

Canadian Political Science and the City: A Limited Engagement

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While the community of Canadian political scientists has grown in size, sophistication and diversity over the past 40 years, only a small proportion of its attention has been directed to urban matters. Previous reviews of the postwar literature suggest that, compared to other areas of inquiry, scholarship on the institutions, processes, practices and impacts of Canadian urban politics is anaemic (Andrew, 1994b; Garber, 1997; Graham et al., 1998: 1; Higgins, 1979; Rowat, 1983). Even the largest Canadian cities have garnered little attention among Canadian political scientists, whether as research subjects in their own right or as cases in comparative studies. In all, few Canadian political scientists have consistently published on urban issues over the years, and their work has not added up to a coherent research program.

There is mounting evidence, however, that Canadian political science has begun to discover (or rediscover) the urban as a relevant political scale. The past ten years have featured the launch of three SSHRC-funded major collaborative research initiatives on urban issues led or co-led by political scientists, several new textbooks on urban politics and an increase in publishing activity. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to trace the intellectual influences that, even in the face of general academic

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neglect, have driven urban political science in Canada, and those that will likely define the field going forward. To this end, we first identify various discourses and paradigms—what we refer to as “lenses”—that have shaped, and continue to shape, the study of urban politics in Canada. We then use this framework to take stock of the urban literature in Canadian political science as it has evolved over time, focusing especially on works published since the mid-1990s. We discover that despite the recent broadening of the literature, productive scholarly debates within and across research clusters remain rare, and where debates do emerge, they are more often driven by current events and normative claims than theoretical innovations. To remedy these deficiencies, we conclude by proposing several bases for a new urban research agenda that is more methodologically and theoretically diverse and connected to work in other disciplines.

A few qualifications should be made clear before proceeding. First, we limit our review to “Canadians discussing Canada.” While prominent Canadian scholars are engaged in the larger international urban studies literature (for example, Isin, 2000; Polèse and Stren, 2000; Wolfe, 2003), the goal is to understand how Canadian political scientists (or political scientists working at Canadian universities) study Canadian urban issues. Second, the reader will find that we concentrate heavily on English-language scholarship. This is not to discount nor diminish the contributions of francophone and Québécois scholars to urban inquiry. Louise Quesnel, for instance, was a pioneer of the subfield. More recently, political scientists Laurence Bherer and Serge Belley have produced a growing body of work. Outside Québec, Caroline Andrew and Anne Mévellec at the University of Ottawa frequently publish in French. Yet, after conducting an extensive review of relevant French-language publications, we are of the opinion that the bulk of urban political research in Québec has been undertaken by scholars working in other disciplines, often outside traditional political science departments. Indeed, some of the most prolific contributors are located within the interdisciplinary Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS), including Pierre Hamel (2002), a sociologist; Jean-Pierre Collin, a historian (Collin and Robertson, 2008); and Mario Polèse (Polèse and Stren, 2000), whose training was in urban planning.

Our focus on political science is deliberate. It goes without saying that many Canadian scholars outside of political science publish a great deal of work that may be understood to deal with “urban politics,” however defined. Still, despite the legitimate valorization of interdisciplinary urban studies, we maintain that disciplinary boundaries do matter—as much for their limitations as their strengths. The traditional disciplines remain the principal mechanisms for the production, reproduction and dissemination of academic knowledge (Losco, 1998). Our objective is therefore to comprehend how Canadian political science *as a discipline* relates to urban subject matter and how this has changed over time.

Abstract. This paper expands on the work of Higgins, whose 1979 review remains the only synthetic overview of the field, by presenting an updated analysis of the study of municipal, local and urban issues in Canadian political science. We conclude that despite several discursive shifts—from the descriptive works of the 1950s and 1960s, through to the blossoming of interdisciplinary research in the 1980s and 1990s—Higgins’ principal conclusion, that the various streams of urban politics continue to be studied in relative isolation from each other, still rings true. Despite the recent broadening of the literature, productive scholarly debates within and across research clusters are rare, and where debates do emerge, they are more often driven by current events and normative claims than by theoretical innovations. To remedy these deficiencies, we propose several bases for a new urban research agenda that is more methodologically and theoretically diverse and connected to work in other disciplines.

