Open federalism in an urban age: implications of recent trends in intergovernmental relations for municipal governance in Canada

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**Abstract**

Cities are becoming more important in Canada and around the world as a result of urbanization and the evolution of the global economy. Everywhere, the emergence of pressing urban issues is confronting politicians with difficult policy problems that cut across formal jurisdictional lines. In Canada, the importance of cities is challenging the traditional intergovernmental arrangements of federalism. But the complex web of federal-provincial relationships that have been a feature of Canadian federalism are also being challenged by the 'open federalism' approach of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. This approach seeks to reduce rather than increase the scope of intergovernmental affairs, and suggests that urban issues are not the concern of the federal government since municipalities and their problems are the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces.

Using two case studies of key urban issues, public housing and public transportation, this thesis examines the evolving intergovernmental arrangements and growing problems in these program areas in Canada's three largest cities (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver). It demonstrates that open federalism as an approach to urban issues is not likely to be effective. Rather, the overlapping jurisdictional challenges posed by urban issues, combined with the limited policy and fiscal resources available to Canadian municipal governments, appear to warrant a greater degree of multi-level governance, a finding consistent with trends elsewhere. In this regard, an updated version of cooperative federalism would seem to allow the federal government the greatest ability to articulate broad national policy objectives while engaging both provincial and municipal governments to ensure adequate and effective program implementation at the local level.
The annual Institute of Intergovernmental Relations State of the Federation conference was held at the Donald Gordon Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, on June 4-6, 2015. The focus of the conference was on the intergovernmental dimensions and implications of the massive infrastructure investments required to be made by all three orders of government. Professor Gomez-Ibanez currently serves as co-chair of the Infrastructure in a Market Economy executive program at the Kennedy School.

Federalism is the mixed or compound mode of government, combining a general government (the central or 'federal' government) with regional governments (provincial, state, cantonal, territorial or other sub-unit governments) in a single political system. Its distinctive feature, exemplified in the founding example of modern federalism by the United States of America under the Constitution of 1787, is a relationship of parity between the two levels of government established. It can thus be defined as a Mowrey, Timothy R (2008) Open federalism in an urban age: implications of recent trends in intergovernmental relations for municipal governance in Canada. Masters thesis, Concordia University. Preview. But the complex web of federal-provincial relationships that have been a feature of Canadian federalism are also being challenged by the 'open federalism' approach of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. This approach seeks to reduce rather than increase the scope of intergovernmental affairs, and suggests that urban issues are not the concern of the federal government since municipalities and their problems are the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces.