

Multilevel Governance and Public Policy in Canadian Municipalities:
Reflections on Research Results

presented at the panel on The Politics of Multilevel Governance

Canadian Political Science Association
Victoria
June 6, 2013

Robert Young

The University of Western Ontario

young@uwo.ca

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This paper reports some of the principal findings from a research project undertaken by a large group of scholars over the past seven years. Our focus was on how intergovernmental negotiations produce policy in Canadian municipalities, and on the role of 'social forces' - more or less organized interests of all kinds - in the policy making process. We have been particularly interested in municipal governments, both as participants in intergovernmental relations and as hubs of networks of local social forces. Our results, overall, paint a thorough picture of multilevel governance in Canada.¹ In this paper, the findings are organized around the themes of effectiveness and accountability. After a brief introduction, and an account of the research, these themes are taken up in turn. I conclude with general findings about multilevel governance in Canada and about the position of municipal governments in the Canadian system.

I. Municipal Government in Canada

Local government in Canada is relatively weak. Compared with the systems in other advanced industrial countries, municipalities' constitutional and jurisdictional power is limited. (Young 2009a). Constitutionally, local authorities are a competence of the provincial governments; hence the well-worn phrase that they are "creatures of the provinces." Provincial governments create them, regulate them, prescribe many policies they implement, and, not infrequently, eliminate them through amalgamation. Of course, those same provincial governments must be responsive to local public opinion and local pressures, and they must be solicitous of municipal economies. This is especially true when a major city makes up a large share of the provincial population: Winnipeg, to take the extreme Canadian example, constitutes 57% of the population of Manitoba. It is noteworthy that many functions carried out at the local level in other countries are administered provincially in Canada. School boards are independent of local-government authority, as are hospitals and most health services. With the exception of Ontario, social assistance is a provincial responsibility (Sancton 2009).

Not surprisingly, municipalities' financial position is also relatively weak. Spending by local governments makes up 4.1% of Canadian GDP, while the 2009 average for the 29 OECD countries for which data are available was 12.2% (calculated from OECD 2012, Table 2). In Canada, most "senior" governments have not allocated to municipalities access to tax bases that grow with the economy, notably sales taxes and the income tax. As a consequence local governments are unusually dependent on the property tax and related taxes, which account for about 50% of total revenue and 62% of own-source revenue (Sancton and Young 2009, 502). Other revenues come mostly from the sale of goods and services and from transfers, which are overwhelmingly from the provinces and largely conditional.

In the intergovernmental world in Canada, municipalities have a difficult time

competing (Breton 1987, 319-22). But they do have some resources. Municipal governments have a lot of information about the locality. Now, provincial and federal agencies also have much information. In Ontario, for example, where immigrant settlement is concerned, both the federal department, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the provincial ministry of Citizenship and Immigration possess localized information about immigrant flows, settlement agencies, language needs, and so on. But this information is not integrated with other knowledge about the community that is relevant to immigrant settlement - about housing, libraries, recreation, local businesses, and so on. Integrated local information is the specialty of the municipal government. Second, municipalities have a monopoly of expertise in some areas, particularly land-use planning and zoning. Third, municipal governments have extensive linkages with organized interests at the local level. To the extent that modern governance relies on consulting and harnessing the expertise and resources of the private and voluntary sectors, municipalities have a comparative advantage at the local level over other governments. Finally, almost all provincial governments have legislated to increase the autonomy of municipalities, especially larger cities, often by replacing narrowly defined powers with broader spheres of jurisdiction and by conferring "natural person" powers that allow more latitude in business matters (Garcea and LeSage 2005).

Over the past 15 years, there has been considerable agitation about the structure and functioning of municipal government in Canada. Ultimately this was spurred by deep background factors - demographic change, technological innovation, shifts in political culture, and the economic re-structuring occasioned by deeper globalization. The proximate cause of real change in the federal stance toward municipalities was intense lobbying, especially by the big-city mayors and some business organizations. It was the Liberal government headed by prime minister Paul Martin (2003-06) that introduced a "New Deal" for cities and communities, one that included a full rebate of the federal sales tax on municipal expenditures and the transfer to municipalities of a portion of the federal tax on gasoline; as well, a ministry of state for Infrastructure and Communities was established, so there was a federal interlocutor for municipalities, the first since the late 1970s (Berdahl 2006). This policy thrust was largely reversed under the Conservative prime ministership of Stephen Harper (2006-). Spending on infrastructure in and with municipalities and provinces was maintained (and very much increased during the 2008-09 recession) but the Conservatives' policy of "Open Federalism" involves more respect for the constitutional division of jurisdiction, and municipalities in Canada fall under provincial authority (Young 2006). So federal-municipal relations have been attenuated overall.

