Explaining Structural Changes to Local ABCs in Three Provincial-Municipal Domains, 1800-2010

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** DRAFT VERSION **

Abstract: This paper introduces a synthetic theoretical approach to structural policy change. We deploy the approach in three long-term historical cases: local boards of health, hydro commissions, and school boards in Ontario from 1800 to 2010. We argue that any compelling explanation of structural policy change must capture the multiple and interacting processes that are present in any moment of change, processes of varying power, duration, and scale.

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Five years ago, in the pages of *Canadian Public Administration*, University of Guelph political scientist Ken Woodside made an intriguing argument about local autonomy. To understand if local governments are truly autonomous, Woodside argued, we need to study four distinct *types* of local policymaking: developmental, allocative, redistributive, and constitutional (205). The first three of these types are borrowed from Paul Peterson's *City Limits*, but the fourth is Woodside's own creation. By adding "constitutional policy" to Peterson's original trichotomy, Woodside reminds us that the structures in which local decision-making takes place -- the structures that "constitute" local policymaking -- are themselves a matter of public policy.

Woodside devotes just a few paragraphs to constitutional policy in the rest of his article; his focus is autonomy more generally. But he has planted an interesting seed. What the idea of "constitutional policy" illustrates, above all, is that two of our major research traditions -- institutionalism and policy studies -- are often two sides of the same coin. Nowhere is this clearer than in the study of local government: while structures like school boards and municipal councils are clearly the product of public policy, they are also political *institutions*, susceptible to all of the arguments that the no-longer-very-new institutionalists have been making for decades (Hall and Taylor 1996).

Thus, in this essay, we step through the door that was opened by Woodside. Using Ontario's boards of health, hydro commissions, and school boards as our cases, we will develop a synthetic approach -- the "Fields and Streams approach" -- to explain how, when, and why constitutional policy change occurs.[1] Our approach will draw upon recent theories of institutional and policy change while also embracing the contextual complexity of the political world.

A final terminological note, however, before we begin. While there is much to like about Woodside's "constitutional policy", its weakest feature is the term itself. From a purely definitional standpoint, the term is sensible enough, but in the Canadian context it evokes all the wrong images: Trudeau and the Queen in the rain, men in suits at Meech Lake, upper-case Crisis and Change. For the remainder of this essay, therefore, we will speak not of *constitutional* but of *structural* policy, referring by that term to policies concerning the structures in which local governments operate.

I. Theories of Change and the Fields and Streams Approach

There may have been a time, decades ago, when theories of institutional and policy change were scarce, but these days we live in abundance. Every possible combination of the old explanatory trifecta -- ideas, institutions, interests -- has been explored with success: ideas and institutions (Weir 1992, Baumgartner and Jones 1993), ideas and interests (Blyth 2002), institutions and interests (Hacker and Pierson 2010, Mahoney and Thelen 2009), and even all three at once (Hall 2009). For all of their differences, these approaches suggest that the most promising line of attack, given the current state of the discipline, lies in synthesis rather than invention (Cairney 2013).

But what *sort* of synthesis? In our view, none of the approaches on offer has attended carefully enough to the kaleidoscopic character of structural policy change. Following William Sewell, we argue that a satisfying explanation of structural change must be able to capture the multiple, interacting processes that are active at any moment of change, processes of varying momentum, duration, and scale (Sewell 2005). Our own approach, called "Fields and Streams", attempts to meet this requirement while also remaining tractable. Whether it succeeds in doing so can only be proven by demonstrating the approach in action. But it will be helpful to begin with an outline.

The first step in any explanation of structural change, we argue, is the *change event*. These events are diverse: abolishing a special purpose body, reforming an electoral system, amending a constitution. To explain them, we draw on John Kingdon's "multiple streams" approach, according to which the policy-making world can be sorted into three streams: problems (the problems that policy actors see around them at a given moment), policies (the policy options that are available to those actors), and politics (the risks and opportunities for political actors involved in a given policy change). Each stream flows along more or less on its own logic, Kingdon argues, but when the streams come into alignment, an opportunity for change can appear. Thus, to explain discrete change events, we need to show how the three streams have intersected to produce changes in a particular time and place (Kingdon 2003, Zahariadis 2007).

But history is more than unrelated events, one after the next, like popcorn on a string. When we zoom out a bit, so that we can see not just one event but many, we often find that changes have *direction*: they tend to be patterned across space and time. To explain these patterns, we turn to the *policy field*.

A policy field is a portion of the political world devoted to a particular policy task: this could be "health structures" or "beef regulation" or anything else in the public arena. All fields contain two elements that create stable patterns over time: *policy resources* and *policy images*. Resources are those features of the field that enable actors to control or direct the field's three streams; the most important are *position* (occupying decision-making positions in the field), *organization* (the capacity to coordinate across time and space), and *legitimacy* (recognition based on experience, expertise, or prestige) (Tsebelis 2002, Hall 2009, Lawrence et al. 2009). Images, on the other hand, are beliefs about what the field is for (*purposes*), about the current state of the field (*status quo beliefs*), and about the changes, if any, that ought to be made in the field (*causal stories*) (Stone 1989, Baumgartner and Jones 1993, Baumgartner 2013). These resources and images interact to produce stable field-level patterns, and shifts in those patterns are caused by changes to resources, images, or both. But how do the shifts occur?

