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Recent Trends of Urban and Metropolitan Governance in Canada

Zusammenfassung

Städte und Metropolregionen sind zu zunehmend wichtigen und relevanten Handlungsarenen der Politik in Kanada geworden. So sind denn auch städtische und metropolitane Prozesse und Politiken sowie die jüngeren Restrukturierungen dieser politischen Arenen in den Fokus der Forschung geraten, und zwar insbesondere unter Verwendung des Governance-Konzepts. Beginnend mit einigen theoretischen Reflexionen zum Governance-Konzept setzt sich dieser Beitrag auseinander mit der spezifischen Relevanz der metropolitenen Maßstabsebene für die Governance-Debatte in Kanada, bevor einige aktuelle Trends in Governance-Praktiken in kanadischen Städten und Metropolregionen untersucht werden.

Résumé

Les villes et régions métropolitaines Canadiennes devinrent des importantes et pertinentes arènes d'actions politiques. Des processus et politiques urbains et métropolitains, aussi bien que les récentes restructurations de ces arènes politiques sont ainsi devenues le centre de la recherche, en particulier en utilisant le concept « Governance ». Cet article réfléchit sur le concept « Governance » et discute la pertinence spécifique de l'échelle métropolitaine en vue du débat « Governance » en Canada. En conclusion, quelques tendances actuelles des pratiques « Governance » dans des ville et régions métropolitaines Canadiennes sont étudiées.

Introduction

Cities in Canada, just like cities around the world, have undergone a number of far-reaching transformations over the last three decades or so. Although the experience of urban change is neither particularly new nor remarkable in itself, it can be argued that the recent dynamics and complexity of urban change have achieved a new dimension, spurred on by the continuing and accelerating processes of global-

ization and urbanization (Gross/Hambleton 2007). The term globalization already alludes to the multifaceted nature of changes in our cities. Economic, social, ethnic, cultural and political processes, as well as the spatial configurations and transformations they have brought about, have influenced the way we live in cities, the way we see and talk about cities, and the way we manage our cities. How to understand contemporary urbanity, the conditions and transformations of the urban, and the ways in which individuals, groups or polities are able to shape these processes, are questions more pressing and relevant than ever before. Accordingly, they have occupied citizens just as much as politicians, administrators and planners as well as academics from a variety of disciplines.

Within academia, when focussing on the issues of running, managing or governing cities, the term governance has for some years been one of *the* buzzwords both in theoretical and empirical investigations of changing political systems in general and, more particularly, of a changing urbanism. In spite of variations in the precise understanding and usage of the concept itself, governance has become an increasingly popular research theme in the academic discourses of political science, geography and planning, to name just the most obvious disciplines. Geographers and planners have particularly pushed the urban and metropolitan dimensions – or scales – of governance, especially so when investigating societies in which the *urban* experience has been interpreted as central to or dominant in terms of societal development in general. Canada today is not just a highly urbanized, but also a predominantly metropolitan nation.¹ Furthermore, it has certainly been Canada's cities – particularly its largest metropolises – that have experienced the most dynamic or drastic economic, social, spatial etc. reconfigurations, and these have arguably 'driven' societal changes in the country at large.

This paper, then, seeks to take a look at some of the recent developments in the sphere of urban and metropolitan governance in Canada. It is not the result of a specific empirical research project, but primarily based on the work of others researching urban and metropolitan governance in Canada. It therefore attempts to 'distill' some trends regarding recent developments in urban and metropolitan governance in Canada, using some particular aspects of urban and government *research* in Canada as a point of departure. For reasons of space, the trends presented here are and must be selective rather than exhaustive, and they are also non-systematic in the sense that they are not deduced from a detailed theoretical conceptualization of governance. Their selectivity reflects the fact that firstly, they are written from the perspective of an urban geographer (rather than, e.g., a political scientist), thus paying particular attention to the spatiality and scale-dependency of

1 This use of the term metropolitan is, initially, simply a statistical one: It reflects the percentage of the Canadian population residing in one of the Census Metropolitan Areas defined by Statistics Canada. Already by 1965 more than half of all Canadians did (cf. Bourne 2000, 26, 28-29), today two out of three Canadians do.

urban (and all social) life, and secondly, that they are based on a necessarily uneven knowledge of developments in urban and metropolitan areas across Canada.