II. The Research

It was because municipal issues were rising once more on the national policy agenda (Andrew, Graham and Phillips 2002) that a research team was assembled to study multilevel governance and public policy in municipalities. This group eventually included more than 90 researchers and a great number of student research assistants. Our focus was on public policies in municipalities, not all of which, of course, are generated by municipal governments themselves. We aimed to explore the creation of such policies, analyzing this as a function of the intergovernmental negotiations that

produced the policy and of the involvement of social forces (or not) in the policy-making process. Even with a large research group, not all policy fields could be explored, so we chose six - emergency planning, federal property, municipal image-building, immigrant settlement, infrastructure, and urban Aboriginal policy. These are areas where we could expect to find municipal-federal relationships, mediated by the provincial governments. The fields vary in visibility, the primary policy instruments used, and jurisdictional location; as well, some involve services to people and others involve physical matters.²

The team produced some noteworthy comparative studies of the position of municipalities in federations and their relations with federal governments (Lazar and Leuprecht 2007). There were also studies of the background to federal involvement in cities in Canada (Carroll and Graham 2009). But most of the research dealt with municipal governments and policy making, and was designed to identify differences across provinces as well as across policy fields and municipalities of different sizes. In each province, we studied the largest city, concentrating in each on four of the six policy fields (Horak and Young 2012). We also studied two policy fields in every province, investigating policy making in four municipalities of different sizes. (An unusual feature of the whole project is this interest in how multilevel governance works in smaller cities, towns, and even rural municipalities.) The policy-field studies are now being published (Tolley and Young 2011; Peters 2011; Harvey and Young forthcoming; and so on).

There is a long and distinguished history of scholarship on federalism in Canada (Simeon 2002). But there has been little linkage between research on federal-provincial relations and research on municipal government, and this is the gap that our project aimed to fill. Because the study of multilevel governance was in its infancy in Canada (Young and Leuprecht 2006), we did not start out with a set of clear hypotheses but rather with a set of guiding research questions. On the intergovernmental side, we were interested first in documenting municipal-federal government relationships. Beyond that we wanted to explore:

- how the municipal-federal relationship is mediated by provincial governments,
- what role is played by politicians in intergovernmental relations, as opposed to officials,
- whether ideological differences between governments impede policy making,
- what is the impact of governments having different levels of resources,
- whether the principles of New Public Management have affected multilevel governance, and
- how growing vertical collaboration between governments might stimulate horizontal cooperation between local governments.

On the 'governance' side, there were a few questions that pre-occupied our study of social forces' involvement in policy making. We wanted to document what interests are involved in the policy process, and at what stage - agenda-setting, problem definition, setting out policy options, decision-making, or implementation. Our major issue was the influence of business in determining policy, a question that has dominated the study of local government in North America for decades. How much power does business have over the policies that prevail in municipal spaces? Finally, we were interested in whether business or other interests could 'shift scale,' and operate effectively at higher

levels of government.

Beyond all this, another research concern was to evaluate the quality of public policy. One of our goals was to assess policies and to suggest changes in the policy process or in policies themselves that would make them better. Researchers were concerned with many aspects of policy - its timeliness, scale, coherence, originality, efficiency, equitability, and appropriateness of problem definition. In the end, however, our two dominant criteria of good policy in Canadian municipalities were effectiveness (whether the policy achieved its objectives) and responsiveness (whether the policy was congruent with local preferences). In terms of these two criteria, we now proceed to some findings about policy and multilevel governance.

III. Effectiveness

It should be understood that true multilevel governance is not terribly common in Canada: there are relatively few fora where representatives of the three levels of government deliberate together about policy, and fewer still where members of social forces are also included. The Urban Development Agreements signed with Winnipeg, Vancouver, Saskatoon and Regina (and the provinces of Manitoba, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan) were the purest form of multilevel governance in Canada. These UDAs embodied a "whole of government approach," where the relevant actors from all levels brought their capabilities and resources to the table and decided who would do what to attack very difficult problems like extreme poverty and drug use on Vancouver's Lower East Side. They were plagued by high transaction costs, especially through the involvement of social forces, but they seem to have been relatively effective (Leo 2006; Bradford 2007). Under the Conservative government, the UDAs have been left to expire.

There are other policy areas and programs where tripartism does exist in Canada. More common, however, are multiple bilateral negotiations, where the provincial government often plays a pivotal role. As the investigators of policy making in Calgary put it, multilevel governance "could better be seen as a complex mosaic of bilateral relations that occasionally expand into trilateral programs or conflicts" (Miller and Smart 2012, 26). It is also true that some substantial policy initiatives bypass municipal governments almost entirely. In the area of immigrant settlement, for example, the federal government and those provincial governments with control of the field deal directly with the not-for-profit agencies that actually provide language training, employment counselling, specialized health services and so on. These contractual relationships are extensive, but municipal officials are involved marginally, if at all. A similar pattern prevails in most of the programming provided for urban Aboriginal people by provincial governments.