In most cases, changes to a field's resources and images occur when a field is "invaded" by an adjacent or enveloping field (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Invasions fall into three general types. First, changes in other fields within the *same* jurisdiction can have intentional or unintentional effects in other fields. Changes in a given jurisdiction's environmental policy field, for example, might affect resources or images in its industrial policy field. Second, changes in similar policy fields in *other* jurisdictions can diffuse into a local field: a shift toward energy deregulation in California, for instance, might prompt policy-makers in New Zealand or Canada to consider a similar reform. Finally, changes within particular central or deeply embedded fields can reverberate through many fields at once. When central decision-making structures are modified (cabinet structures, Senate filibuster rules, etc.), this can affect the resources available to actors in a great many policy fields.

The obvious challenge for an approach like Fields and Streams is to knit these layers and processes together into something that is more than *ad hoc* description; they must be more than

actors in an improvisational comedy, ready to leap into the scene when their presence is helpful. This is a significant analytical problem that has yet to be addressed in political science and policy studies (Abbott 2001, Sewell 2005). Our own strategy is to adopt what might be called methodological localism: we will attempt to locate traces of the various processes within *particular* streams, in *particular* fields, at *particular* points in time.[2] To be convincing, in other words, we need to show how patterns of varying duration and power affect the actual flow of the problem, policy, and politics streams. This resolutely local approach has the additional advantage of reminding us that the broad patterns, however powerful, are always enacted by *people* -- and therefore always have the potential to change.

Stated so abstractly, of course, the Fields and Streams approach seems little more than a tangled thicket of concepts. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the proof of the approach is in the explaining. Can Fields and Streams usefully illuminate two centuries of structural policy change in health, hydro, and education? It is time to find out.

II. Research Method

Our research has proceeded in four steps. The first step was to decide what *kinds* of structural change would be our focus for the case studies. After surveying the history of special purpose bodies in Ontario, we generated a septempartite typology of structural changes to local agencies, boards, and commissions. They are:

1) Creation: Establishing an ABC to perform a policy task that was not previously public (e.g. purchasing a waterworks system and entrusting it to a waterworks commission)
2) Elimination: Removing an ABC and its task from the public domain (e.g. dissolving arena board after the arena is sold to a private club)
3) Consolidation: Merging several ABCs of one type into a larger ABC of the same type (e.g. school board consolidation).
4) Partition: Dividing an ABC of one type into smaller ABCs of the same type (e.g. dividing township boards into smaller boards).
5) Specialization: Transferring authority to a local ABC. This can be partial (e.g. creating a council-appointed ABC) or complete (e.g. creating an independently

elected ABC).

1) Generalization: Transferring authority from an ABC to a general-purpose local government. This too can be partial (e.g. making members of a local ABC council-appointed) or complete (e.g. dissolving the ABC and transferring to a committee of council).
2) Provincialization: Transferring authority from an ABC to the provincial government. This can also be partial or complete.

The second step was to create inventories of change events in each of the three cases. To build the inventories, we surveyed as many sources as possible -- legislative journals, government reports, academic publications, archival materials, and so on -- searching until additional research turned up the same list of events again and again. Having checked our inventories against numerous and various sources, we are confident that they are complete.

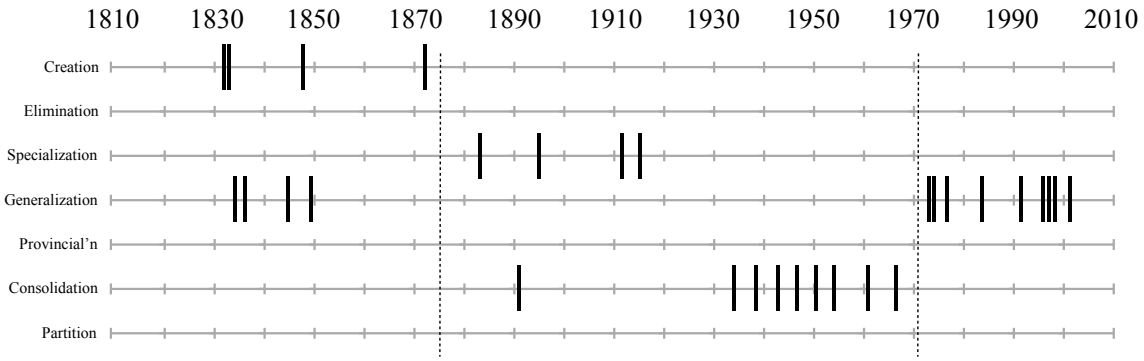
The third step was to try to understand each of the changes. This meant a return to the sources, this time in search of information on how the changes emerged, when and how they succeeded, and who was involved. Once this step was complete, we were finally prepared to examine each of the three inventories and to begin to explain what we had found. Our goal throughout the research process was to explain, using the Fields and Streams approach, both the timing of the changes and the patterns of those changes across time.

III. Structural Change in Public Health, Hydro, and Education[3]

We begin with public health. Each of the black lines in Figure 1 marks a structural change event in the history of local boards of health in Ontario. The figure suggests three major episodes, which are marked off from one another with vertical dotted lines. Between 1830 and 1875, for example, we see nothing but creation and generalization; we then see specialization and generalization from the 1880s to the 1960s. A lengthy string of generalization brings us from the 1970s up to the present. Let us explore each episode in turn.