The paper is divided into two main parts. In the first part we will consider some of the theoretical background to the governance debates. This is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of the multitude of theoretical strands and differentiations that can be observed in the development and application of the concept over the last two or three decades. Rather, though assuming a basic familiarity with the concept and its development, a brief review of the concept seems in order and helpful – on the one hand for theoretically grounding the following empirical observations, and, on the other hand, for explaining the somewhat particular perspective that can be brought to these debates by the discipline of geography.

The second part of the paper will then reflect some of the recent trends in urban and metropolitan governance and, as explained above, governance research in Canada. This being a rather diverse and potentially large field of research, observations and reflections have been organized in three sections, based on the theoretical reflections in part one. Initially, we will consider practices of governance *research* in Canada, then the focus will be on the urban and metropolitan as a particular scale of inquiry, and finally we will return to a broader perspective on governance as outlined in the theoretical discussions of part one.

Theory

The central idea behind the term governance is, of course, that it is framed in contrast to the 'old' term *government*. Even though the latter in itself is neither as precise nor as unproblematic as often assumed, it is generally taken to refer to two things: firstly, the activities of officials and agencies of the state, and secondly, the *formal* mechanisms of governing which these actors employ. If we thus consider 'western' style democracies like Canada, government involves first and foremost the processes of decision-making of elected representatives of the people (i.e., the work of parliaments/councils and governments/cabinets) as well as the implementation of such decisions through more or less hierarchically organized administrative bureaucracies (ministries, departments and the like). Of course, most western democracies – not just those which are federal states – know various different levels or scales of government (e.g., the federal/provincial/municipal arrangement in Canada or the *Bund/Land/Gemeinde* system in Germany). While the exact authorities and responsibilities of such different levels of state vary widely from one country to the next largely as a result of historical and political idiosyncrasies, all these levels are understood as (part of) 'the state', and government is the term applied to the activities of state actors on all these levels.

The idea of governance as a theoretical concept and an analytical tool is that there is a lot more to the way in which our states function than is covered by the just described sphere of government. On the one hand, there are a plenty of *informal* processes and practices at work even in the processes of decision-making of

formally authorized state actors. By far not all decisions are made at the top and percolate through the administrative hierarchy from on high, and not all of them are based on the classic authoritative-regulative mechanisms of the state: policies, laws, regulations etc. Even within bureaucracies, people know one another, seek and exchange information off the record, meet and discuss informally before applying rules and regulations. On the other hand, these processes – especially when it comes to managing cities – involve a whole range of additional actors beyond formally authorized state actors. These other actors have very different and varying remits, frames of reference, resources of power and political practices. Local residents' NIMBY groups, community-based advocacy groups, national industry or business associations, internationally active non-governmental organizations etc. – all such actors play a part in political decision-making beyond the meetings in parliaments and the activities of administrations. The term governance, then, describes a system of societal decision-making which encompasses a wider – and ever-wider – “array of constituencies and interests, including social forces [far beyond the] elected officials and the formal mechanisms of the state” (Hutton 2008, n.p.) as well as a wider array of processes than those traditionally employed by government and its bureaucracies. Or, as Hambleton (2007, 164) puts it:

‘Governance’ [...] involves government *plus* the looser processes of influencing and negotiating with a range of public and private sector agencies to achieve desired outcomes. A governance perspective encourages collaboration between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to achieve mutual goals. While the hierarchical power of the state does not vanish, the emphasis in governance is on steering, influencing, and coordinating the actions of others. (emphasis in the original)