On the other hand, there are policy initiatives that require the three levels of government to coordinate their activities in order to achieve their objectives. The infrastructure programs are one example. These began in 1993, and have proliferated since into an array of specialized initiatives, including the federal government's Economic Action Plan that was introduced to provide stimulus during the 2008-9 recession. The standard formula is that projects are cost-shared equally between the three levels of government. Municipalities propose projects, and federal-provincial

negotiations - with such input as municipal governments can manage - decide which will be funded.³ Municipalities then implement, under the other governments' supervision. Here is a case where the severe shortfall in municipal capital investment dovetails with the federal government's desire to increase economic demand.⁴ Another field where there is even more intense interaction is federal property. Coordination is necessary when the federal government is undertaking new developments. However, over the past two decades much more interaction has been generated by Ottawa's policies of closing military installations and divesting control over airports and ports. These decisions have caused multilevel negotiations that have often been intense, to say the least. There is some interaction in the field of emergency planning. For example, there did exist a body called the Major Industrial Accidents Council of Canada, with representatives from the federal and provincial governments, many municipalities, and 17 industry associations, but this is now defunct (Henstra, forthcoming). Generally this field is characterized by federal framework policies, provincial policies that elaborate them, and municipal plans and activities that conform, more or less, to provincial guidelines. Policy in this area truly is 'nested' (Hooghe and Marks 2003).⁵ In the urban Aboriginal field, the federal government has continued to support the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, which funds local initiatives. Municipal representatives in those cities where the strategy is established participate with provincial and federal officials, along with Aboriginal representatives, in defining problems and allocating funding.

An overview of the effectiveness of multilevel governance is perhaps best undertaken by surveying the obstacles to it. Effectiveness requires that the three levels of government coordinate their agendas and cooperate in supplying resources (Horak 2012a). This requires interaction and trust. One obstacle to effectiveness is the sheer turnover of political leadership. Politicians must lead the formation of new intergovernmental arrangements, and they must be prepared to approve projects and programs negotiated by officials. But elections at three levels of government, at different rhythms and with substantial turnover, mean that there are many periods when new administrations are being formed: they are inward-looking and will take time to trust their counterparts at the other levels. Figure 1 illustrates this. It depicts the electoral histories of the city of Montreal, the province of Quebec, and the federal government. The gray areas represent one-year periods after a change of government at either the federal or provincial level. Obviously the windows of opportunity for multilevel agreement are constrained, as one level or another was re-organizing over 40% of the time. If we assume further that cooperation is also less likely for a year after municipal governments are newly elected, then the windows narrow further, as shown in Figure 2. ((Figures 1 and 2 about here))

In Canada, there are generally no political parties at the municipal level (though big cities in Quebec and British Columbia are exceptions). Further, it is widely assumed that there is little connection between the federal party system and provincial parties, despite considerable overlap in party labels, and growing evidence to the contrary (Esselment 2010, 2011). In terms of multilevel governance, this has mixed effects. There are instances where shared partisanship facilitated agreement, and others where partisan differences impeded intergovernmental coordination. But the largest effect that party structure has is through its systematic absence at the municipal level. We found

that political channels are very important in some policy areas - notably infrastructure and federal property. This is true in part because there is no recognized and official channel in the federal government that municipal governments can use to press their demands. Yet political contacts were haphazard and sporadic. A mayor might have a particularly close relationship with a federal Member of Parliament or with the regional minister for the province, but such linkages are idiosyncratic and personalistic. When incumbents change, these advantageous connections are broken. Widely known and understood partisan positions can structure multilevel relationships; regardless of any effect on particular outcomes, partisanship provides order and predictability of intergovernmental relations.⁶ These can be achieved in the Canadian system, but it takes time.

Multilevel cooperation tends to be more effective when there is steadfast political leadership at the municipal level. In securing approval of infrastructure projects and in federal property, this is most notable. The city of Toronto, for example, initially lacked a coherent infrastructure strategy, and the projects funded were sub-optimal, at least from the city's viewpoint. Over time, though, its demand coalesced around a single objective - support from the other levels of government for public transit. This was pressed determinedly and consistently for years, and was buttressed by the business community and broader coalitions, and the city was very successful (Horak 2012a, 234-38). Similarly, municipalities need to have policies that are internally coherent. Larger cities benefit from specialized units devoted to intergovernmental relations, while the effectiveness of smaller municipalities depends heavily on mayoral leadership. Mayors in Canada are not 'strong mayors,' in the American sense, but they do have a lot of authority in representing the municipality externally, to other levels of government.

Another obstacle to effective multilevel governance is the federal government's propensity to unilateralism. As noted, Ottawa has no central institution for liaison with the municipal sector as a whole, despite the longstanding efforts of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and its near success in building consultative institutions with the Martin government (Chenier 2009). Individual departments are in a position to discuss policy and programs, but they do not hesitate to take policy initiatives without consultation with affected municipalities. This is most striking in the field of federal property, where divestitures and closures have been common. The announcement that some installation will be closed shocks the local community, politicians and business interests mobilize broad coalitions to protest, pressure is applied to Members of Parliament, the provincial government is enlisted; in short, political turmoil results. Either the decision is reversed or, more commonly, local interests fabricate a plan and the federal government ends up providing transition assistance and remediation. In any case, there are highly dysfunctional politics and difficult economic transitions. A consultative, multilevel governance approach would be more effective (Ircha and Young, forthcoming).