The story of public health in Ontario begins with terror. In April of 1832, a deadly cholera epidemic arrived on Canadian soil, and in June of that year, the provincial executive authorized magistrates across the province to create Boards of Health in each district to manage and protect

Figure 1. Structural Change Events, Local Boards of Health, 1810-2010



against the disease (Aitchison 1953; Atkinson 2000). Later that year, after the worst of the outbreak had passed, the Upper Canadian legislature passed a statute to clarify and strengthen the system that had emerged during the crisis. Though the original system in 1832 had recommended boards of health at the district level, the centre of gravity in the 1833 statute was local, focused on cities, towns, and villages across the province. Through the next two decades, this shift to local control continued. As new municipalities appeared in Upper Canada, such as Toronto in 1834 and Kingston in 1837, their new councils were often given the authority to appoint boards of health, and by 1849, with the passage of the *Municipal Act*, the same authority was extended to all incorporated municipalities. Through the whole of this period, changes were intermittent and local boards of health were generally ignored except during moments of dire emergency (MacDougall 1990; Aitchison 1953; Splane 1965).

With the arrival of the "sanitarians" in the late 1870s, the public health field in Ontario was transformed. The sanitarians, composed primarily of a core group of devoted urban physicians, carried a radically new policy image into the field. For the sanitarians, the central problem was *ignorance*, both informational (nobody was collecting adequate statistics) and *institutional* (those in authority were ignorant of scientific medicine). To solve this problem, the sanitarians advocated expert authority at every level: in new federal and provincial health agencies, and also in local boards of health (Craig 1983, MacDougall 1981, 1982, 1990; PBH *Annual Report* 1882 and 1898).

By the 1880s, the sanitarians had successfully established themselves in positions of leadership in Ontario's new Provincial Board of Health; this central institutional position,

combined with organization, shared educational experience, and missionary zeal, gave the sanitarians the resources to set the agenda in the field for decades (Powell 1991).

The sanitarians first emphasized specialization, hoping to put some distance between boards of health and local councils by means of mandatory boards of health (1884) and increased term lengths (1895). When these early reforms proved unsuccessful, their attention turned to consolidation (PBH *Annual Report* 1901). Larger public health structures, the sanitarians thought, might solve two problems at once. First, they would remove the health system from the direct control of ignorant and stingy municipal councils. Second, they would provide local communities with the capacity to hire a full-time medical officer, eliminating the need for a part-time officer who depended on private practice for his primary income, and who therefore faced inevitable conflicts of interest when his own patients became ill with contagious diseases (PBH *Annual Report* 1901, 1902, 1906, 1911, 1912; Powell 1991).

The push for consolidated health structures was viewed with some trepidation by provincial politicians, who worried about the reaction from local and county councils: local councils would be unhappy to surrender local control, and county councils were equally unlikely to appreciate the added costs and controversies of a county health system (PBH *Annual Report* 1904; Powell 1991). In 1912, however, the Provincial Secretary introduced a compromise bill. The new statute did not create county boards of health, but it did make the local medical health officer (MHO) the executive officer and a member of the local board of health. Unlike other members of the local board of health, the MHO would serve on the board for years, even decades, and his accumulated expertise would make him the *de facto* policy leader on the board.

Under the new Act, however, the medical officer's position was still, in most places, only part-time, and most officers remained dependent on private practice for their primary income. So the sanitarians took up the cause of consolidation once again. For two decades, they travelled across the province, promoting consolidation in every conceivable venue with little to show for their efforts. In 1930, they came close to a change, when a somewhat muddled bill for consolidated public health structures managed to make it into the Legislature -- only to be quickly withdrawn. A few years later, however, after an opportunity for funding appeared from the Rockefeller Foundation, four counties in Eastern Ontario agreed to form a consolidated

health unit for "demonstration" purposes. In their decades-long campaign for consolidation, the sanitarians had finally gained a toehold (MacDougall 1980b, Powell 1991, Sanborn 2005).

The demonstration unit was a success, and in 1940 the provincial government added a funding incentive to encourage the formation of consolidated health units. It also added provincial appointees to the health units' boards. The sanitarians set out once again to preach the gospel of consolidation, and after 1945, the number of consolidated health units exploded: twenty-three were created by 1949, and eight more were added in the following decade. Then, in 1967, following criticisms by the provincial NDP, the Robarts government introduced yet another round of consolidation, encouraging the voluntary formation of twenty-nine "District Health Units" with 75 percent provincial funding as an incentive (Powell 1991).

By the end of the 1960s, then, the sanitarians had achieved victory: after nearly a century of advocacy, their program of specialization and consolidation was all but complete. In the 1970s, however, a challenge emerged. For more than a decade, a small but growing coalition of "regionalists" -- advocates of regional government -- had begun to attack local special purpose bodies, including local boards of health, arguing that they led to incoherent and fragmented local policy-making. Special purpose bodies, they claimed, should be folded into general-purpose local and regional structures (Feldman 1974, O'Brien 1975, Jacek 1980, Powell 1991). The sanitarians avoided open battle with the regionalists for a time, but by 1975, when one of the province's new regional councils explicitly requested permission to abolish its separate board of health, the question could be delayed no longer.

In the end, the sanitarians lost. The sanitarians' role in the Ministry of Health had been diminished in the post-war years, swamped in the growth of hospital insurance and medicare. Simultaneous changes to the provincial cabinet, which replaced a highly compartmentalized departmental structure with a system of strong inner cabinet committees, also meant that the sanitarians could no longer count on the Minister of Health as a devoted ally (Powell 1991, Loreto 1980). Waterloo Region was permitted to abolish its local board, folding public health into the responsibilities of regional council; the change was soon followed by York, Halton, and other regional governments across Ontario.

This generalization process continued under the Mike Harris government in the 1990s.

The government first shifted local boards of health from the statutes to regulation, making it easier for municipalities to request that their boards be dissolved. It also eliminated many local boards during the municipal amalgamation process. This long history of generalization came under heavy criticism in the aftermath of SARS in 2003, and the most prominent investigative commission in Ontario recommended that public health structures be either partially or wholly provincialized (Campbell 2006). Since 2006, however, no major structural changes have been made, and the provincial government has preferred to explore further consolidation rather than wholesale provincialization (Moloughney 2005, Ontario Public Health Division 2009).