Converting this idea of governance into a framework for empirical analysis is no mean task. It involves the analysis of the more formal aspects of governing, such as rules and regulations, processes and procedures, structures and networks (of actors). It also involves, however, less tangible aspects like patterns of communication, the factual rather than formal distribution of power, systems of hiring, training and promotion, as well as, of course, values, norms and beliefs that influence or underlie most of the first-mentioned aspects. In sociology, political science and planning, such a focus on factual and less tangible rather than just formal processes often applies the term institution to describe that very “ensemble of norms, rules and practices which structure action in social contexts” (Healey 2006, 302), and this is why governance research is often undertaken from a more or less explicitly institutionalist theoretical perspective. It requires a heightened sensitivity to the individual specificities of the governance systems under scrutiny – be they local, metropolitan

or national in scale or scope – and of their cultural embeddedness.² Investigating and understanding governance thus requires a cultural gaze as much as an analytical one, as the following conceptual diagram illustrates.

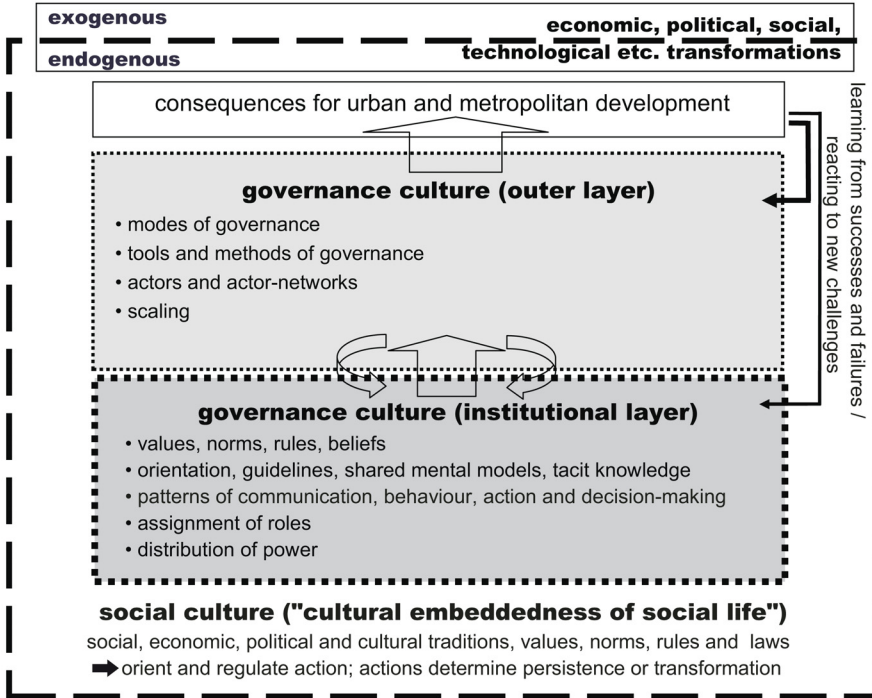


Fig. 1: Conceptualizing governance cultures

Source: based on Hohn/Neuer 2006, 294 (modifications by agreement with authors)

Whatever precise conceptual or analytical framework for analysis is being used, it should be noted that the concept of governance marks a shift in (research) perspective as much as a shift in (political) practice. Arguably, this wider, more encompassing view of how societies and political systems arrive at certain decisions and how they implement all sorts of policies – both public and private ones – can be applied to new and broader analyses of former events or systems just as much as it can be applied to the present. The changed perspective towards governance rather than

2 That the idea of governance is strongly influenced by – or biased towards – a ‘western’ understanding of central concepts like polity, statehood, government, legitimacy, democracy etc. is one of the key themes investigated by the interdisciplinary research project on *Governance in Räumen begrenzter Staatlichkeit* in Berlin.

government may thus fill in some of the gaps and oversights of a more formally focussed political science of the past.