Occasionally, multilevel governance produces joint-decision traps. The sheer number of players and their non-congruent policy agendas mean that no progress can be made. Impasse normally results in federal or provincial unilateralism, but when all actors have important resources and conflicting objectives, then stasis can be the result. Again, examples are most common in the field of property, where

redevelopment plans are often mired in disagreement. For example, an urban park to be built on the site of an old air base in Downsview has been over fifteen years in the making (Horak 2012a, 238-41). More striking has been the tangled, conflict-ridden redevelopment of the Toronto waterfront, where plans have lurched and veered and stalled for decades because of incompatible and shifting goals and sharp political interventions (Sanderson and Filion, forthcoming). On the other hand, some complex redevelopment efforts that involve all three levels of governments have proceeded relatively smoothly: the Lachine Canal project in Montreal provides a good example (Bherer and Hamel 2012, 125-29).

In the Lachine Canal case, relationships between the three levels of government were institutionalized in an agency, Pôle des Rapides, and also in a set of committees (which involved both governmental and non-governmental actors). Institutionalization is a device that can formalize intergovernmental relations, while insulating them somewhat from transient political pressures. The development of the Toronto waterfront was hampered for decades by competition and conflict among agencies created by all three levels of government. Finally, however, with the establishment of Waterfront Toronto (which has a Board of Directors to which each government appoints four members), there is a vehicle for coordinated planning and development. A similar example was VANOC, the organizing committee for the Vancouver-Whistler 2010 Winter Olympics. This powerful group included municipal, provincial and federal representatives along with appointees from the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Committees and also a First Nations representative. It was highly effective in planning and implementing very complex events (Hutton 2012).

Inter-municipal competition - or 'horizontal' competition - is a hindrance to effective multilevel policy making. In the view of some analysts, increasing vertical collaboration leads to more horizontal cooperation (Agranoff and McGuire 2003). We did not find much evidence of this in the policy fields that were examined in our research. There was little cooperation among municipalities in immigrant settlement and urban Aboriginal policy. There was some in infrastructure, where joint applications for recreation facilities and other public goods strengthened the case of smaller communities. Cooperation in emergency planning occurred where regionalization was encouraged by provincial governments, as in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. In image-building there was outright competition for the most part. Most inter-municipal cooperation was found in the field of federal property, because facilities with truly regional implications, such as airports and big military bases, were being divested by the federal government.

Overall, multilevel governance in Canada is effective when it does occur. We have found cases of high transaction costs, disagreements and extensive delays, but there are more instances where three levels of government were able to coordinate their expertise and other resources in pursuit of an objective that was a priority for each of them. Much of the day-to-day creation and implementation of the policies that operate in municipalities is done by governments operating alone; other policies are pursued bilaterally, usually through municipal-provincial coordination (which is dominated by the provinces for the most part). But tripartite relationships are possible, and in some fields they are essential. Cooperation can produce effective policies. This

is facilitated when there is adequate consultation by officials, strong political leadership at the municipal level, and good working relationships among politicians.

IV. Accountability

A well recognized drawback of multilevel governance is that it can make it difficult for citizens to hold governments accountable for the policies that are implemented in some polity. Accountability requires that governments be transparent about what they have done, that they be prepared to explain or justify policies, and that they face consequences if the public is not satisfied: there are good reasons to think that multilevel governance impedes accountability (Papadopoulos 2010). Accountability is hard to achieve when meetings are private, and when citizens cannot know all the actors consulted, the initial position of various governments, the alternative outcomes that were possible, and the distribution of responsibility for the final decision. These weaknesses have been noted qualitatively (Peters and Pierre 2005, ch. 6), and there is strong comparative empirical evidence to show that economic voting - punishing or rewarding incumbents for national economic performance - is less prevalent in federations, where the attribution of responsibility is more difficult than in unitary states (Anderson 2006).

Our research showed that accountability was certainly weak in some policy areas. Infrastructure programs are the best example. The municipalities propose projects (as may community organizations and institutions like universities), and a federal-provincial committee makes decisions. Citizens do not know the whole set of projects proposed, nor the reasons for denying or approving funding (since the criteria are very general). There is very little information about the relative weight in decision making of provincial and federal actors. And significantly, there is no transparency about inputs from other sources to the committees - from municipal lobbying, Members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, or other interests. Local Members of Parliament and ministers announce successful projects with great fanfare, but citizens cannot know the provenance of the decision to support one project or another.

