³ The red line in the figure marks the percentage of

61. Overlapping elites should be understood here in basic Dahlian terms: people who are simultaneously elite in the social (clubs, organizations), political (elected positions, committees, ABCs) and economic (business owners, large property owners) realms. Bloomfield, “City Building Processess in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930”; Elizabeth Bloomfield, “Community Leadership and Decision-Making: Entrepreneurial Elites in Two Ontario Towns, 1870-1930,” in *Power and Place*, ed. Gilber A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986).

62. Bloomfield, “City Building Processess in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930”; Bloomfield, “Community Leadership and Decision-Making: Entrepreneurial Elites in Two Ontario Towns, 1870-1930.”

63. Sources for the figure: *Berlin News Record*, *Berlin Daily Telegraph*, Berlin Board of Trade Minute Books (KPL: Kitchener Chamber of Commerce Fonds); Berlin Town

Berlin's town councillors, year by year, who also served on the council of the Berlin Board of Trade – it shows, in other words, a rough approximation of the proportion of town council occupied by prominent businessmen. Notice that the line dips into the mid-twenties before 1898, when the water commission was created; notice the similar dip into the low twenties around 1903, when council decided to create the light and sewer commissions. Have we found the smoking gun?

In short, no. It might be possible to lean hard on these data and to piece together a just-so story about the shape of the line and the creation of special purpose bodies. But to do so would require that we over-interpret the timing of Berlin's ABCs. The principal reason that the water commission was created in 1898, and the light commission in 1903, has nothing to do with the data in figure one; it is because those were the years that the relevant ten-year franchises expired. What we would like to see in the figure, if the insulation thesis were plausible, is evidence of a consistent decline in the dominance of town council by business men during Berlin's period of ABC enthusiasm. The figure's jagged line, more like a mountain range than a gradual downward slope, provides no such evidence. The early years of the twentieth century were the first years that workingmen and other non-elites appeared on Berlin's town council, and even, in a few cases, in the mayor's chair. Throughout the period, however, the presence of Berlin's business elites in the Berlin council chamber continued to be disproportionately large.

A final point. If the insulation thesis were correct, we might expect to find one additional clue in the historical evidence: opposition to ABCs by organized labour. But in fact the opposite is true. Berlin's Trades and Labour council consistently endorsed the town's special purpose bodies. In a referendum on the abolition of the Berlin water commission in 1920 – surely late enough for the town's labour leaders to have grown wise to an insulation effect – the Trades and Labour council strongly endorsed the commission. Perhaps most important, it was the town council, over which Berlin's elites were ostensibly losing control, that wrote and approved the bylaws to create the town's special purpose bodies.

In the end, then, the circumstantial evidence for the insulation the-

Council Minute Books (KCA).

Table 2. Summary of Service on ABC and/or Council, and Proportion of Members with Board of Trade Council Experience: 1880-1930ⁱ

	Individuals ⁱⁱⁱ (N / %)	Years ^{iv} (N / %)	ABC Years ⁱⁱ (M)	Council Years (M)	Bd. Trade ^v (%)
ABC only ⁱⁱ	32 (17%)	218 (20%)	3.5		19%
Council only	120 (62%)	346 (32%)		2	18%
ABC & Coun.	42 (22%)	519 (48%)	4.5	4	64%

i. Sources: see footnote 57.

ii. ABCs include park board, water commission, light commission, sewer commission.

iii. Number of distinct individuals in each category, and percentage of total.

iv. Number of years served by individuals in each category, and percentage of total.

v. Percentage of distinct individuals in category with service on Board of Trade Council.

sis is unpersuasive. Berlin's business leaders appear to have had little reason to find the insulation thesis attractive. And Berlin's labour leaders, who were no fools, consistently supported the town's special purpose bodies. Instead, what we see in Berlin during the early ABC period is a council still dominated by business elites and a series of special purpose bodies which mirror and extend that dominance. Table 2 provides a sketch of the basic administrative terrain. Those who served on council or a special purpose body (not both) served shorter median terms and were much less likely to be prominent business leaders than those who did dual service on council and one or more special purpose bodies. Dual-service politicians comprised just 22% of those who served in Berlin during these years, but filled 48% of the available seats, and many more of them (over 60%) were prominent businessmen. If our goal was to vindicate the insulation thesis, this is not the evidence that we would hope to find. In the end, like the Wilsonian thesis, it too must be set aside.