However, a strong case can be made for viewing the shift in perspective as at least partly guided or even caused by an underlying shift in political practice. Within the realm of urban development policies and urban geography, few authors have argued this case more cogently than David Harvey in his seminal 1989 essay *From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism* (Harvey 1989). Today there exists widespread consensus about the central thesis that firstly, over the last two to three decades roughly, a multitude of new practices has emerged and become more important for actual decision-making, and secondly, that these shifts in practice are related to or caused by rather complex economic and societal changes which are often described by referring to the emergence of post-Fordist, late capitalist, late modernist or postmodernist societies. The emergence of new modes of governing or governance thus coincides with and relates to the widespread tendency to adopt neoliberal policies, in urban politics as in other policy fields – which serves as another reminder of the normative (or even ideological) content of the governance concept itself (cf. Keil forthcoming). Governance is not inherently more or less democratic than government, its practices and implications are contested by neoliberalist reformers and grass-roots organizations or bottom-up initiatives – at all scales of action. Public private partnerships realizing prestigious flagship projects of urban regeneration and community planning initiatives aiming at strengthening social networks and neighbourhood resilience are invariably interconnected or two sides of the same coin. Edward Soja, one of geography's most prominent academic theoreticians of these societal transformations, describes their impact on the contemporary city by identifying "governing space in the postmetropolis" as one of six predominant discourses shaping contemporary urban development (Soja 1997, 2000).

Thus, one of the central arguments or contributions of urban and political geographers has been to spatialize or territorialize the governance debate. Firstly, and very basically, they have stressed that the idea of governance is inherently linked to space, not just in the sense of political territory but also in the more existential sense of people's every-day spatiality. These two ideas of space are obviously related but they remain analytically different.

Secondly, and more particularly, they have focussed on the issue of scale, i.e. that governance processes are especially characterized by the interplay of actors working on very different and sometimes fluid spatial scales. Governance processes, much more so than government processes, involve actors who often have very different spatial constituencies or references which can overlap in a myriad of ways. Some actors are locally grounded, others internationally, for some actors local means municipal, for others it does not. Furthermore, these spatial references of actors are not necessarily stable in time but can shift, depending on context.

Additionally, empirical observations of urban restructuring tend to operate at different and especially changeable scales, yet they tend to grapple with processes that are not inherently or primarily local. In fact, many locally debated issues are not inherently local at all, especially not local in a municipal sense. In particular, the internationalization or even globalization of economic, social, cultural and political worlds has increased the importance of metropolitan areas – as functionally inter-linked urban regions – as arenas to negotiate and solve urban problems, mainly at the expense of the municipal level. Central to this strongly economic discourse on competitiveness is the thesis that as ‘cities’ are increasingly finding themselves in a situation of international competition, it is not the municipalities that are the relevant scale of action, but the urban or metropolitan regions – in Canada as anywhere else (cf. Courchene 2007). Neil Brenner thus talks of a new *metropolitan regionalism* that has emerged (Brenner 2002), these metropolitan regions being the arenas where new forms of governance are negotiated and experimented with. More often than not, these regions often need to newly constitute themselves as actors, and those that manage to do so tend to be more competitive and successful in the race for capital, brains, jobs etc. than those regions that struggle with defining themselves and acting as coherent regions. This is the key argument behind the idea of metropolitan rather than urban governance, and it strongly informs the renewed debates on political restructuring of metropolitan regions in Canada and – especially among geographers and planners – the related debates on metropolitan-wide regional planning.

Governance research in Canada

Research on governance and particularly on government reform in Canada has long tended to concentrate on aspects of federal-provincial relations or on Canada-First Nations relations etc. While there has also been a strong sideline focussing on local government (e.g. Tindal/Tindal 2004), on the whole, urban and metropolitan politics have tended to receive much less attention. This, no doubt, is largely to be explained by the subordinate role of municipalities – i.e. their lack of an independent constitutional status – within the Canadian political system and their mere existence as ‘creatures of the provinces’. Because of this, one *urban* theme in this research context has always been the difficult and contested relationship between the federal government and the municipalities (Sancton 2000, 426-427).