In other policy fields, where there is less complex multilevel governance, transparency is more possible. In immigrant settlement, for example, there are three provinces - Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia - where settlement programs and funding have been devolved from the federal to the provincial governments, which can be held accountable for policy. In the other provinces, the federal government provides funding to the immigrant settlement agencies that administer the programs, and it is ultimately responsible for policy outcomes. In urban Aboriginal policy, the federal government ultimately controls those programs delivered through the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, and is accountable. Other programs are primarily funded through provincial governments, even though representative Aboriginal organizations may have substantial decision-making power. In their image-building activities, the municipalities have a lot of autonomy, and they can be held accountable. Emergency planning is less clear, because of the way that regulations and incentives are nested: this forms a loosely coupled system, where accountability for policy is not easily achievable. Finally, our studies of federal property issues show that the federal government is clearly responsible for initial decisions about divestment. But final policy outcomes are

determined through processes as murky as those in the realm of infrastructure, involving community organizations, firms, municipalities, multiple agencies of the federal government, and, importantly, provincial departments. Overall in Canada, then, the record is mixed. In some fields is found the lack of accountability that characterizes complex European Union structures and processes; in others, fewer agencies and levels of government are effectively involved as decision makers, and there is more transparency.

Notwithstanding all this, there is another view of accountability that was more central to our research. Bovens (2010) describes mechanisms of accountability, through which conduct can be observed and judged, with consequences for decision makers. This, he argues, contrasts with a much broader use of the term accountability, a more normative one, that can embrace “loosely defined political desiderata, such as good governance, transparency, equity, democracy, efficiency, responsiveness, responsibility, and integrity” (946). A very common sense of accountability so construed is responsiveness to community preferences.⁷ In our research, this was a major criterion of good public policy. We were interested in the effectiveness of multilevel policy making, but we also thought from the outset that policy should respond to local opinion, because multilevel governance is a means of realizing overarching objectives while accommodating local particularities (Leo 2006).

In all our research - over 120 case studies - we analyzed local social forces; that is, organized interests of all kinds. We wanted to know which ones are present in the municipality, what resources they possess, which participate in policy making, and the stage of the process when they are involved. Most important, we analyzed which ones have their preferences, views, and interests represented in policy outputs. This is critical, because multilevel policy making is not only about the pressures exerted by local social forces. Policy is not the simple resultant of the set of pressures applied to decision makers, because even the local state has some autonomy from political forces. As well, when policy is formed by multiple actors at different levels then it could, in theory, favour interests which are poorly organized locally and which hardly participate in the policy process.

There is a long and rich debate in the political-science literature about the relative power of various social interests in determining public policy at the municipal level. The central question, especially in the North American context, is whether business dominates other local interests - whether its preferences prevail (Hunter 1953; Dahl, 1961; Lukes, 1974). Most work considers the policies adopted by local governments themselves, but when we examine intergovernmental relations in a multilevel governance framework, policy making obviously is more complex. Our research covers only a limited number of policy fields, and we did not explore some central areas like taxation and economic development, but our results are very clear. Local business does dominate policy making in Canadian municipalities, and its preferences are generally reflected in the outputs of multilevel policy processes.

Many social forces are active at the local level. We encountered environmental groups, heritage associations, religious organizations, social-service agencies, neighbourhood associations and residents' groups, trades unions, Aboriginal organizations, and many more. But most of these non-business organizations tend not

to be influential, at the local level or beyond (Horak 2012b, 358-9). For the most part, they have few financial resources. They rely mainly on members' contributions, and most members are not wealthy. They tend to represent sectoral interests; indeed, they are regarded, and see themselves, as 'special interests,' which speak for a segment of the community about particular issues of concern. They tend to participate late in the policy process, when decisions are being fine-tuned and when information and assistance are required for implementation. In the multilevel context, they mainly participate through local governments themselves. Very few are able to 'shift scale,' and to operate effectively at higher levels of government. It is true that they are often represented at higher levels by representative umbrella organizations. In the immigrant-settlement sector in Ontario, for example, relatively weak local agencies that provide settlement services to immigrants are represented provincially through the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. Yet umbrella organizations like this one can lobby the provincial government about general policies only, not about particular local issues.

There are exceptions to all these generalizations. Some social forces possess considerable expertise. This can be levered into a role in planning policy. A significant component of image-building in many municipalities involves sporting events, for example, and sports associations can have considerable power in setting policy about these. Neighbourhood groups can be influential too. In the redevelopment of the Lachine Canal in Montreal, they impeded gentrification (Bherer and Hamel 2012, 128). In Charlottetown, they managed to freeze development on two pieces of surplus federal farmland, at least temporarily (Bulger 2012, 63-66). Similar groups managed to block the relocation of the Toronto island airport in the 1970s and to impede its expansion in the 2000s (Sanderson and Filion forthcoming). By strongly mobilizing, neighbourhood groups can put electoral pressure on local politicians, and win concessions about unwelcome local developments. A third exception are Aboriginal organizations. In Canada, native people have a special status. Courts have ruled that governments have a fiduciary responsibility to take their interests into account, that there is a "duty to consult" with them when their interests may be affected, and that their right to self-government exists even for off-reserve status Indians. They are not social forces like other organizations but are quasi-governments. As such, they can have an influential role in policies affecting them, often by stopping policy implementation, and they can acquire resources to implement their own policies.⁸