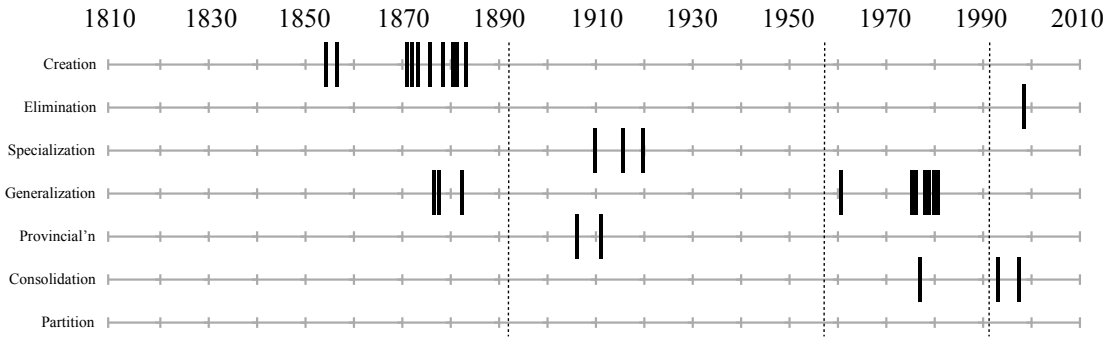
Hydro Commissions

As in public health, the inventory of changes to hydro commissions, summarized in Figure 2, suggests several episodes: the first from 1850 to 1900, consisting of creation and generalization; the second in the early 1900s, consisting of specialization and provincialization; a string of generalization events in the 1970s; and a small burst of consolidation and elimination in the late 1990s.

Most of the events in the first episode, from 1850 to 1885, are changes to water commissions rather than hydro commissions. They belong in the hydro story, however, because the first legislation to create hydro commissions in Ontario simply adopted the waterworks structure whole. This meant that the endpoint in the long evolution of water commissions in Ontario became the starting point in the story of hydro. It was a story of incremental change. The basic structure for the water commissions, first developed in Hamilton in 1856, was tweaked and adjusted as it spread to Toronto, St. Catharines, Ottawa and beyond (Furry 1960, Jones & McCalla 1979, Nelles & Armstrong 1986, MacDougall 1981). In some cases, the process was literally a matter of cut-and-paste, with portions of earlier bills glued into the draft versions of later ones.[4]

In the early 1900s, however, a new player entered the hydro field: the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario (HEPC). The HEPC was born from a coalition of manufacturers in Ontario cities, who were eager for a new source of energy in coal-starved Ontario, and two features of the new Commission gave it considerable resources in the field. First, the structural

Figure 2. Structural Change Events, Local Hydro Commissions, 1810-2010



position of the HEPC was ambiguous. A provincial agency in some respects, a municipal cooperative in others, the HEPC could draw on the power of both levels of government without being controlled by either (Denison 1960; Nelles 1974, 1976; Freeman 1996). This ambiguity was cultivated by Adam Beck, hydro's first chairman. Ferociously competitive, politically savvy, and committed to hydro with a zeal that would put tent-revivalists to shame, Beck exploited the structural ambiguity of the HEPC to enhance its autonomy in every sphere (Plewman 1947, Drury 1966, Nelles 1974, 1976). Beck was aided in this program by a second new feature of the field: a coalition of municipal hydro actors that was known, after 1912, as the Ontario Municipal Electric Association. This coalition provided the HEPC with an important source of extra-parliamentary power, and whenever pressure was needed, the OMEA was ready with deputations of dozens -- even hundreds -- of municipal representatives, who streamed into Toronto at Beck's call to voice their support for the Hydro and for the mighty Sir Adam Beck (Gregory 1924, Nelles 1974, Dewar 1975).

Early in the twentieth century, then, the major positional and organizational resources in the hydro field shifted decisively toward the HEPC. This shift, combined with a desperate desire for hydro across the province, meant that local structures shifted away from municipal councils and toward special-purpose hydro commissions and the HEPC. This meant increased term lengths (1906), an HEPC appointee on the Toronto hydro commission (1911), and mandatory hydro commissions in municipalities receiving Niagara power (1913). It also meant that in some parts of the province, the HEPC moved into the business of local distribution itself, controlling local hydro systems first in central Ontario and then in much of rural Ontario. These changes were possible in part because they rarely threatened existing municipal hydro commissions, but they were also possible because of the extraordinary capacity of the HEPC and its leader, Adam

Beck, to exploit the HEPC's structural ambiguity and to meet the desire for hydro power in local communities across Ontario (Gregory 1924, Fleming 1992).

After 1920, the basic structure of hydro commissions in Ontario remained remarkably stable for decades, and it was not until the early 1970s that the quiet continuity was finally challenged. The reason for the change, as in the case of public health, was the regionalists. In many cases, regionalist reports on local governments in Ontario recommended wholesale abolition of the hydro commission; in milder cases, they recommended that commissions be appointed rather than elected. Then, in the early 1970s, a separate cluster of reports and reviews began, this time focused exclusively on the subject of hydro. These reports did not recommend that local commissions be abolished, but instead that they be regionalized: the problem was not the *existence* of hydro commissions, in other words, but their *number*, more than 350 across the province at the time. As regional governments were created across the province, these reports suggested, hydro utilities ought to be consolidated at the regional level (see Table 2 for an overview of these reports).