The ongoing processes of urban and metropolitan restructuring, together with the parallel shift from a government to a governance perspective, have changed this situation somewhat. One indication of this is the huge research project that has been installed under the auspices of Western Ontario political scientist Robert Young, who holds the Canada Research Chair in *Multilevel Governance*. Entitled *Public Policy in Municipalities*, the wide-sweeping comparative project aims at an understanding of “how [...] state actors and social forces interact to create public

policy in Canadian municipalities" (Public Policy in Municipalities 2005). To quote from the project website:

We posit two explanatory factors.

First is the structure of intergovernmental relations; that is, the patterns of interaction between officials and politicians based in different levels of Canada's complex system of multilevel governance. [...]

Second are the 'social forces' active in the municipality and beyond. This category includes community organizations, business associations, trade unions, interest groups, voluntary associations, and members of social movements. These social forces make policy demands, take some decisions, implement policy, and represent clients and citizens. Their relations with state actors must be grasped in order to explain policy. (Public Policy in Municipalities 2005)

Even while these latter lines reflect the conceptual shift from government to governance, I would argue that the primary understanding or reading of *governance* as multilevel *government* is still rather pervasive in Canadian research on governance, and on urban and metropolitan governance research as well. Andrew Sancton, for instance, in his 2002 essay entitled *Metropolitan and Regional Governance*, really discusses alternative systems of metropolitan and regional *government*, framing the issue in his starting sentence as "organizing municipal government for large cities" (Sancton 2002, 54). This should be borne in mind when we now turn to some of the substantial recent trends in urban and metropolitan *governance* in Canada.

The urban and metropolitan scale

It is one of the strongest traditions among Canadian academics and politicians alike to define the primary or even sole legitimate purpose of the local level of government – in particular when it comes to *urban* municipalities – as the provision of services related to property, meaning largely real estate. This is why land use policies and land use planning form centrepieces of local government activities in Canada (Sancton 2000, 427). However, economic and social restructuring in Canada's metropolitan areas over the last two decades or so has revealed, firstly, that local land use developments are increasingly shaped by forces outside the control of local government, and secondly, that the impact of policy decisions at upper tiers of government on local development has increased notably. There are three trends or issues in recent Canadian urban development that may illustrate this point.

The first is *the resurfacing of the metropolitan government question* in the late 1990s, especially in eastern Canada, as exemplified by the cases of Toronto and Montreal. Since the inception of Metro Toronto in the 1950s, academics from geography, planning and political science have done research especially on Metro Toronto and its supposed 'success story' since the 1950s, praising Metro Toronto for its

efficiency in providing much needed infrastructure allowing for metropolitan expansion while stressing its capacity to do so in a fairly equitable and locally responsive way (Frisken 2001; Fillion 2000; Frisken et al. 1997). Yet the old models of metropolitan government no longer seem to fit postmodern urban development well enough, and in the late 1990s the governments of Ontario and Quebec undertook a process of formal political restructuring of metropolitan (and local) government in Toronto and Montreal. Political and, to some considerable degree, academic debates on these two experiences have mirrored what can be seen as an almost traditional Canadian preoccupation with *government* structures, rather than with the wider governance processes (Sancton 2002; though cf. Boudreau et al. 2006; Keil forthcoming). The reform of local government in metropolitan regions can be read as one outcome of the economic and socio-spatial restructuring of Canadian cities, one aspect of which has been the emergence of more patchwork-like spatial structures that form an increasingly notable contrast to the formerly rather clear central city vs. suburb divide. In this way, many metropolitan regions in Canada have outgrown the political-territorial government structures that provincial governments put in place over the previous decades, which were relatively well adjusted to mitigating the potential conflicts between city and suburb (Basten/Gerhard 2008). The experiences of Toronto and Montreal, and earlier reforms in Winnipeg don't reveal a discernible common trend as to how provincial governments see the way forward, but if anything, there seems to be a notable trend away from two-tier towards more unified single-tier municipal government structures (Sancton 2000, 438) and, especially in Ontario, a similarly notable trend towards the strengthening of both provincial governments and municipalities vis-à-vis local and especially locally elected special purpose bodies like school boards, police boards or library boards etc. (Sancton 2000, 432-433).