Generally speaking, though, our research shows that business dominates in the formation of the policies that exist in Canadian municipalities. Business interests are most involved, and their preferences are most reflected in policy. In the property field, for instance, military base closures generate intense resistance, and the entire community is galvanized to oppose closure. But if the decision is maintained, it is business that takes the lead in formulating plans for alternative uses and in pressing for assistance from the provincial and federal governments. When airports are divested, local business interests mobilize to design new administrative and financial structures, and they dominate the new Boards of Directors. In the infrastructure field, business is most influential. In immigrant settlement, business takes a leading role. Here, it is not alone, because some ethnic organizations are active in pressing for particular

immigrant flows, but the labour needs of business predominates, along with business concern about demographic decline. In remote Truro, Nova Scotia, for example, the county development agency, with a Board of Directors largely made up of local businesspeople, pressed the provincial government to supply immigrants through the Provincial Nominee Program (Haddow 2011, 226-29). In the larger Ontario cities, there are employment-related partnerships that are broad coalitions but are business-led, like the Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council, and that aim to help skilled immigrants find appropriate work, especially through locating internships (Stasiulus, Hughes and Amery 2011, 116-19).

The image-building field supplies the most striking example of business power. In our research, this field is the closest to economic development, because the object of policy is to attract tourists, immigrants, and investment. Here business is interested and very active in forging strategies about place marketing and branding, so continuing a long Canadian tradition of local boosterism. It is local business which perceives image problems, defines alternatives, makes choices about images, and even implements campaigns. Other interests are brought in, at best, for consultation. The image-building function is very often delegated to a quasi-autonomous agency, such as Action Swift Current, the Capital Commission of Prince Edward Island, Destination Winnipeg, and so on. The Boards of these agencies are composed of local businesspeople, with one or two public-sector representatives, sometimes sitting *ex officio*. They are normally funded by both private interests and the municipality. So in this area, which involves defining and projecting the very essence of the community, business controls the field.

To this pattern of business dominance, there are a few exceptions. In some areas, local business chooses not to be active. This is notably the case in urban Aboriginal policy, where we found very little evidence of business interest or participation in policy making. Given Canada's aging population and looming shortages of workers, this is surprising, because employment gaps will be filled either through immigration or through incorporating new population segments into the workforce, and on the latter count it is Aboriginal people who offer the most promise. But perhaps the time perspective of local businesses is too short. Another absence was in emergency planning. We found no evidence of business being interested in sound emergency preparedness at the local level, and pressing for plans and investments. This contrasts with determined efforts by the insurance industry to have policy strengthened at the national and provincial levels. Perhaps business is subject to the same phenomenon as citizens: the probability of a disaster somewhere in the nation or province is high, but the probability of one occurring in any particular municipality is not very high, so demand for good preparation is not strong (Henstra, forthcoming). There are also instances where business is divided. The city of Montreal has had real difficulties in image-building, because no segment of the business community and no government in its very complex structure of metropolitan governance "is currently strong enough to convince the others to adhere to a particular vision" (Bherer and Hamel 2012, 118). Similarly, when portlands are under pressure for redevelopment into post-industrial uses like housing and recreation, there can be substantial conflict between development interests and the traditional users of the port facilities. Such divisions can

open windows of opportunity for non-business groups. Environmentalists in Prince Edward Island, for instance, can make common cause with nascent businesses to have cycling and other Green, pastoral pursuits feature more prominently in advertising than the old images of beaches and golf courses.

Despite such exceptions, we have found that business dominates policy making in Canadian municipalities. Further, its influence is not weakened when other governments take part in multilevel decision making. On the contrary, local business interests are generally more adept at operating at higher scales of government, where they tend to have better contacts and more influence than other interests. As Martin Horak (2012b, 356) put it bluntly, “the short answer is that multilevel governance does not, by and large, attenuate business influence over urban policy issues.” These findings raise an important issue. It is generally held that accountability, in the sense of responsiveness, is necessary in a political system, because it provides legitimacy to officials, governments, and policy making (Bovens 2010, 954-56). So if public policies overwhelmingly reflect the preferences and interests of local business, why is this not met with resistance? How and why is it that business gets its way?

In light of our many case studies, which were based in part on well over 1,400 interviews with officials, politicians, and representatives of various social forces, we can offer some answers to these questions. They fall into two categories: the characteristics of business as a social force, and the place of business in the culture of local communities.

As a social force, local business is interested in most municipal issues.⁹ Economic growth and development in general provide greater opportunities for profit, through the provision of more or better customers, suppliers and workers.¹⁰ In Canada, a settler country, business has a long history of action to promote development in the forms of settlement, roads, industry, railways, highways, and more. There is a strong business ideology that growth is good, and that it can be facilitated by government policy. As well, business has long been well organized at the local level. Every municipality has its Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade. These organizations are most cohesive in medium sized and smaller municipalities, where there are no sectoral organizations in areas like tourism, information technology, and so on. But every municipality has a peak business organization. In the extreme, because these represent all of business they can be held to represent the whole community, in contrast to the ‘special interests.’ Finally, business possesses resources. Its organizations are generally well funded, and they are ready to spend on important matters like image-building, immigration and infrastructure plans. In the development sector, individual firms will invest heavily on property issues in pursuit of future profits. Finally, business has considerable expertise. Entrepreneurs, for instance, can credibly claim to understand what images and attributes will attract immigrants, tourists, trade, and investment.