IV

Our argument thus far has been that successful diffusion requires successful theorization; but in the case of Berlin's special purpose bodies, we have suggested that the two most likely candidates for such a theorization ought to be rejected. In making this argument, however, we have relied on at least two unstated assumptions about the evidence we would need to vindicate a given theorization. We must now make those assumptions explicit, not only in the interest of remaining maximally open to critique, but also because a brief discussion of the assumptions will lead toward more promising explanatory territory.

Put simply, we have assumed two necessary conditions for any successful theorization. The first is availability: a theory needs to have been available to the relevant actors at the time of diffusion. Our goal is not to construct a stylized model but to show that a theory did real persuasive work in a specific historical context. We therefore need evidence that the theory was available in that context. The relevant context may be large (citizens, attentive publics) or small (municipal councils, special committees), but whatever the context, we need to show that the availability condition is satisfied.

We have also assumed that a successful theory will meet what might be called a condition of *contextual awareness*. A successful theory will adapt to the empirical and theoretical context of a given social sphere. From the perspective of the relevant audience (again, it may be large or small), the basic empirical claims of the theory must be seen as reasonable – a spade must be a spade. More importantly, the theory must be of the appropriate *kind*: a theological theory of special purpose bodies, for instance, would have had little purchase in Berlin. None of this is to deny that social actors can and often do redescribe and reframe their contexts. It is rather to claim, more simply, that they must place their arguments and theories in *relation* to that context, explaining how their arguments fit within, or offer a compelling challenge to, the relevant context.⁶⁴ If this second assumption is convincing, we may naturally be led to ask about the kinds of theories that might have satisfied the condition of contextual awareness within Berlin’s municipal sphere. We are led, in other words, toward the notion of the *field*.

Within current debates, the concept of the “field” stands alongside a variety of similar concepts – paradigm, policy community, advocacy coalition – all of which attempt to capture two important and related features of political life.⁶⁵ The first is the significance of ideas, theo-

64. Theories of “framing” can be useful here. For an overview, see R.D. Benford and D.A. Snow, “Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (2000): 611–639; For further discussion of what we have called “fit”, see Philip Selznick, “Institutionalism ”Old” and ”New”,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1996): esp. 273-274.

65. For paradigms, see P.A. Hall, “Policy paradigms, social learning, and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain,” *Comparative politics* (1993): 275–296; and G. Skogstad, “Ideas, paradigms and institutions: agricultural exceptionalism in the European Union and the United States,” *Governance* 11, no. 4 (1998): 463–490; for advocacy coalitions, see Paul A Sabatier, “An advocacy coalition framework of

ries, meanings – in short, culture – within politics. These approaches rarely deny that interest-seeking or power-relations matter, but they tend to insist that even the most hardened Machiavellian will have to “theorize” his devious schemes, and therefore that attention to ideas, arguments, and theories will be profitable for researchers regardless of a political actor’s motives.⁶⁶ Our earlier argument about “theorization” is in keeping with this claim; without attention to the theories deployed by political actors in Berlin, we argued, we will be unlikely to understand the enthusiasm with which special purpose bodies were adopted in Berlin at the time.

The second important feature of theories built around concepts like “field”, “paradigm”, and so forth is an emphasis on the *bounded* character of the ideas and theories deployed by social actors. People use different theories and arguments in different contexts, and field-oriented approaches attempt to understand how (and ultimately why) arguments and ideas have purchase in some contexts while being ineffective or invisible in others. In short, these approaches attempt to move from the study of political culture at the broad level of “climate”, where much of the best work on political culture has thus far been done, down to the level of the “microclimate” – and to understand how political-cultural microclimates continually affect and adapt to one another. While all of the above-mentioned approaches accept that ideas and theories are

policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein” [in English], *Policy Sciences* 21, nos. 2-3 (1988): 129–168; C.M. Weible, P.A. Sabatier, and K. McQueen, “Themes and variations: Taking stock of the advocacy coalition framework,” *Policy Studies Journal* 37, no. 1 (2009): 121–140; Paul A Sabatier and Christopher Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” in *Theories of the Policy Process*, ed. Paul A Sabatier (Boulder: Westview Press, September 2009), 189–220; The concept of the policy community is somewhat more distant from field theory, though still related; see, for example, P.M. Haas, “Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1–35; G. Skogstad, “Policy Networks and Policy Communities: Conceptualizing State-Societal Relationships in the Policy Process,” in *The Comparative Turn in Canadian Political Science*, ed. Linda A. White et al. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); For an overview of field theory, see N. Fligstein and D. McAdam, “Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields,” *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 1 (2011): 1–26; D. McAdam and N. Fligstein, *A Theory of Fields* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); John Levi Martin, “What Is Field Theory?” [In English], *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 1 (July 2003): 1–49.

66. See, for example, McAdam and Fligstein, *A Theory of Fields*, 50-52.

best studied within such microclimates – advocacy coalitions within policy subdomains, paradigms within fields, and so on – only within field theory has this claim become a theoretical and methodological foundation.⁶⁷

A great deal of work still needs to be done to understand how all of these concepts relate to one another, to decide what they share and where they diverge, and to determine which approach offers the most promise. My adoption of “field” terminology suggests my own preference, but this is no more than an early allegiance, one that awaits further discussion and theoretical elaboration. We cannot hope to provide such a discussion here.⁶⁸ For the purposes of this essay, all that we need to accept is the basic idea that theorization matters for diffusion, and that it is useful to try to understand the boundaries within which such theorizations operate. Our hope is that by examining the broader context in Berlin – by asking about the nature of the field – we can better understand why the Wilsonian thesis and the insulation thesis fell on infertile ground, while another thesis was able to flourish in precisely the same soil.

What, then, was the nature of the municipal field in Berlin? What (to adopt a somewhat more Aristotelian terminology) was the good at which Berlin’s political actors aimed? The answer will hardly surprise those who are familiar with North American urban history: in an extremely competitive, largely unregulated, highly decentralized political economy, municipal government was viewed as an instrument for attracting and maintaining local economic growth. Every policy innovation, from tax reform to park construction to water municipalization, was forced to answer a single underlying query: will it attract new industry and reliable workers to our town, without needlessly disrupting the workers and industries who are already here?

This basic agreement in Berlin was supported by two widely ac-

67. The inclusion of “fields”, or something like them, within these theories often goes unnoticed, especially within discussions of “policy paradigms”. See Hall, “Policy paradigms, social learning, and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain,” pp.278, 292.

68. I hope to address some of these issues in a more theoretical paper, currently in development. See my “Paradigms, Communities, Coalitions: Field Notes from the Terminological Jungle”, coming, eventually, to a conference near you.

cepted foundational premises.⁶⁹ First, it was widely believed in Berlin that the town was in constant competition with neighbouring towns, and that a failure to remain attractive would mean their gain and Berlin's loss. This was particularly true in Berlin, it was believed, because of a lack of "natural advantages", such as waterways, in the town. What Berlin lacked in natural advantages, it would have to make up in raw determination, constant innovation, and, of course, generous financial inducements.⁷⁰ The infantile language of "boosters" and "knockers" would arrive somewhat later, but the basic principle – that excessive criticism of the town would damage its stability and growth – was present from the beginning. The result was predictable. "About the nearest thing to a perpetual motion," wrote a newspaper in nearby Galt, "is the wagging of a Berliner's tongue in laudation of his town."⁷¹ Berlin was not shy about self-promotion.

The second premise, related to the first, was that a successful municipal government must be administered in accordance with "sound business principles". In practice, this meant attentiveness to efficiency and economy, and, more concretely, it meant that successful businessmen must be regularly recruited into civic life.⁷² However, even when businessmen were in the minority on council, the town's commitment to business principles remained strong:

69. The following account of Berlin's political culture is indebted to the work of Elizabeth Bloomfield, whose outline of Berlin's "urban ethos" can be read in Bloomfield, "City Building Processes in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930," 65-90; Bloomfield outlines seven key features of the urban ethos in Berlin; I have attempted to present a more integrated picture, but I believe that my comments here are consistent with Bloomfield's presentation. See also English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History*, 113; *Berlin: Celebration of Cityhood* (Berlin: Sand Hill Books, 1912), esp. 69-74.