The second theme which illustrates the increasing relevance of the metropolitan scale of urban governance and the increasing problem of multilevel governance for metropolitan regions is *the disentanglement issue*, i.e. the attempt to more clearly and neatly divide responsibilities and duties of local and provincial governments. Obviously, especially in the Ontario and Toronto case, disentanglement is closely related to the formal political restructuring of metropolitan government. While the particular political agendas of specific provincial governments vary – gaining more control over education and arguably downloading unwanted 'social' responsibilities on the municipalities in the Ontario case – the impulse to create clearer, more efficient and possibly also more accountable government structures through disentanglement seem to be a more general desire not (only) driven by a particular partisan agenda (Sancton 2000). It is, no doubt, one attempt to grapple with the recognition of the increasingly complex interplay of different levels and bodies of *government* implicated in urban, in particular metropolitan development.

Thirdly, Canadian cities and metropolitan areas are experiencing strong tendencies towards *an increasing involvement of upper levels of government in urban or met-*

ropolitan affairs. In particular, “municipal-federal relations [form] an area where interaction appears to be increasing sharply” (Public Policy in Municipalities, 2005), as metropolitan regions are increasingly recognized as the key driving engines for innovation and economic development of the nation as a whole (The Conference Board of Canada 2006), just as they are also recognized as those areas where some of the most pressing social problems in the country are concentrated. Yet these insights and rationales for active policies for and in urban and metropolitan regions hold true for provincial governments as much as for the federal government. And the mayors of the largest Canadian cities have increasingly argued the same case, that of the overriding importance of Canadian metropolises for the social, cultural and especially economic development of the country as a whole, in order to secure and channel more funds into the cities as well as securing more fiscal and political autonomy for the biggest cities. The result has been increasing upper-level government investment in large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly in transport, and in image-making projects or events which promise to increase the visibility of leading Canadian cities and thus improve their stance in the international competition for attention and ultimately investment.

Recent examples of the former are easily found in Vancouver. The eventual construction of long-debated rapid transit rail line to connect downtown and much of the city with the international airport in suburban Richmond has been dependent on the support provided initially by the provincial, then also by the federal government – resulting in the renaming of the line as the Canada Line, scheduled for opening just before the 2010 Winter Olympics. These Olympic Games form a good example of the latter type of upper level government involvement in urban affairs, since launching and especially winning the bid to host the Olympics was entirely dependent on political as well as substantial financial investment from both provincial and federal governments.

Of course, such urban policy initiatives of provincial and federal governments are not new – Expo ‘86 being the obvious case in point for Vancouver. Still, for many decades we have not been able to observe a similar willingness of the federal government to get involved in urban policy. And that means, not just to accept a certain fiscal responsibility, but rather to identify the development of urban and metropolitan regions as of special importance to the federal government and thus to devise a whole new strategy of providing for urban development out of national interest. The former Liberal government’s New Deal for Cities and Communities – designed from about 2002 onwards, then put in place during 2004-2006 – saw the federal government providing substantial funds through multi-party financing arrangements, especially for hard transport infrastructure (roads/bridges, rapid transit, airports), but also for tackling social problems (Bradford, forthcoming).

Certainly, the recent demise of the Liberal and instalment of the Conservative government with its own ideological agendas has certainly put a stop to this for the time being. “From the Conservative perspective, national undertakings on the scale

and scope of the New Deal for Cities and Communities appear to be viewed not only as inappropriate intrusions into provincial jurisdiction but also as undesirable expressions of social engineering" (Bradford forthcoming). However, whether this pull-back of the federal government will last is as yet an open question depending partly on the political ideologies of future governments. The growing pressure and lobbying work of municipalities – and especially the leading cities' mayors – for more federal money for (big) city problems seems destined to continue and increase, if anything (Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2007a, 2007b).