For more than a decade, then, report after report rolled off the presses, all of them nearly unanimous in the desperate need for reform. But the actual result of the recommendations was minor. Rather than moving to regional commissions, or abolishing commissions altogether, hydro commissions in Ontario's new regional governments were simply restructured to match the boundaries of the lower-tier municipalities, and those new lower-tier municipalities were now authorized -- within a two-year window of their creation -- to make their local hydro commissions appointed rather than elected. Compared to the radical recommendations of the reports in Table 2, this was a remarkably modest reform. Much of the province was left unchanged, and even in the new regional governments, there would be no abolition, no consolidation, and precious little generalization. The reason for the modest changes was in part due to timing -- when regional governments were created, hydro structures in those areas were often under separate study -- and was also due in part to the truncated nature of the regional government program in Ontario, which fizzled in the 1970s in the face of economic strain and widespread criticism. But the chief reason for the modest reforms was the powerful lobbying effort of the Ontario Municipal Electric Association, which mounted a consistent campaign of

Table 2: Hydro Recommendations in Government Reports, 1960-1980

Year	Geog. Area	Description
1965	Province-wide	Beckett Committee: recommends abolition of HCs
1965	Ottawa area	Ottawa-Carleton-Eastview report recommends abolition of HCs
1965	Toronto	Royal Commission on Metro Toronto: no discussion of hydro commissions
1966	Niagara area	Niagara area report recommends abolition of HCs
1966	Peel-Halton area	Peel-Halton review recommends appointed HCs
1967	Province-wide	Ontario Committee on Taxation: No recommendations on HCs
1968	Lakehead area	Lakehead local review makes no recommendations on hydro
1968	Province-wide	Select Committee on Ontario Committee on Taxation: no discussion of HCs
1969	Hamilton area	Hamilton-Wentworth report recommends larger lower-tier HCs
1969	Muskoka	Muskoka area report leaves hydro structure to hydro experts
1970	Province-wide	Dolbey ABCs Report recommends abolition of HCs
1970	Waterloo area	Waterloo area report recommends abolition of HCs
1970	Sudbury	Sudbury area report makes no specific recommendations on hydro
1972	Province-wide	Task Force Hydro report recommends regional consolidation of HCs
1972	GTA East	Report on Area East of Metro: wait for Task Force Hydro report
1974	Province-wide	Hogg report recommends regional HCs where viable
1976	Ottawa area	Ottawa-Carleton Review recommends abolition of HCs
1977	Niagara area	Niagara Region review recommends regionalization, abolition of HCs
1977	Toronto	Royal Commission on Metro Toronto recommends appointed HCs
1978	Hamilton area	Hamilton-Wentworth review: hydro is under study elsewhere
1979	Waterloo area	Waterloo Region review commission recommends abolition of HCs

resistance to any regionalist structural reforms. The OMEA (which was still comprised of hundreds of elected municipal officials) was able to exploit its contact with local ratepayers to stir up concerns about the changes, and it also enjoyed the consistent provincial support of Ontario Hydro. In an atmosphere of steady attack, with a new report advocating the abolition of hydro commissions practically every year, most hydro commissions emerged from the challenge unscathed (Dolbey 1970, Fleming 1996) .

By the 1990s, however, the field had changed. At the provincial level, Ontario Hydro was under constant attack, and public support for the once-beloved corporation had crumbled in the face of spending and planning controversies, particularly in Hydro's nuclear division (Swift and Stewart 1994). After a scathing 1997 report dubbed Ontario's nuclear plants "minimally acceptable" -- the hydro-consultant equivalent of a D-minus -- the *Economist* joked that Homer Simpson, the riotously lax nuclear safety inspector in *The Simpsons*, "might be more at home in Canada" ("Hydrophobia" 1997). Even at the local level, support had begun to erode; as in the reports of the 1970s, those who studied the hydro system in the 1990s emphasized the problems that were created by an overabundance of local utilities, and everyone, even the OMEA, agreed that *some* degree of consolidation would probably improve the province's electrical distribution

system (Swift and Stewart 1994, Stewart 2005, Martin 2007).

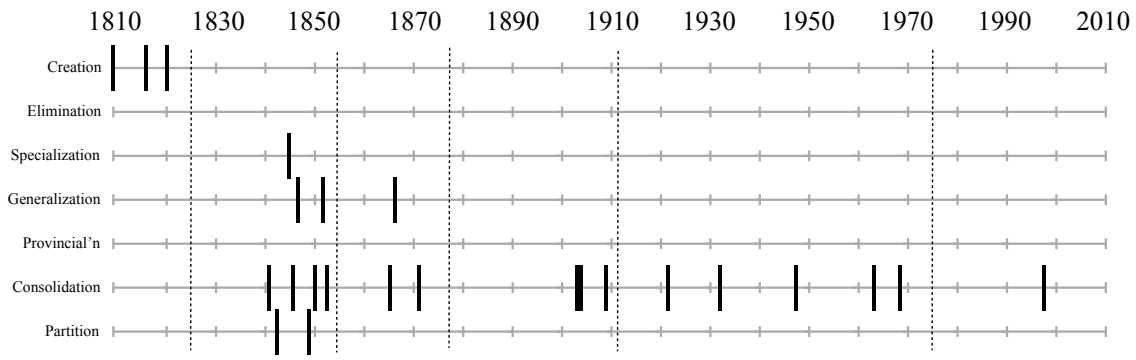
Gradually, after a long string of reports, the Harris Government decided that retail-level competition in the hydro sector would have an additional advantage: it would lead naturally to voluntary consolidation and rationalization. To make the transition from commission to corporation, millions of dollars would have to be paid to consultants, lawyers, and technology specialists -- the City of Peterborough ultimately spent $2.5 million on a new computer system alone (Swift and Stewart 1994) -- which meant that the only realistic option for tiny places like Chatsworth (pop. 522) or Flesherton (pop. 625) would be divestment. Thus, in 1998, the *Energy Competition Act* required that all local utilities be converted into business corporations, and shortly after the turn of the new millennium, the commission structure that was born in Hamilton in 1856 was finally retired. As expected, the number of distribution utilities in the province plummeted from more than three hundred in the 1990s to fewer than ninety. For some in the field, this is still much too high a number: as in the 1990s, recent reports have recommended a regional (or "shoulder to shoulder") system of six to ten major distribution utilities (Elston et al. 2012). But these reports sparked considerable local consternation, and the present Energy Minister has announced that the government will stick with voluntary consolidation for now (Gamble 2013). Thus, despite ongoing pressure for consolidation, local hydro structures appear for the moment to be stable.