Résumé. Dans la foulée des travaux de Higgins, cet article présente une mise à jour sur les enjeux municipaux, locaux et urbains en science politique canadienne. Higgins publia en 1979 la seule synthèse des travaux dans ce domaine disponible à ce jour. Il y concluait que les diverses problématiques associées aux politiques urbaines étaient étudiées de manière isolée les unes par rapport aux autres. Cette conclusion nous apparaît encore juste, malgré les nombreux changements de discours qu’a connus ce domaine d’études. En effet, les travaux descriptifs des années 1950 et 1960 ont fait place, dans les décennies 1980 et 1990, à un foisonnement de recherches interdisciplinaires. Or, malgré ce récent élargissement de la littérature, les débats productifs dans et entre les différents champs de recherche sont rares. De plus, lorsque des débats émergent, ils sont plus souvent motivés par les événements de l’actualité et les opinions émises que par l’innovation théorique. Pour combler ces lacunes, nous proposons plusieurs avenues ouvrant sur un nouvel agenda de recherche en politiques urbaines à la fois plus diversifié sur le plan méthodologique et théorique et davantage connecté aux travaux réalisés à l’extérieur de la science politique.

What is Urban Politics? An Interpretive Framework

The boundaries of urban politics—indeed, of the “urban”—are fuzzy and contested. As Higgins (1979: 401) reminds us, it would be hubristic to suggest that scholars should be confined to a single, monolithic approach. Any definition of the urban must be inherently heterogeneous, simultaneously comprehending institutional forms, administrative and policy processes, intergovernmental relations, societal organizations and multiple scales of analysis. It must recognize the many complex linkages between the state, society, economy and the built and natural environment. Cognizant of this complexity, we can identify at least four major “lenses” through which political scientists and other social scientists tend to confront urban questions. Each has strengths and weaknesses, and each can be used in combination with another.

The *institutionalist* lens emphasizes the city as government. This approach concentrates on institutional structures, public administration, and activities of municipal corporations, including electoral rules and the making of public policy by different levels of government. Related to this are inquiries into constitutional and legislated constraints on municipal action and their effect on local policy making and expenditure.

The *regionalist* lens focuses on patterns of intergovernmental relations within metropolitan regions and accompanying debates over gov-

ernmental fragmentation. Consolidationists advocate for the benefits of expansive governance frameworks for city–regions, whether for reasons of social equity or international competitiveness, while adherents of public choice favour the efficiency bred by inter-municipal competition, and hence fragmentation, as means to enable citizens to choose the mix of taxes and services they prefer. In between lie those who endorse the creation of cross-municipal special-purpose bodies to correct market failures.

The *society-centred* lens shifts the focus from *government* to *governance*, re-conceptualizing the city as an arena of social conflict and co-operation, rather than as an institutional or administrative unit. While scholars may differ in their explanations of power and power relations, society-centred interpretations are rooted in a common attention to the formal and informal influences of social groups, elites and classes on local state decisions, each possessing different resources and capacities for action.

Finally, the *systemic* lens situates urban politics, societies and economies in national or global context. Analysts seek evidence of institutional, social and economic restructuring, and investigate how (and how much) local agency is constrained or enabled by broader structures, forces, policies and ideologies.

The remainder of the paper uses this interpretive framework as a heuristic device to illustrate the historical development of the field. As we shall see, urban political science in Canada has been shaped, and continues to be shaped, as much by real-world events as academic debates. It is clear, for example, that the decades-long national unity crisis prompted many Canadian political scientists, and especially federalism scholars, to ignore the study of local and municipal affairs in favour of federal and provincial concerns (see Eidelman and Taylor, 2010). Likewise, the revival of urban-oriented scholarship in the 1990s was in no small part a reaction to provincial restructuring of municipalities and demands for a “New Deal for cities.” At the same time, the lenses through which these events have been interpreted have been influenced by evolving theoretical, methodological, and normative discourses inside and outside political science.

The Historical Development of the Field

Higgins’ landmark review (1979) remains the only comprehensive synthesis of the Canadian urban subfield. Based on his extensive review of the “more or less academic” literature (382) available, as well as a survey of post-secondary political science courses on urban and local politics, Higgins identified four major eras of Canadian urban scholarship. Although his periodization is not watertight—each era is clearly not a

revolution that completely supplants the ideas and paradigms that came before—it nevertheless offers a useful starting point from which to track the changing state of the subfield over time.