In Canada, there is considerable deference to business, and in municipalities people tend to be deferential towards local business leaders. This is not merely a matter of status: the public generally believes that economic growth is beneficial to all, and that businesspeople understand better than others how to generate it. So when ports and airports are divested, for instance, it is only natural that business interests

take the lead in setting up new management structures and that they constitute the Boards of Directors (with some token representation of other groups). On issues of federal property and its development, there are more challenges because citizens resist losing amenities and having their property values fall. But in most policy areas business leadership is not questioned. Another reason for this is that other groups and the general public sense they are ill-equipped to grasp and debate technical matters. Beyond this, many citizens are passive and disengaged from local issues. Media coverage of municipal issues is generally weak in Canada, and voter turnouts of 30-40% are the norm (Sancton 2011, 193). Finally, there are few incentives for elected municipal politicians to challenge business when it is determined and united. Now all of this is somewhat less pervasive in the largest cities, where there is some critical mass of ideological dissent, demands for citizen participation, greater media attention, organizations like Trades and Labour Councils that can marshal expertise, and some politicians who can find a base in this part of the political spectrum. Still, the dominant tendency in Canada is that local political cultures support business dominance of the policy process.

V. Conclusion

i. Thin and thick multilevel governance

In Europe, where the term multilevel governance originated, it is omnipresent. Most countries have many levels of government. A major restoration project near Turin, for instance, involves UNESCO, the European Union, and the governments of Italy and the Piedmont Region, in collaboration with the governments of Turin province, the city of Turin, the city of Venaria Real, and the commune of Druento.¹¹ The EU is also shot through with many special agencies and organizations. Some of these span national boundaries and promote integration. Others bridge the levels of government, and thereby multiply linkages and make networks of relationships more dense. In the literature on multilevel governance, little attention is devoted to ideological differences, as the emphasis is on the structures within which consensus is reached and cooperation achieved. Yet ideology is omnipresent, in the form of strongly differentiated parties that are electorally antagonistic at all levels of government. European analysts tend to take the role of political parties for granted.¹² But parties both facilitate and impede cross-level relationships; more important, they structure them, providing to actors orientations and sets of expectations. In sum, the thick multilevel governance of Europe features many levels, dense bridging institutions, and clear partisan ordering.

In North America, multilevel governance is a much thinner affair. There are fewer levels of government, just three for the most part - federal, sub-national, and local - or four, where regions or counties are concerned.¹³ There are fewer special agencies designed for integrating policy horizontally and vertically. As true federations, the total policy space is carved into national and sub-national areas of jurisdiction, and these are well understood and static, relative to the EU. This allows governments both to engage in policy making, and to abjure from doing so where it is politically advantageous not to act (Young 2011). Finally, while political relationships are very important in multilevel governance, these are transient and personalistic where

municipal governments are concerned. One effect is that there is little principled opposition locally to business dominance. Another is that intergovernmental relations are not facilitated or obstructed by partisanship; nor are they ordered by it.

ii. Local government in multilevel governance in Canada

In the recent past, there have been pressures toward decentralization in Canada, and strong advocacy for a greater role for municipalities, especially the big cities, in the Canadian governance mix. Persuasive analysts argued that global forces and the imperatives of economic competitiveness made this evolution inevitable (Courchene 2007). There has been movement in this direction. Most provincial governments have increased 'their' municipalities' range of autonomy. More strikingly, the New Deal for Cities and Communities (2004-06) aimed to bolster the resources of local governments and to cement the municipal-federal partnership in making policy in cities. This New Deal was summarily terminated by the current Conservative government.

Nevertheless, municipal-provincial-federal relations are very important in Canadian policy making, especially in the form of bilateralism.¹⁴ In all these relationships, bilateral or multilateral, municipal governments tend to be policy takers. They are subject to initiatives undertaken by provincial governments, often with little consultation, in a wide variety of areas that have not been discussed above - land-use planning, roads, public health, libraries, policing, building codes, and much more. Municipal governments also must react to federal policy initiatives, in areas like property and infrastructure. In many intergovernmental relationships, municipalities lack the resources and the jurisdiction to make much of a policy impact.