Refocussing on the broader understanding of governance

So far, we have discussed issues mainly focussing on new arrangements of the interplay of different *government* actors, and we have argued this emphasis to be rather typical for Canadian governance debates. However, there are also developments in Canadian urban and metropolitan governance that concern the 'social forces' beyond formal government structures that impact on urban policy or urban development. Considering this wider or broader understanding of governance, one can also discuss three trends, which, for clarity, have been connected to the examples of multi-level government restructuring.

Firstly, the restructuring of formal metropolitan government structures in Toronto and Montreal has, of course, not (only) taken place behind closed government doors. In both cases reform commissions were installed, consultation processes took place, and these involved a plethora of local or regional actors and stakeholders way beyond formal political representatives. Furthermore, extensive public and media discussions could be observed, certainly in the Toronto example often giving voice to the most vociferous opposition to the final decision of the Conservative provincial government. In this sense, then, the formal restructuring of government inevitably led to and involved the mobilization of a whole range of non-governmental actors, and the reform commissions – especially the early, i.e. pre-Conservative-government Golden task force – became arenas for new governance processes in due course. This is certainly not a universal trend, though, since not all Canadian metropolitan areas have recently been undergoing formal political restructuring. While Vancouver has also seen a kind of regional restructuring in the transformation of the Greater Vancouver Regional District into Metro Vancouver, this seems to be more of a rebranding exercise rather than a substantial alteration of either the remit of the regional organization or the processes and stakeholders involved in policy at and for this level. However, there can be no doubt that the ongoing social transformation and the increasing heterogeneity of the Canadian population, especially affecting Canadian cities, has led to a more diverse field of social forces seeking ways to form and express views and get involved in (public) policy for cities, often through new institutional channels.

Secondly, in spite of the retraction of the present Conservative federal government, it is worth returning once more to its predecessor Liberal government's New

Deal for Cities and Communities. Not, as discussed above, because this clearly showed the increasing involvement of the federal government in urban affairs and the related invention of new tri-level government arrangements. But rather, because it contained at its core a new and very different policy approach very strongly informed by more recent understandings and perspectives of governance. This concerned primarily the realization of persistent and often worsening social problems in most Canadian cities and metropolitan regions, and the design of novel area-based rather than person- or group-based policy approaches – a concept quite similar to programmes established in a number of European countries. The tool devised for these area-based approaches were so-called Urban Development Agreements (UDAs) which were to bring together resources of all three levels of government, involving departments and agencies across jurisdictional divides, *and* involving a whole range of community organizations ‘on the ground’. Even if the actually realized degree of community engagement has been criticized and the horizontal coordination between departments and agencies of different governments has sometimes been very problematic (e.g. Bakvis/Juillet 2004), the scope of integrating both informal processes and non-governmental actors in these area-based approaches has been and remains much higher than in traditional government policies. All the more so, as the federal government’s New Deal for Cities and Communities also included a programme of expert and community action research to learn from experiences of community actors.

And thirdly, an increasing involvement of and attention to community-based actors and organizations as well as local public opinion in more general terms also characterizes recent image-making exercises for cities instigated by upper levels of government. This again can be illustrated by referring to the Olympics in Vancouver, where local pressure and interest groups early on expressed strong concerns regarding community interests potentially being overridden by the boosterist impulses of municipal, provincial and federal governments. While some general, rather middle-class concerns of negative impacts on quality of life and municipal expenditures were articulated, most specifically and acute fears of rising costs of living and especially displacement in the poor and deprived neighbourhoods east and south-east of downtown were voiced, based on the proposed location of the Olympic Village at Southeast False Creek and the previous negative experiences with Expo ‘86 in this regard. This led to the supporting governments and the agency charged with organizing the bid working with community groups to develop the so-called Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement, identifying a number of priority areas and then developing corresponding initiatives to ensure both a socially inclusive and responsible as well as an environmentally benign Olympic Games. For sure, a significant impulse to do so is the decision-making process of the International Olympic Committee which has become far more responsive of local opinion. Local popular support – demonstrated in Vancouver by a 64 % yes vote in a municipal referendum – has become a key aspect in the IOC’s decision when awarding the