The first era, from 1886 to 1913, marked by the work of Sir John George Bourinot, Clerk of the House of Commons, was largely historical, focused on the establishment of institutions of local government and the British and American influences on their formation. The second, beginning with the first annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association in 1913, substituted historical description for normative prescription, motivated by the American municipal reform movement's preoccupation with eliminating and preventing the corrupting influence of partisan politics on local municipal administration. The third era commenced with the establishment of the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* in 1935, which signalled the maturation of the discipline. Urban scholarship was dominated by Horace Brittain (1951), Kenneth Crawford (1954), and Donald C. Rowat (1955), each of whom wrote substantial synthetic texts on local government—Crawford's remaining the standard text until the 1970s. Finally, the fourth era, beginning in about 1960, was typified by a burgeoning eclecticism. Indeed, Higgins identified no less than twelve overlapping "directions" in urban political studies at the time, including the impacts of and policy responses to urbanization and urban development, regional government, land use planning, municipal public administration, intergovernmental relations, citizen participation and elections, leadership, community power structures and urban history (1979: 388–89).

Thirty years on, and with the benefit of the interpretive framework laid out above, we can refine and extend Higgins's periodization. The first, second, and third eras' focus on municipal administration and, later, intergovernmental relations, largely saw urban politics through the institutionalist lens. While institution-focused research has persisted to the present, Higgins's fourth era can be interpreted as characteristic of the piecemeal development of new perspectives that drew on the regionalist, society-centred and systemic lenses. The creation of Metropolitan Toronto in 1954, for example, along with regional government reforms in other provinces over the subsequent 15 years, spurred an enduring regionalist literature (Crouch, 1954; Kaplan, 1965; Lightbody, 1978; Quesnel-Ouellet, 1973; Tennant and Zirnhelt, 1973), which despite limited attention in the 1980s, was reactivated in the 1990s by municipal amalgamations in Halifax, Toronto, and Montreal.

Even more dramatic was the rise in the early 1970s of a new society-centred literature on community and neighbourhood protest and reform movements, as well as the role of capital in shaping private development. The literature, perhaps best represented by Lorimer (1970), who saw municipal governments, in concert with private business interests,

as the principal villains of city life, drew attention to the dominance of land developers in urban political life, helping to inspire a new, “bottom-up,” anti-business/establishment stream of urban political studies both inside and outside the academy. Indeed, the early 1970s featured a veritable cottage industry of books cataloguing the electoral and governing efforts of municipal activists and reformers (Caulfield, 1974; Sewell, 1972), battles against urban expressways (Leo, 1977) and the influence of private developers over local government (Aubin, 1972; Gabeline et al., 1975; Gutstein, 1975). While reminiscent of the earlier American community power literature, much of this work was atheoretical, descriptive and often polemical in nature. Unlike Hunter (1953) and Dahl (1961), who saw in American cities a microcosm of the greater polity and sought, through empirical analysis, to make a contribution to democratic theory, the Canadian literature was generated by politically involved actors for immediate political purposes. In its focus on community-level power relations and political behaviour, however, the Canadian literature laid a foundation that was compatible with later American models of “growth machines” (Logan and Molotch, 2007) and developmentalist “urban regimes” (Mossberger and Stoker, 2001).

The emergence of a vibrant society-centred literature did not mean that the earlier focus on the functioning of municipal institutions and intergovernmental relations had disappeared. Rather, it transformed the study of institutions by embedding them in society-centred and systemic analyses. While more traditional examinations of jurisdiction and intergovernmental fiscal and regulatory relations continued (Dupré, 1968; Feldman and Graham, 1979; Siegel, 1980), others became interested in the democratic potential of municipal government. Magnusson (1983: 30), for example, considered provincial imposition of regional structures over top of municipalities by provinces as undermining rather than enhancing the ability of city–regions to articulate goals—a position echoed in more recent critiques (Andrew, 2001).