School Boards

The inventory of structural changes to local school boards (Figure 3) looks rather different from our inventories in health and hydro above. After some early creation events, the field seems to have undergone a rash of changes in the 1840s, only to settle down into an endless string of consolidation events for the rest of its history. The dotted lines in the figure also seem more arbitrary than in the cases above. As we shall see, however, a more careful look at the structural history of school boards in Ontario reveals that this field, like the others, can be sensibly organized into a series of coherent episodes of change.

School boards arrived in Upper Canada in two types: the grammar school board (first known as the "public" or "district" board) and the common school board. Each grammar school

Figure 3. Structural Change Events, Education, 1810-2010



was administered by five executive-appointed trustees. The same number of executive appointees were also selected in each district to supervise the common schools, but the core of the common school system was the three-person boards that were elected annually to oversee each of the common schools (Hodgins 1895, Gidney 1972, Downes 1974). By the late 1830s, proposals for change for both types of boards -- especially the common school boards -- were plentiful. But it was not until a Reform coalition was elected in the new Province of Canada in 1841 that the first major structural change was finally passed into law (Wilson 1970, Gidney and Lawr 1978, Gidney and Millar 1985, Houston and Prentice 1988).

When change did arrive, however, it arrived with force. In the next decade, common school structures changed wildly. In 1841, the province abolished the three-trustee board, replacing it with township boards. This proved disastrous, and the government quickly switched back to the former model (Gidney and Lawr 1978). After a weak Tory coalition replaced the Reform coalition in 1844, the new government introduced another set of amendments in 1846 and 1847. Among other changes, the new amendments consolidated urban school boards at the municipal boundaries and made them council-appointed. The latter reform, combined with the ambiguous legal relationship between urban councils and school boards, led to a major controversy in Toronto and ultimately to the reversal of the 1846 and 1847 changes in a new statute of 1849 (Gidney and Lawr 1978, Ross 1975). But when the government realized that the 1849 amendments would mean a very public resignation by Egerton Ryerson, the province's Superintendent of Education, they tiptoed backward, opting not to put the changes into effect; in 1850, the government introduced a bill to return to a watered-down version of the 1846-47 system (Hodgins 1895, Gidney and Lawr 1978). It was not until 1850, when responsible

government had been established, the Canadian party system had begun to congeal, and education policy had a small but growing bureaucratic home, that the wild, pendular reforms finally began to subside (Hodgins 1895, Ross 1975, Gidney and Lawr 1978, Houston and Prentice 1988).

In the late 1860s, Egerton Ryerson introduced (or re-introduced) two structural changes in Ontario. The first was for consolidated urban boards of education, uniting primary and secondary school boards in larger elected boards. This proposal was rejected in the 1870s but passed at the turn of the century with little controversy, first in Toronto and then -- when other cities proved eager for the same structure -- in numerous towns and cities across the province (Hodgins 1895; Stewart 1986, Gidney and Millar 1990). The second major proposal was the township school board. Although this change was the precise structural equivalent of what had been installed in urban areas in 1847, it took more than a century before a similar change was fully implemented in rural Ontario. The first attempt, as we have seen, ended in disaster in 1841. The second resulted in a tepid provision for voluntary consolidation in 1871, and the third attempt, in the 1920s, resulted in no change at all (Oliver 1977, Stamp 1982). Only in the 1930s was an effective provision for voluntary consolidation finally introduced, to which financial incentives were later added to encourage voluntary consolidation. By the early 1960s, about half of the province's rural areas had adopted township boards voluntarily, and in 1964, the structure was made mandatory (Hope 1950, Cameron 1969, Stamp 1982, Gidney 1999).

The reasons for the long and controversial history of township consolidation in Ontario are complex, and our summary can be little more than an outline sketch. The shift to mandatory township boards required two conditions in the field which came into alignment only in the 1960s: cabinet-level support and weak rural opposition. Those who advocated the township boards in the 1860s were able to convince most local actors of their value, especially if they were voluntary rather than mandatory, but cabinet-level support was unreliable; by the 1920s, on the other hand, cabinet support was assured but rural actors were actively organized in opposition to the change (Hodgins 1895, Stamp 1982). It was not until the 1960s that cabinet support for consolidation was firm *and* the power of rural trustees to veto the change had been weakened: rural opposition to consolidated boards (and schools) had faded in the face of increased

secondary participation (i.e. parents had grown accustomed to sending their children to more distant schools), much-improved roads and busses, and increased funding; moreover, whatever opposition remained was now diluted by agricultural consolidation, suburbanization, and rural demographic change, all of which meant fewer farmers in Ontario (Fleming 1971, Stamp 1988, Gidney 1999). The move to mandatory township boards in the 1960s was hardly free of political risk, but the quiet response to the change confirmed that the field had indeed changed drastically since the 1920s. A few years later, the government decided to go further, consolidating all urban and rural school boards into even larger county-level boards. Even this change, though considerably more controversial than the first, provoked little more than tepid procedural complaints in the Legislature; to meet Liberal criticisms, for example, Premier Davis could counter that precisely the same change had been recommended in the Liberal Party's most recent election manifesto (*Debates* 1968, 1593).