Olympic Games. Even so, beyond the Vancouver Olympics, it seems a more general trend that the multitude of social forces at local and community level are becoming more vocal and less easy to ignore when governments are deciding upon policies for urban and metropolitan regions.

Conclusion

As Canadian cities and – especially – metropolitan areas have experienced a whole range of dynamic transformations over the last few decades, the age-old questions of how 'best' to govern, manage or run these urban places have been revisited with increasing urgency. In academia and politics alike, the theoretical concept of governance has come to dominate the discourse on cities, entailing a broader and more encompassing understanding of processes and actors involved in decision-making in and for cities and metropolitan areas. This use of the governance concept signifies both a shift in analytical perspective and in political practice towards the increasing involvement and importance of non-state actors. The trend towards a governance rather than a government approach, then, can be seen as the most basic trend when analysing Canadian urban politics.

The Canadian discourse – and research – on the governance of cities is arguably still strongly dominated by a focus on governance as multilevel government. On the one hand, this is an outcome of the Canadian constitutional framework granting the provinces supreme authority over all matters municipal. As Canadian cities are becoming ever more important for the country as a whole, cities and urban politics have become another arena for the long-standing contestations of federal-provincial powers and demarcations. On the other hand, the focus on multilevel government results from a more than five decade-long history of provincial attempts to devise appropriate (i.e. efficient, effective, democratic) governmental structures for metropolitan areas, those functionally integrated urban regions that have long outgrown – in territorial terms – any municipal boundaries.

Within this multi-level government perspective on Canadian urban and metropolitan governance, we have highlighted three – strongly interconnected – issues or recent trends: firstly, the resurfacing of the metropolitan government question through government restructuring in some of Canada's leading cities in the 1990s, which points to an increasingly felt discrepancy between present-day metropolitan conditions and government structures or processes devised for former (simpler?) times and circumstances; secondly, the attempt to disentangle responsibilities of different levels of government, to increase the efficiency, and accountability of government in general – a trend of particular relevance to metropolitan areas with multi-tier government structures; thirdly, and somewhat in contradiction to the disentanglement impulse, the notable tendency of upper levels of government (provincial and federal) to get involved in urban and municipal affairs, in recognition of the supreme importance of cities and metropolitan areas for the economic and social well-being of the electorate at large.

Applying a broader governance perspective to these very trends, we can observe that the policy environment in most Canadian cities and metropolitan areas has become much more diverse. Partly, government restructuring initiatives have fuelled public discourse on matters of local government and democracy; in the heterogeneous and multicultural metropolitan areas of Canada this has arguably led to an increasing involvement and – at least potentially – importance of a multitude of non-state actors. Add to this the advent of new, area-based approaches in urban social policy and of more image-based approaches in urban marketing and economic development policies, both being far more conscious of the necessity to gain widespread community support, and it becomes obvious that even state actors have begun to develop governance-related perspectives regarding their own roles and modes of operation.

However, identifying these trends as such and especially predicting their future is a potentially flawed undertaking. Canadian urban politics is a volatile environment, not least due to the constitutional background mentioned above and the strong ideological battles between different political parties. The recent 'roll-back' of federal involvement in urban policy by the Harper government or the Toronto amalgamation decision of the Harris government in Ontario in 1997 serve to illustrate the tremendous power of governments in Canada to drastically change the basic rules and processes of local government and governance – and that these powers are often employed for primarily ideological or partisan reasons rather than for the development of 'good governance'.

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