By the 1970s a discursive shift had occurred in urban political science, one that recognized that political dynamics at the local level extended beyond governmental institutions and structures. Even authors whose analyses focused explicitly on local public administration conceded that Canadian municipal institutions could only be fully appreciated in the context of broader social and economic relations (Plunkett and Betts, 1978: xviii). Magnusson and Sancton’s *City Politics in Canada* (1983) further extended this concern, challenging the notion that local politics and government are generally consistent across Canadian cities. Bringing together a collection of original essays on seven major urban centres (Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa-Hull, Halifax, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Edmonton), they suggested that significant variations in both political culture and structures of political economy across Canada’s prov-

inces and regions have important ramifications for urban politics. The increasingly diverse developmental and demographic trajectories of Canadian cities suggested to the authors the necessity of a more systemic analysis that would address questions of how historical, geographical, economic and sociological factors play out differently in different urban communities. As Sancton put it, urban politics in Canada is “much more rich and complex than some of the more simple-minded descriptions of business dominance seem to have suggested” (Sancton, 1983: 292). Although Magnusson and Sancton provided few suggestions as to how political scientists might best approach this diversity, their assessment was astute.

By the early 1990s, the degree of social complexity in Canada’s urban areas demanded a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of urban politics and policy making. As a result, some of the most interesting research on Canadian urban politics was being published not in conventional political science journals, such as the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *Politique et Sociétés* or *Canadian Public Administration*, but rather in interdisciplinary publications, including the *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* and the US-based *Journal of Urban Affairs* and *Urban Affairs Review*, as well as journals in other disciplines. Paradoxically, this academic metamorphosis from a marginalized subfield of political science into a fluid research program in the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of urban studies would later cement the relative isolation of urban research within the field of political science.

The Contemporary Period: Orphans and Islands

If the urban political science literature in the three decades following 1960 was defined by the integration of social and economic concerns into the traditional focus on municipal institutions and intergovernmental relations, as well as a broadening of scholarly concern, the past two decades have been characterized by an even greater eclecticism. The contemporary literature is, in a sense, made up of orphans and islands—clusters of studies on particular topics, sometimes developed over time, other times abandoned, that are rarely connected to mainstream, national-level studies of Canadian politics. What follows is an attempt to identify these clusters and the gaps both within and between them.

1. *Municipal restructuring and local and regional institutions.* The 1990s saw a wave of provincial restructuring of municipal governments and school boards, often resisted by local officials and populations. These events have captured a large segment of urban political inquiry, spawning investigations employing all four lenses. The institutionalist literature is often descriptive, providing blow-by-blow accounts of the content and politics of particular restructuring processes (Garcea and LeSage,

2005; Mévellec, 2008; Sancton, 2000). Amalgamations in Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax have been criticized on both practical and philosophical grounds. While the former are concerned with flawed transition and implementation processes (see, for example, Sancton, 1996), the latter see consolidations as undermining local democracy and autonomy (Magnusson, 2005), accountability, and citizen participation (Bashevkin, 2006; Bherer, 2006). In this society-centred mould, Hicks (2006), for example, argues that although voter turnout has risen since Toronto's amalgamation, council incumbents have shut out challenges by women and minority candidates.

In the regionalist literature, Lightbody (2006) has called for expanded provincial authority, suggesting that postwar two-tier governments have become impracticable amid increasing regional fragmentation. Most recently, Sancton (2008) has advocated provinces acting as *de facto* regional governments, a step away from his previous call for a "thin" council-of-governments approach (1994). Bradford (1998) and Frisken (2008) provide commentary and analysis of formal and informal governance arrangements within specific metropolitan regions, yet none of these works systematically analyze "horizontal" intermunicipal relations in the context of "vertical" federal-provincial-municipal arrangements. Stewart's (2008) recent rational-choice explanation of patterns of provincial intervention in Toronto metropolitan governance is an exception, both in substance and methodology.

Finally, systemic accounts link restructurings initiated in the 1990s to broader structural forces. Boudreau has been prolific, drawing connections between municipal mergers in Toronto and Montreal and neoliberal ideology, middle-class consciousness, citizenship regimes and critical state theory, arguing that municipal amalgamations are a deliberate strategy to ease adjustment to neoliberal globalization (2006). These themes are also elaborated by Kipfer and Keil (2002). Like many structural accounts, these works are pessimistic about the potential for local regimes to resist (or positively channel) neoliberal forces. Broader case comparisons, focused as much on small- and mid-size localities as Canada's large metropolitan regions, would help strengthen the generalizability of these claims.

2. *The "New Deal," multilevel governance, and urban policy.* Starting in the early 2000s, municipalities demanded a so-called "New Deal" for Canadian cities—more money, autonomy and respect from other levels of government. The former Martin government and, more recently, several provincial governments have made strides toward meeting these demands with a variety of initiatives, including transfers of money and taxing authority, as well as changes to legislation and policies. Scholars have taken both institutionalist and systemic approaches to interpreting these events. Much of the institutionalist work assumes Canadian politi-

cal scientists' historical focus on the federal government as the most relevant policy scale. The \$2.5 million, SSHRC-funded Major Collaborative Research Initiative on Public Policy in Municipalities is emblematic of this focus (Carroll and Graham, 2009; Public Policy in Municipalities, 2005; Sancton and Young, 2009; Young and Leuprecht, 2006). The federal–municipal relationship, studied within the frame of multilevel governance, is now front and centre—a dramatic shift for a subfield historically dominated by municipal and metropolitan governance, and sometimes provincial–municipal relations (Andrew, 1994a).

Notwithstanding the renewed focus on the federal level, important work continues to be done on discrete policy areas, as illustrated in several recent anthologies dedicated to urban public policies, regardless of which government makes and implements them (Andrew et al., 2003; Fowler and Siegel, 2002). In a more holistic conceptualization, Leo (2006) employs the term “deep federalism” to describe multi-level governance arrangements that operate outside of traditional hierarchical, one-size-fits-all relationships and tailor national policies to local conditions. Also in this vein, Bradford (2007) contrasts the Martin government's experimentation with “interscalar policy co-ordination,” or “new localism,” with European national urban policies. The causes of municipal “New Deal” demands are also explored. In an earlier analysis, Bradford (2002) argues that municipal demands for a new deal are to be expected given recent social and economic transformations at the national and global scale, while Horak (2008) concludes that Toronto's demands were more directly a cause of amalgamation than of globalization. Still in its early stages, this literature represents one of the most exciting new avenues for research, with great potential for linkages with the largely untapped European literature on local and urban governance, particularly in policy areas that demand active co-ordination across multiple policy domains and scales, such as the environment and urban regeneration.

3. *Internal municipal organization and administration.* The traditional focus on municipal administration persists, though it is less pronounced than in previous eras. Both Sancton and Woolner (1990) and Begadon and Agócs (1995) have studied the balance of power *vis-à-vis* professional staff. Challenging the traditional view of municipal government as non-partisan, Siegel (1994) approaches the council–staff relationship in another way, by defining principles to govern the murky relationship between them. Gidengil and Vengroff (1997b) take a society-centred turn, considering the degree to which the bureaucracy is representative of society, as well as the extent to which certain sectors of municipal administration are gendered.

This work could be taken further. As Rowat (1983) notes, the fact that municipal executive, legislative and administrative functions are orga-

nized very differently from responsible cabinet governments at the federal and provincial levels calls for different paradigms. As different municipalities in Canada tinker with the relationship between council and mayor, and between both and the municipal public service, it would be useful to engage in comparative research to understand if particular institutional formats lead to particular patterns of behaviour or outcomes. In a recent article, Fernando (2007) examines the City of Toronto's computer leasing scandal, dissecting various dilemmas of ethical conduct in the local public service. This work points to the need for much more extensive examination of the role of lobbyists and interest groups in the municipal policy-making process, perhaps with aid of concepts pioneered at the federal level, such as policy networks (Skogstad, 2008), and also urban regime analysis (see below).

4. *Municipal elections, electoral systems, and voting behaviour.* As Cutler and Matthews put it, municipal elections remain "the poor cousins in the study of elections and voting behaviour" (2005: 359). Nevertheless, studies of local electoral behaviour have the potential to illuminate broader phenomena. According to Kushner and Siegel (2006), low turnout in municipal contests is driven by the lack of information about candidate positions and a perception that candidates are of poor quality, while Milner (1997) suggests that low turnout is due to the lack of consistent party labels across political levels, which undermines cognitive shortcuts for voters. Cutler and Matthews (2005), who fielded a municipal election study in Vancouver modelled on national equivalents, found that electors' choices of mayoral candidate were determined more by provincial party identification than by positions on local issues, while Belley (1992) found a strong ideological distinction between the platforms of the major parties. Granted, Vancouver, Montreal and Québec City may be the exceptions that prove the rule, as they are among the few Canadian municipalities with party competition. Other factors, such as incumbency rates, gender and campaign resources have also been investigated (Kushner et al., 1997), as well as the relative size of immigrant populations and housing tenure (Stanwick, 2000). Were municipal voting behaviour to be analyzed systematically over time and related to a wider range of variables, much more would be known about citizen motivations at the ballot box and why they might be changing. The relationship to contests at other levels should also be explored further.