70. Instances of this competitive ethos can be seen in *Berlin Daily Record* 11-28-1894, 02-29-1896, 03-17-1896; *Berlin News Record* 01-06-1898. For discussion of "natural advantages", see *Berlin News Record* 05-26-1900, *Daily Telegraph* 03-13-1908 English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History*, 67; *Berlin: Celebration of Cityhood*, 69-74.

71. Quoted in Paul Tiessen, "Introduction," in *Berlin: Celebration of Cityhood* (Berlin: Sand Hill Books, 1912), 1. See also *Berlin Daily Record* 03-27-1896, 03-30-1896.

72. For a representative sample, see *Berlin Daily Record*, 1894-08-10, 1895-01-01, 1895-11-07, 1896-02-22, 1897-01-05; *Berlin News Record*, 1898-05-30, 1898-10-14; *Berlin Daily Telegraph*, 01-10-1903, 1906-07-03, 1908-08-21.

It is sometimes said that a Labour Council is a detriment to a town for the past three years the candidates of the Berlin Trades and Labour Council have been in the majority in the Town Council, for one term holding every seat but two – and these years have been among the most prosperous in Berlin’s history Berlin’s working-men seem to have thoroughly grasped the necessity of town building; they also seem to take a practical view of their duty towards all classes, and to be ready to combine with the merchant, manufacturer, and professional man for the one purpose of advancing the interests of the town of which they are all so proud.⁷³

If a stable and attractive environment for industry was at the core of the municipal field in Berlin, if such an environment was the goal toward which the field was striving, then the actor that most powerfully and consistently reinforced this goal was surely the Berlin Board of Trade.⁷⁴ The Board’s basic position in the field was clear enough: “when any business man has a happy thought for the advancement of Berlin,” the local newspaper wrote, “the proper form in which to bring it forward is the Council of the Board of Trade. If meritorious, it is sure of endorsement. Obtaining this, it should be sent to the Council and by it considered, and if endorsed, put into effect.”⁷⁵ This did not mean that the Board’s proposals were robotically rubber-stamped by Council; in fact, Berlin’s foremost historian has argued that the Board’s “later claims that it was chiefly responsible for Berlin’s industrial policy were exaggerated.”⁷⁶ Instead, the Board’s power was positional:

The city was like a watch: wheels within wheels. The factories were the great wheel; industry, the mainspring; the Council, the balance heel; and the Board of Trade, the hair-spring. All the parts, named and unnamed, clicked.⁷⁷

73. Article in the *Galt Reporter*, quoted in the *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 04-05-1904.

74. See English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History*, 69-74.

75. *Berlin News Record* 01-05-1909

76. Bloomfield, “City Building Processes in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930,” 204.

77. W.V. Uttley, *The History of Kitchener* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1937), 408.

The Board of Trade's proposals were not always accepted by Council, especially when it occasionally grew overzealous about industrial bonuses, but it did serve as the point of origin for many of the town's most important innovations (including most of its special purpose bodies), it did provide a steady supply of prominent civic leaders, and it did offer (and, more rarely, denied) a highly-regarded stamp of approval on significant local bylaws.⁷⁸ The Board of Trade worked diligently to uphold the existing understanding of the field, and the innovations endorsed by the Board were intended to deepen or extend, rather than to reform, this basic understanding.

If the Board of Trade served to support the existing status quo understanding of the field, was there anyone who was working to undermine it? Were there any challengers at work in the field?⁷⁹ We might note before answering this question that challengers come in a variety of shapes and sizes. First- and second-order challengers accept the basic goals of the field but believe that instrumental reforms are required; third-order challengers reject the field's overall orientation and believe that the field as a whole must be reoriented in the direction of a new and better end.⁸⁰ In Berlin, it is difficult even to find a third-order challenger, a fact which is itself telling as regards the basic stability of the field. There is, however, one person who might fit the bill: Allen Huber.