By June of 1995, when Mike Harris's Progressive-Conservative party was elected, school boards had become exactly what Bill Davis had hoped: large and sophisticated bureaucracies, capable of providing specialized services and training to tens of thousands of students. But the boards were also the subject of increasingly scathing attacks, accused of providing an education of declining quality at increasing expense, of wasting funds on administration rather than -- in what would become a 30,000-volt term -- on "classroom spending" (Ibbitson 1997, Gidney 1999). A report by former Liberal cabinet minister John Sweeney in the early Harris years, which emphasized heavy administrative spending and recommended school board consolidation, thus became a key element in the Conservatives' rhetorical arsenal (Ibbitson 1997).

Premier Harris and his cabinet considered a number of radical proposals for structural change, including the wholesale provincialization of the system. But those changes would require total war with local trustees, along with a near-certain constitutional challenge from the Separate schools, and the government was already busily at war on multiple fronts. So Harris and his cabinet opted for radical enfeeblement instead. In 1997, the government eliminated nearly half of the province's school boards, organizing the remaining boards into just four major types: public English and French, and separate English and French. Where school board types in Ontario could once be measured by the hundreds, and boards themselves by the thousands, the

local education system had been reduced to just seventy-two mega-regional boards, and just four general types, by the turn of the millennium (Ibbitson 1997, Gidney 1999, Bedard and Lawton 2000, Sattler 2012).

IV. Discussion

In the summaries above, we have aimed for as compact an overview as possible. Our use of the Fields and Streams approach has therefore been implicit rather than explicit. Now that we have surveyed each field, however, we can clarify how our approach helps us understand the timing, patterns, and overall shape of the three cases.

Stream-Level Processes

We begin with the change events. Our research has turned up a list of nearly one hundred major structural change events to local public health, hydro, and education structures in Ontario. A detailed multiple-streams analysis of each event would therefore be rather tedious -- and, given space constraints, impossible. What we *can* provide, however, is an overview of three major *types* of structural change events in our three cases.

The first type, which might be called "fire-alarm oversight", is incremental, pragmatic, and problem driven (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984). In these cases, policy actors make politically uncontroversial changes whenever problems happen to appear, and their search for alternative policies is driven by satisficing: they choose whatever solutions are closest to hand, as long as those solutions meet a basic threshold of adequacy (Simon 1972). Changes in local public health structures before 1880, as well as changes in the hydro field before 1900, follow this *problem-triggered* trajectory.

The second basic type, which is much rarer, is *policy-triggered* change. Just one of the events in our three cases clearly conforms to this type: the creation of Rural Power Districts in hydro in 1920. In this case, the problems in the field were well known (rural Ontario wanted hydro), and the political will was more than sufficient, but it was not until a 1919 hydro study suggested the rural power district as a policy alternative that the policy change occurred.

The most common trajectory, however, is the third: instances in which problems are well known, policy solutions are available, and structural changes are triggered by shifts in perceived political risk or opportunity. These *politics-triggered* changes include changes that took place in the relative safety of a first legislative session (e.g. public health in 1884, 1895, 1912; education in 1964 and 1968), after the appointment of a new cabinet minister (health in 1912, 1934; education in 1903, 1934, 1964, and 1968), after criticism or encouragement by opposition parties (health in 1967, hydro in 1920, education in 1964), and also, though less often than one might expect, after changes in government (education in the 1840s, all three fields in the 1990s).

Field-Level Processes

The central claim of the Fields and Streams approach is that the patterned character of structural policy change results from the arrangement of policy resources and policy images in a field -- and that shifts in those resources and images result in shifts in the broad patterns of change.

Our case studies yield considerable support for this thesis. In public health, the two major field-level shifts -- in the 1880s and the 1970s -- are quite clearly the result of shifts in images and resources in the field. In the first case, the sanitarians established themselves in the Provincial Board of Health, and organized themselves across the province, entrenching the sanitarian policy image in the field for decades. By the 1970s, however, those resources had weakened -- organization was less cohesive, position was less prominent, and cabinet-level support was nonexistent -- which meant that the regionalist policy image could and did successfully invade the field.

In hydro, the story is similar. The shift to specialization and provincialization in the early twentieth century resulted from the arrival of the HEPC and its supportive municipal coalition in the field. These new actors dominated the field's resources almost completely, entrenching a single policy image -- that of the municipal manufacturers and their allies -- for several decades. Even in the 1970s, this basic arrangement persisted, and the HEPC-OMEA alliance prevented the regionalist challenge from being as successful in hydro as it had been in public health. It was not until the 1990s, when resources and images both shifted -- provincial enthusiasm for

deregulation (an image shift) meant that the municipal coalition no longer enjoyed the support of its provincial ally (a resource shift) -- that deep and lasting structural changes occurred.