The literature dealing with municipal electoral systems, party systems, and election financing has also struggled to sustain academic interest. MacDermid's work (2009) on campaign contributions in recent Toronto-region elections has shed harsh light on the degree to which property development interests fund can potentially influence council campaigns in smaller municipalities in the Toronto region. Thomas (1995)

has profiled local party organization and competition in Montreal, Vancouver, and Winnipeg in relation to European social movement-parties, while Lustiger-Thaler and Shragge (2002) describe the 1994 Montreal election as the triumph of neoliberal discourse. Still, significant gaps remain. Why, for example, have the subtle ways in which national and provincial parties support local candidates in the City of Toronto not been the object of study? It would also be interesting to compare the political dynamics of ward-based (as in Toronto) and at-large systems (as in Vancouver), as would more detailed investigation of the evolving two-layer system of Montreal's borough councils (Collin, 2005). Spanning institutional, regional, societal and systemic dimensions, municipal electoral studies are fertile ground for research that spans multiple lenses of analysis.

5. *Urban regimes*. Urban regime analysis is perhaps the most influential paradigm in the American urban politics literature. Originated by Stone (1989) in his study of postwar Atlanta, and theoretically extended by other scholars and applied to numerous city cases (Mossberger and Stoker, 2001), this society-centred approach focuses on the collaborative arrangements and coalitions through which local governments and private actors assemble governing capacity.

Curiously, despite their analytic power, urban regimes have found little purchase in the Canadian literature. The reasons for this are unclear. It is possible that the regime approach does not apply in Canada. This seems unlikely given its widespread application in both the United States and Great Britain, to which our municipal and urban systems bear great resemblance, but little can be concluded from the Canadian literature thus far. Although Leo (1997) and, more recently, Good (2009) seem to have applied it successfully, a debate between Cobban and Leo over the existence of regimes in Canada (or at least in London, Ontario) ended in a draw (Cobban, 2003a, 2003b; Leo, 2003).

The paucity of work on regimes is perhaps emblematic of the sub-discipline's atheoretical bent. As Graham and colleagues note, "we do not have home-grown theories of local government in Canada" (1998: 19). As such, discussion of regimes (or any other theory or model of urban politics) is largely absent from the three undergraduate urban politics textbooks now in print: Tindal and Tindal's *Local Government in Canada* (2008), McAllister's *Governing Ourselves: The Politics of Canadian Communities* (2004) and Lightbody's *City Politics, Canada* (2006).

6. *Urban social movements, identity, citizenship, and group representation*. Work in the systemic lens on urban citizenship and identity has perhaps been developed most fully by Magnusson (1996), who has supplemented his earlier Marxist conceptualization of metropolitan governance arrangements as class struggle with an adventure into postmodern

social theory. He calls for a focus on the urban as the scale and context in which people exercise self-government and political choice, nested within broader structural forces. This perspective later led him to study urban radicalism and insurgent citizenship (Kataoka and Magnusson, 2007) and also the assertion that local self-government deserves constitutional recognition and protection (Magnusson, 2005).

Also working within the systemic lens, Boudreau (2003) applies her notion of “strategic territorialization” to language politics in Montreal, conceptualizing political and social mobilization around municipal mergers and partition in relation to territorialized culture claims. Stasiulis’s (1997) analysis draws attention to how place-blind federal immigration policy has disproportionate impact in only a few urban areas, while Abu-Laban and Garber (2005) propose that distinctive Canadian and American public ideologies have positioned immigration as a policy problem at different governmental levels in each country.