Although "challenger" is an adequate descriptor for Allen Huber, a better term for the man is surely *eccentric*. With his dark, wide-brimmed hat and his wild unkempt beard, Huber bestrode his beloved Berlin pronouncing his hatred of the town's business leaders to all who would listen, liberally suing, harassing, speechifying, and disrupting

78. See e.g. *Berlin Daily Record* 1894-09-01, *Berlin News Record* 1898-09-03, 1909-03-22, 1909-04-05; *Daily Telegraph* 01-23-1903, 02-03-1903, 01-10-1908 *Berlin: Celebration of Cityhood*, 74.

79. This language of "challengers" is taken from McAdam and Fligstein. It is probably unhelpfully simplistic; in the discussion that follows, I attempt to (begin to) expand the language somewhat. See Fligstein and McAdam, "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields."

80. The source of this threefold distinction is Peter Hall's work on the state and social learning; I have used it here for somewhat different purposes. See Hall, "Policy paradigms, social learning, and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain," esp. 281-7.

the town's quiet life with whatever means he could dream up.⁸¹ By a series of exceedingly odd circumstances, Huber was elected mayor of Berlin in 1908 (he had run for the position before – and received fourteen votes), and quickly set about to remake his hometown.⁸² Most of Huber's mayoral action can be classified as merely odd – the occasion in which he demanded at a council meeting that the police officer on duty arrest a councillor and throw him directly into jail may stand as a representative instance – but Huber did occasionally cut more deeply into the heart of the field. At a meeting of the Board of Trade, for example (Huber, with no money to his name, was an invited guest, not a member⁸³), Huber declared to a stunned audience that he intended to eliminate all tax exemptions for local industries. “The Board of Trade has made Berlin commercially drunk,” Huber declared a few weeks later, “and now it has the headache.”⁸⁴

What is most telling about Huber, however, is that the result of his many exuberances, beyond the constant irritation of the town's business elites⁸⁵, was essentially nothing. After Huber's bold declaration before the Board of Trade, the exemptions continued. When Huber demanded the resignation of councillors and commissioners whose pri-

81. For an overview of Huber's career, see English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History*, 104-110; John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, “Allen Huber: Berlin's Strangest Mayor,” *Waterloo Historical Society* 69 (1981): Amusing examples of Huber's trouble-mongering can be found in the *Berlin Daily Record* 1895-01-29, 05-05-1898 *Daily Telegraph* 12-31-1901, 02-18-1903, 01-04-1907, 11-02-1907.

82. “Cheer up,” a local newspaper wrote, “the Board of Trade has a strong Council anyway” (*Daily Telegraph* 01-10-1908). For the odd circumstances, see English and McLaughlin, “Allen Huber: Berlin's Strangest Mayor,” as well as *Daily Telegraph* 01-07-1908, 01-08-1908, 01-16-1908, 01-25-1908, 02-03-1908, 02-20-1908.

83. By the end of 1909, Huber was denied the right to vote - not to run for office, but to vote - because he failed to meet the minimal property qualifications required for municipal voting. See *Berlin News Record* 11-25-1909, 12-09-1909, 12-28-1909.

84. The meeting is discussed in *Daily Telegraph* 03-13-1908, and the quotation is from *Daily Telegraph* 04-14-1908. See also *Daily Telegraph* 1908-04-14, and Bloomfield, “City Building Processes in Berlin/Kitchener and Waterloo, 1870-1930,” 90-91.