In education, the picture is less clear until we recognize a basic fact: for much of Ontario's history, we are not dealing with *one* policy field in education, but *many*: urban primary structures, rural primary structures, Catholic board structures, and so on. Some of these fields have been quite stable since 1850 (such as urban public structures), while others have been deeply contentious (such as rural structures). In some fields, the Department (later Ministry) of Education's policy images have faced few competitors, while in others, the competitors have been well-resourced and deeply entrenched. Most recently, it has been the Catholic coalition that has replaced the rural coalition as the most important brake on structural changes in the field.

We have also found three general *types* of policy fields in our three cases: unorganized, stable, and contentious.[5] The general characteristics of these three types are summarized in Table 3. In unorganized fields, images are inchoate, pragmatic, and non-politicized and resources are unstable and scarce, resulting in satisficing and incremental change. In stable fields, policy images are widely shared and deeply held, and resources are weighted heavily in favour of those who share the field's dominant image. In contentious fields, more than one image competes for dominance in the field, and supporters of each image battle for control of the field's resources in the hope of installing their preferred vision of the field.

What about field-level change? Our argument above was that episode-level changes occur when the field is invaded by an adjacent or enveloping field. Changes in similar fields in other jurisdictions can inspire actors to promote the same changes locally: the sanitarians, for example, were inspired by examples from the USA and the UK; provincial hydro officials in the 1990s were similarly inspired by deregulation in other hydro fields around the Anglo-American world. Changes in adjacent fields in the *same* jurisdiction can also profoundly affect a given field. The regionalist challenge in health and hydro, which first developed in fields devoted to economic development, planning, and municipal administration, invaded public health and hydro as the regionalist critique extended to include special purpose bodies in those fields as well. Finally, changes in particularly central fields in a jurisdiction can reverberate through many connected fields. When the Robarts and Davis governments reorganized cabinet-level decision-

Table 3: Characteristics of Policy Fields

	Unorganized	Stable	Contentious
Policy Images	Inchoate, pragmatic, non-politicized	Single image is widely shared and deeply held	Competition between two or more policy images
Policy Resources	Shifting positions, weak organization, legitimacy is parasitic	Major policy image is well organized, established in key positions, legitimate.	Coalitions of well-organized actors compete for decision positions and legitimacy
Examples	Water/Hydro 1850-1900 Public Health 1830-1875	Public Health 1880-1960 Hydro 1900-1990	Public Health 1970-1990 Education 1840-1850
Change Events	Problem-triggered	Politics-triggered	Politics-triggered
Problem Stream	Fire-alarm oversight; problems enter the field "from the outside"	Ongoing attention to problems; consistent reporting and analysis	Ongoing attention; disagreement about which problems should have priority.
Policy Stream	Incremental and pragmatic; low-threshold satisficing predominates.	Particular policy options dominate; innovations from similar policy fields.	Competing policies, sometimes in response to differing problems.
Politics Stream	Non-politicized decision-making processes and little public attention	Little politicization; pace of change determined by exposure to political risk	Opportunities for politicization as policy players battle to control/influence veto players

making structures in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the new structure meant that any proposed changes would have to be justified to a wider array of voices in the "inner cabinet". In all three of our cases, the result of this change was a shift toward a more contentious environment; the new cabinet structure altered the available resources in all of the fields, making it more difficult for a single policy image to dominate.

V. Conclusion

In this essay we have introduced a synthetic theoretical approach to structural change, which we call Fields and Streams, while also applying the approach to two centuries of structural change in three important policy fields in Ontario. Our treatment of the three cases has necessarily been painted in outline strokes.[6] The goal has been to demonstrate that in at least one instance of structural policy change -- the history of local special purpose bodies in Ontario -- the Fields and Streams approach has considerable purchase and promise.

The approach that we have introduced in this essay could be taken much further. One of the intriguing possibilities of the fields and streams approach is that it helps us understand why very different theoretical approaches all prove helpful in understanding structural change. The "Advocacy Coalition Framework", for example, seems particularly well-suited for examining contentious policy fields (Sabatier 1988, Sabatier and Weible 2009); Peter Hall's "Policy Paradigms" approach may be best suited for the study of stable policy fields (Hall 1993). But these are hardly the only theoretical insights that could prove useful. Theories of institutional friction and punctuated equilibrium can help us understand when particular fields are ripe for major shifts (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, Lieberman 2002); and theories of problem definition, policy development, and policy entrepreneurship will help clarify the timing of particular change events (Kingdon 1993, Rochefort and Cobb 1994). If our argument has been successful, however, these investigations will begin with two assumptions. They will assume, first of all, that every policy change results from multiple processes that differ in temporal duration, spatial scope, and structural power. They will also assume that the best way to embrace the challenge of explaining these changes is to show how the intersecting processes affect the images and resources of real policy actors who labour, day after day, within ever-flowing policy streams.

[1] A note for those with a nose for anachronism: we will use "Upper Canada" when referring to pre-Confederation Ontario (even during the "Canada West" period). When referring to the overall history, however, we will simply use "Ontario".

[2] The term is inspired by Little (2010), though our meaning is very different. The more direct inspiration is Abbott (2005) and Sewell (2005), and by the many historians and social scientists who adhere to such a principle in practice without necessarily articulating it in theory.

[3] I survey all of these cases is much more detail in my forthcoming dissertation, "Explaining Institutional Change: Local Special Purpose Bodies in Ontario, 1800-2010". Each case receives a full chapter in the dissertation; the chapters also contain full references to archival materials, professional journals, and other unpublished sources.

[4] For a particularly clear example of this cut-and-paste process, see 41 Vic. Bill 4, 1871 (Brampton Waterworks) in Original Bills, RG 49-39, Archives of Ontario.

[5] These terms are inspired by (though not identical to) those in McAdam and Fligstein 2012.

[6] See note 3.

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