Chapters by Abu-Laban, Andrew, Garber, Thomas and Thomlinson in *The Politics of the City: A Canadian Perspective* (Thomas, 1997), as well as the work of Thomas and Trimble in Lightbody (1995) and Andrew (1992, 1994b), employ a society-centred lens to explore identity politics and the mobilization of women, homosexuals and ethnic groups as they relate to globalization, policy needs, access to political power and representation. More recently, Fernando’s work (2006) on Chinese immigrant interest groups in Toronto and Los Angeles links the study of local social mobilization to a system-level analysis of institutionalized racism. These qualitative studies complement more traditional positivist work by Gidengil and Vengroff (1997a), who show that women face barriers to election in Québec municipalities. Hewing to the earlier American community power model of urban political sociology, Rayside’s exploration (1991) of citizenship and governance in a small Ontario town treads similar ground.

While these works provide useful empirical and occasionally theoretical windows on many aspects of urban life and politics, they have neither been systematically followed up, nor productively connected. For example, Magnusson’s normative and theoretical work on self-government could be linked to work on local political parties and movements and perhaps also to the study of local political culture and institutional change (Reese and Cox, 2007).

7. Urban planning and development. Planning and land development are major sources of political conflict yet they have received only limited attention from Canadian political scientists. Battles between citizen and property developer or city government, between city councillors, between political representatives and staff, and between governments play out on a daily basis at the municipal scale. These battles are often driven by

intergovernmental issues, particularly with respect to waterfront redevelopment, transportation or Olympic megaprojects, and environmental protection. Recent exceptions to this gap in the literature include Leo (2002), Smith (1995) and Frisken (2008).

Political conflict of this order might be dismissed as micropolitics, unworthy of study. However, in conjunction with urban regime analysis and the new comparative urban political economy literature (see, for example, Savitch and Kantor, 2002), it may be possible to make generalizations and causal arguments from a systemic perspective regarding the politics of local and metropolitan growth patterns and trajectories. Cross-national study may also help us clarify our thinking about domestic issues. In *The Myth of the North American City* (1986), geographers Goldberg and Mercer asserted that Canadian and American cities differ fundamentally in their socio-economic, developmental and political dynamics (see also Garber and Imbroscio, 1996). Further analysis by Canadian political scientists is warranted, especially given the currency of theories of continental and global policy convergence (Hay, 2004; Skogstad, 2000) and cross-national urban competition (Courchene, 2006; Friedmann, 1986).

Toward a New Research Agenda

More than thirty years ago, Simeon (1976) reprimanded students of Canadian public policy for being parochial and reactive. He accused them of being captive to events at the expense of exploring grand questions, focusing on description of idiosyncratic case studies rather than generalizable, cumulative knowledge and engaging in normative prescription rather than explanation. This review suggests that contemporary Canadian urban politics falls prey to all of these pathologies. While urban research by Canadian political scientists has gained popularity in recent years, the literature still lacks comprehensiveness and continuity of focus. To remedy these deficiencies, we propose several bases for a new urban research agenda.

1. *Join up existing research and become more theoretically and methodologically diverse.* As it stands, much of the literature consists of one-off projects by single authors rather than long-term debates involving communities of scholars. New fronts are opened only to languish without response. While institutionalist and regionalist research has been supplemented by society-centred and systemic analyses, the body of work remains fragmented. Positivist research on local voting behaviour and representation has been unsystematic and has remained separated from qualitative work on group struggles and movements. While the recent turn toward systemic approaches exemplified by Bradford and Boudreau has incorporated structural variables into urban analysis, this has yet to filter into most institutionalist accounts. Good's and Leo's importation

of regime theory, as well as Stewart's and Milner's use of rational choice explanations are important advances in hypothesis- and theory-driven research.

The lenses through which Canadian scholars have studied the urban yield distinct insights, but they also come with blind spots. For example, focusing on central city institutions risks neglecting the region or processes and forces at other scales, while a focus on societal actors may ignore decisive institutional dynamics. As we have suggested in the previous section, urban political studies stand to benefit from multidimensional analyses informed by sustained debate between scholars using different lenses to observe the same phenomena.

The explanation of events is necessary and important, but a literature focused only on the issues of the day risks myopia. To move beyond reactive, event-driven research, scholars should assess the applicability of historical institutionalism to the urban scale. Pierson (2004), for example, distinguishes between incremental and abrupt changes in policy and institutions, as well as short- and long-term causes, while Streeck and Thelen (2005) typologize incremental institutional change. These approaches may be usefully brought to bear on path-dependent local and intergovernmental policy processes, institutional structures and patterns of state–society relations in cities. In the international literature, for example, Sellers (2002) goes some way toward developing a historicized comparative political economy of city–regions.