We have found, however, that municipalities can play a larger role, and that they can successfully pursue their objectives in intergovernmental arenas. Much depends on their orientation. Here, we can distinguish 'minimalist' from 'comprehensive' municipal administrations (Young 2012, 16-17). Municipal governments of the former type are focused on providing standard services, and doing so efficiently in order to keep property taxes and fees as low as possible. But other municipalities are prepared to expand their traditional role as service providers and to take on activities beyond those allocated to them by provincial governments. They are prepared to act with a new "assertive maturity" (Siegel and Tindal 2006). They do not function almost as administrative units of provincial governments; instead they are the means by which communities formulate collective objectives and act in their common interest.¹⁵ Municipal governments with a comprehensive orientation are prepared to take the lead in addressing problems within their territories, and in so doing to engage other levels of government.¹⁶

We found local governments that were prepared to propagate their images through big sporting events that drew funding from other levels of government. Others used the Provincial Nominee Program to bring in new immigrants, and undertook creative measures to retain them. The cities of Edmonton and Calgary have no responsibility for urban Aboriginal people, but they engage in some programming, and have long published directories of services offered to native peoples by other governments and local service agencies. Some municipalities do cooperate well with their neighbours in emergency planning. Coherent plans backed by a local consensus have brought success in redeveloping federal properties, and the same holds true for

the infrastructure programs. There are many factors that make some municipal governments more successful than others in intergovernmental relations - size, electoral significance, resources, and so on - but it is clear that those with a comprehensive orientation are more likely to try for success in the arenas of multilevel governance.

Notes

1. The support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Federation of Canada is gratefully acknowledged. For comments on this paper, I am grateful to Andrew Sancton.
2. For more information about the research project, visit www.ppm-ppm.ca
3. In some provinces, the Management Committees that administer infrastructure programs have been advised by consultative committees that include representatives of municipal associations. In very large projects like the Lachine Canal redevelopment and the Manitoba Floodway expansion, there were extensive public consultations, though these were about implementation only.
4. The infrastructure programs were introduced by the federal Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, but they have been maintained under Stephen Harper's Conservative administrations. Infrastructure, along with higher education and health, has always been an exception to Open Federalism's principle that the federal government will respect provincial jurisdiction. In 2010, as the emergency stimulus spending was winding down, Mr. Harper expressed his appreciation that local governments were ready, willing and able to propose viable projects on short notice so that the money could flow. As he told municipal representatives, "It's not easy for us to spend money" (Harper 2010).
5. There is informal cooperation too, built through federal training programs and contingent decisions. In the Halifax Regional Municipality, for instance, the emergency coordinator's office is in the same building as the provincial Emergency Management Office and the regional representative of Public Safety Canada (Grieve and Turnbull, forthcoming).
6. The studies reported in Lazar and Leuprecht (2007) all covered the politics of municipal-federal relations. In their summary (Leuprecht and Lazar 2007, 8), the editors wrote that "in all the European cases and also in South Africa and Mexico, political parties have an integrative function that ensures that municipal interests are understood at the national level." This function is carried out by the cumulation of mandates, the selection of national candidates from among municipal politicians, and shared partisanship. The European countries included in the research were Spain, Switzerland, Germany and France.
7. As Bovens (2010, 949) summarizes, "it comes close to 'responsiveness' and 'a sense of responsibility,' a willingness to act in a transparent, fair, and equitable way."
8. For an account of some of these decisions and how they have bolstered the capacity of First Nations in the New Brunswick case, see Murray 2012, 71-4. The position of urban Aboriginal people - off-reserve - is weakened by the reluctance of governments to take jurisdictional responsibility for them and by competition among Aboriginal

organizations, particularly between political organizations and agencies that provide services.

9. I will not deal here with the differences between locally based firms and branches or subsidiaries of firms headquartered elsewhere. For the purposes of our discussion, their incentive structures are similar.

10. I neglect the problem of communities growing through the attraction of competitors, which has been a thorny problem in the retail sector in small and medium sized municipalities in Canada as elsewhere.

11. As well, institutions like universities and many private firms have also been attached to the project. Currently, private foundations are playing a leading role.

12. As Deschouwer (2003, 220) put it, "political parties are one of the very important political actors that produce the linkages between the political institutions." Yet he argues that their behaviour has not been described and analyzed very well. Instead, the literature on parties in the multilevel EU has focused on the relationship between European institutions and party structures and party system development (Thorlakson 2007; Jeffrey 2011).

13. There are exceptions in metropolitan regions where special agencies or governments with limited functions do operate. In the Canadian context, Montreal is very much an outlier: there are boroughs, the city of Montreal, the agglomeration council, and the Montreal metropolitan community, so Montrealers live under six levels of Canadian government. This is unique in Canada. The North American context simply has fewer levels than in Europe, a fact noted by Stein and Turkewitsch 2010, 197. As for supranational authorities, in the view of Clarkson (2011, 280), NAFTA has no legal personality and "no executive, legislative or administrative bodies of note."

14. The relationship might be called 'serial bilateralism.' While there are trilateral relations - when, for instance, municipal and provincial authorities collectively lobby in Ottawa about some federal property - there are other cases when federal-provincial agreements are followed by provincial-municipal negotiations about policy implementation, as in emergency planning. In still other instances, it should be stressed, the bilateralism involves federal and provincial governments dealing with local social forces, such as immigrant settlement agencies, with only tangential participation by municipal officials.

15. This distinction between service provision and collective political action runs through a standard text on Canadian local government: see Tindal and Tindal 2009.

16. For success in these arenas, a solid foundation of public support, democratically expressed, is most helpful: see Young 2009b, 497-8.

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