85. L.J. Breithaupt, one of the town's most distinguished men, wrote of his annoyance with Huber on several occasions in his personal diary. See e.g. 02-25-1908, 04-14-1908, 04-15-1908, 06-05-1908. The relationship between the two men is the stuff of afternoon television: after working together as business colleagues (01-10-1888 in the Breithaupt diary), the two men clashed in 1908, but Breithaupt ultimately carried Huber to his grave, as one of his pallbearers, in 1915 (*Daily Telegraph* 10-05-1915).

vate businesses had contracts with the town, they firmly refused. After Huber fired the groundskeeper of the town park, the board of park management quickly reinstated him.⁸⁶ On one issue – the question of entrance fees at Victoria Park, a sore spot among townsfolk for years – Huber was successful, forcing the park board to restrict its fees to the park’s athletic fields.⁸⁷ Overall, though, Huber’s year in office was little more than an entertaining spectacle, and in a speech to Berlin voters at the end of the year, seeking re-election (very unsuccessfully), Huber’s tone illustrated his capitulation to the field: “In addressing the audience,” the newspaper wrote, “the Mayor claimed he tried to run the town on business principles but did not receive the support of the council.”⁸⁸ After a year in office, even Allen Huber had some facility in the field’s native tongue.

V

If my argument above is correct – if Berlin during the age of the ABC can be convincingly characterized as a stable field – then we can begin to understand how the creation of special purpose bodies operated as a contribution rather than a challenge to that field. Once we see Berlin as a stable field, in other words, we can more easily understand why the most attractive theory of special purpose bodies in Berlin did not grow out of Wilsonian reform, nor out of a defense of elite self-insulation, but was instead an articulation of a determined pursuit of local *capacity*.

To see what we mean by this, we first need to recognize a few basic features of Berlin’s municipal government at the turn of the century. Although the complexity of the municipal sphere had increased substantially, the basic organizational environment remained the same: one-year terms for municipal politicians, regular turnover on council committees, limited staffing, and minimal provincial support. Everything, from major policy initiatives to the width of the town’s water pipes, was decided by politicians. A variety of informal institutions had

86. See *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 06-16-1908.

87. English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History*, 109. For the earlier sore spot, see *Berlin News Record* 1898-06-08, 1898-07-20, 1900-08-29. See also “Interview with Schmalz” (KPL Oral History Collection).

88. *Daily Telegraph* 12-29-1908. See also *Berlin News Record* 12-29-1908.

developed to overcome some of these limitations, such as a customary second term for mayors who had served the town well, but the overall capacity limitations of the municipal sphere were a source of constant and unending complaint.⁸⁹

Within this highly circumscribed organizational environment, an opportunity emerged: special purpose bodies. Unlike councillors, members of special purpose bodies often served terms of three years or more. Special purpose bodies were responsible for a single service area, allowing their members to focus effectively and to develop specialized competence in a single sphere. Those who had interests in one area of municipal government, but who had little interest in municipal council, could serve the town on special purpose bodies. In short, Berlin's leaders argued, special purpose bodies afforded the town the opportunity to achieve two important outcomes that were difficult to obtain on council: continuity and competence.⁹⁰

If we return briefly to Table 1 (page ## above), and take a look at the third item in the list (continuity / specialization), we can see the pervasiveness of this theorization. What was attractive about special purpose bodies, Berlin's leaders consistently argued, was that they allowed their members the time and space they needed to make well-informed decisions about a given policy or service. Local arguments about special purpose bodies were therefore built on a claim about expertise, but the "causal arrow" in that claim ran in an unfamiliar direction: the continuity afforded by such bodies would make their members *into* specialized experts. In an atmosphere of limited capacity and constant turnover, special purpose bodies allowed the town to increase its capacity to carry out the tasks it considered proper to the municipal field.

This emphasis on capacity-building within the municipal field allows us to understand an additional feature of special purpose bodies in this era, a feature that I have thus far neglected: their instability. We saw above that Berlin's town council came close to abolishing the park board in 1895. What we neglected to mention was that at some

89. See e.g. *Berlin Daily Record*, 11-29-1894, 1894-12-20; *Berlin News Record*, 1898-12-28, 1902-11-03; *Daily Telegraph*, 1903-01-23, 1903-05-11, 1908-03-07.

90. In its emphasis on efficiency and capacity, this argument might also be called "Wilsonian". For our purposes, however, I am reserving "Wilsonian" for the familiar politics-administration distinction.

point during their early years, council seriously considered the abolition or consolidation of *every one* of the special purpose bodies it had created: the park board in 1895 and 1912, the water commission in 1907 and 1920, the light commission in 1903 and the street railway division of the light commission in 1909, the police commission in 1908 and 1909, and the sewer commission – successfully – in 1911. The town’s major concerns, as the second set of arguments in Table 1 reveals, are unsurprising. The very presence of so many special purpose bodies created an incomprehensible tangle of problems: jurisdictional squabbles, accountability issues, policy fragmentation, and so on. In 1911, for example, when a series of events called the competence of the Berlin Sewer Commission into question, Council pulled out its heavy weaponry and successfully abolished the commission.⁹¹ In other cases, it threatened to do the same.⁹²

Once we grant that Berlin’s special purpose bodies were an extension of, rather than a reform to, its municipal field, this instability clarifies. When special purpose bodies failed to provide the promised continuity and competence, they came in for hard questioning.⁹³ The sewer commission, which faced more serious challenges than the other bodies (including lawsuits and significant technical difficulties), and experienced higher turnover and more controversy about competence, was ultimately eliminated. We might say, then, that the theoretical foundation of Berlin’s special purpose bodies was initially unstable: because it rested on an empirical prediction about continuity and competence, special purpose bodies were never accepted as being of such overwhelming merit as to broker no dissent.⁹⁴ Instead, when promising

91. See *Berlin News Record* 04-19-1911, 05-16-1911, 05-17-1911, 06-06-1911, 07-17-1911.

92. However, council was always careful to indicate its support for commissions in general. In the case of the sewer commission, for instance, “the aldermen were careful to place themselves on record as being in favor of the commission form of Government”. See *Berlin News Record* 06-06-1911, 07-17-1911.

93. In this respect it may not be a coincidence that the instability of the sewer commission, with an overall turnover rate of about 70%, was higher than the park board (40%), the water commission (50%), or the light commission (40%) during the same period.

94. Or we might say, following Selznick, that the special purpose bodies were not (yet) institutionalized. See Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration* (New York: Harper / Row, 1957), 18-19.

new innovations entered the municipal scene, such as the city manager system or the American commission system, Berlin's municipal leaders seriously considered eliminating their special purpose bodies, and to the extent that they were legally permitted to do so, moved to adopt the newer organizational structures.⁹⁵

VI

Berlin's enthusiasm for special purpose bodies at the turn of the twentieth century was built on a foundation of diffusion. Once the administrative structure of the special purpose body had proved successful in one area, it was enthusiastically applied to others as well. Supporting this diffusion was a theory of special purpose bodies that made no attempt to challenge the general purposes of the municipal administration in Berlin. Instead, it offered an instrumental understanding of special purpose bodies, one that fit comfortably within the field as it already existed. The enthusiasm with which special purpose bodies were embraced in Berlin was therefore a function of the extraordinary depth to which the basic goals of the municipal field were accepted by all relevant actors, and of the extent to which special purpose bodies were believed to be capable of providing the means for the town to achieve those goals.

Because the theoretical basis of special purpose bodies in Berlin was primarily instrumental, I have argued that their position remained unstable. When special purpose bodies failed to provide continuity and competence, the jurisdictional problems that they created surged to the foreground, and they became vulnerable to demands for abolition or consolidation. For as long as they existed, however, special purpose bodies remained available for theorization in other, more stable terms. As new actors entered the field, and as debates about the goals of the field evolved, special purpose bodies would be theorized in new and different ways. From the perspective of the turn of the century, however,

95. In 1921, for example, Berlin's town council attempted to consolidate a number of special purpose bodies into a single massive commission, effectively creating a Canadian variant of the American commission system, but were prevented from doing so by the Ontario government's private bills committee (a decision that provoked considerable local complaint). See *Berlin Daily Record* 12-04-1920, 12-08-1920, 12-29-1920, 12-31-1920, 01-03-1921, 04-07-1921.

those newer actors, and the theories that they carried with them, remained in the unknown future.

NOTE ON PRIMARY SOURCES

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Newspapers: *Berlin Daily Record / News Record*, 1893-1902, 1909-1921; *Berlin Daily Telegraph* 1903-1909. During periods of lively debate (e.g. 05/1898, 01/1904, 12/1908, 01/1909), both newspapers were consulted when both were available.

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