Canadian urban political science may also profit from comparative research. Comparisons can be between metropolitan regions, between central cities or suburban municipalities of different metropolitan regions and between municipalities within the same metropolitan region. Interprovincial or international comparisons of urban projects, municipalities and regions can also illuminate whether local phenomena are exceptional or if they are part of broader convergence trends. The SSHRC-funded major collaborative research initiatives on public policy in municipalities and the regional basis of economic innovation, as well as the Québec-based Villes-Régions-Monde research network, are a step in the right direction.

2. *Expand the scope; fill the gaps.* Consider four avenues of research that remain neglected.

First, local political leadership. At the intimate scale of urban governance, policy development and outcomes cannot be abstracted from the personalities of individual actors. Leaders are idiosyncratic, their agency difficult to model, yet they can play a pivotal role in shaping local debates and political choices. Mévellec's (2009) study of extraordinary mayoral involvement in the creation of the City of Saguenay is a rare contribution. Until the recent publication of Urbaniak's (2009) study of long-time Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion, Colton's book (1980) on Metro

Toronto chairman Frederick Gardiner was the only detailed study of a Canadian municipal leader. The study of executive leadership in Canadian municipalities could benefit from examination of American municipal and presidential studies.

Second, the influence of ideas. Specific policy ideas and more general policy orientations come from somewhere. Theories of agenda setting, policy windows and policy networks may enrich our understanding of how local actors make decisions, while theories of issue framing and the diffusion of policy ideas and models may help explain why particular options find purchase in some contexts but not others.

Third, the differential spatial impacts of policies. Geographers and sociologists have studied the spatial distribution of populations of Aboriginals, racial minorities, the poor and immigrants in Canadian cities. The next step is to link this knowledge to the study of multilevel governance by considering the spatially uneven distribution of impacts of (often contradictory) federal, provincial, and municipal policies.

Fourth, political culture. Using survey-based indicators of political culture (such as perception of parties, voting, left-wing beliefs and post-materialism), Henderson (2004) identifies nine relatively homogeneous cultural clusters in Canada, including three distinctly urban clusters. This challenges the conventional wisdom that Canadian political culture is best understood as a product of East–West regionalism. Examining the variation in political culture among, for example, city cores and suburbs, may generate new understandings of Canadian political culture in general. Although he is a geographer, not a political scientist, we must call attention to the important advances made by Walks (2005), who has demonstrated the salience of the urban–suburban cleavage through analysis of the relationship between place of residence and party preferences and political attitudes in federal elections.

3. *Think beyond the municipality.* Canadian political science must shed its reflexive response to looking at issues at the federal scale. In addition to looking at cities from the vantage point of federal and provincial capitals, we must look at Ottawa and provincial governments from the vantage point of cities.

Within the institutionalist lens, it should also be recognized that municipal corporations represent only one actor in a broader network of local governance. About one-third of the City of Toronto's operating budget, for example, is disbursed to over 100 semi-autonomous agencies, boards and commissions that have considerable discretion, and each of which is the site of policy making, bureaucratic conflict, fiscal pressures and social engagement. The politics of special purpose bodies, including school boards, are no less interesting, fierce or consequential to peoples' lives, despite being neglected as objects of study.

Geographers are accustomed to thinking of cities as being components of stratified regional, national, and global systems. With the exception of McAllister (2004), contemporary Canadian urban research tends to emphasize large cities and city regions. While there may be good reason for this—not least data accessibility and quality—in a stratified urban system like Canada’s, we must pay attention not only to the core municipalities of large metropolitan regions, but also metropolitan suburban areas and small cities and towns.

Conclusion

Twenty-five years ago, one of Canada’s leading scholars of urban politics and public administration referred to the study of local government as an “academic ghetto” (Sancton, 1983: 310). This is perhaps as true today as it was then. But must it be so? Political science cannot hope, any more than any other discipline, to provide a complete understanding of urban phenomena. The challenge is to harness the distinctive conceptual and analytic tools of each discipline. A methodologically diverse, theoretically informed and diverse political science, drawing on its traditional and distinctive emphasis on power, policy and institutions, has the potential to make an important contribution to the broader enterprise of urban studies. At the same time, the discipline of political science stands to be enriched by urban inquiry.

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