

La protection sociale dans un état fédéral urbanisé : Est-ce que l'autonomie locale explique les différences entre les politiques contre l'itinérance à Vancouver, Calgary, et Montréal?

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“For a growing number of Canadians, the city is their safety net”

- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2009.

Immediately following his election as Vancouver's new mayor in late 2008, Gregor Robertson made it clear that homelessness would be his number one priority (CBC 2008). To help homeless Vancouverites get through the winter, Robertson began his term in office by opening 5 emergency shelters around the city; as a longer term plan, however, he introduced a ten-year strategy to not only end street homelessness, but to improve housing access for all residents of Vancouver. Governments at the local level in Canada have long been involved in the provision of social housing, with varying degrees of support from other senior levels of government (Sancton 2010). Lower levels of funding and the recent “downloading” of services from the federal to provincial governments, and in some cases from provincial and municipal governments (Sancton and Young 2009), have created a situation in which the welfare state increasingly frayed and lower to the ground (Prince and Rice 2000). The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has recently argued that Canadian cities are facing a “social infrastructure deficit”, and that they are struggling to meet the front line housing needs of their citizens (FCM 2009).

Large cities across Canada, such as Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and Montreal, have recently adopted comprehensive and local level strategies to fight homelessness. These plans differ in many interesting ways, such as in terms of their target populations, the policy instruments used, the end goals, and the intergovernmental implementation

strategy. Through a close look at these four cities from the four largest Canadian provinces, this research aims to systematically document and thus explain why these policies are so different. Though facing the same problem of homelessness and with the same Constitutional status (creatures of the provinces), these cities have adopted remarkably different approaches, and this research asks why and with what consequences. An understanding of why these policies are so different will also answer two supplementary questions. First, what do the determinants of these differences tell us about the current state of social protection in Canada? And second, what, if any, role do cities play in the intergovernmental system, specifically with respect to redistributive policies and the welfare state more generally?

To determine the causes of these differences, I will combine theories of local governance and public policy to argue that they are the result of three analytically distinct factors. The first factor is local autonomy. If cities have significant autonomy from the provincial governments, they may have more control over the content of the policies they implement; however, if the autonomy is limited, they may have little choice but to implement provincial priorities. The other two factors that explain the differences between these policies are the local regime dynamics and the social construction of poverty and homelessness in the four cities. The second and third empirical chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to regimes and construction, respectively. This paper for the Villes Régions Monde conference is a presentation of my original theoretical framework and some initial results for the first empirical chapter of my PhD thesis regarding local autonomy.

To systematically measure and compare the local autonomy of the four cities, I will adapt an index proposed by Sellers and Lindström (2007) and will combine this with insights gleaned from *Foundations of Governance* (Sancton and Young 2009). But before measuring local autonomy, however, we must examine the provincial context in which the cities are located. British Columbia has a provincial housing strategy that emphasizes reducing homelessness through the creation of more social housing and neighbourhood mix, but it does so within the broad spectrum of all types of housing. In this way the provincial plan and Vancouver's plan are similar. BC has no poverty reduction strategy, though at the time of writing, the New Democratic Party has

proposed one. Following the election, should the NDP win, we might expect to see a provincial poverty reduction strategy. Alberta has a provincial plan for ending homelessness in ten years, though this plan was adopted one year after Calgary adopted its plan. Further, the recently elected Progressive Conservative government promised to enact a provincial poverty reduction plan as well. Though details on the plan are sparse, it has been announced that the big goals of the provincial strategy are to abolish child poverty in five years and abolish all poverty in ten years.

Ontario has both a long-term housing plan that contains solutions to homelessness as well as a provincial anti-poverty strategy. The goals of the latter are modest compared to Alberta's, as it aims to reduce child poverty by 25% within the next five years. Also interesting about the provincial poverty plan is that it relates specifically to children and families living in poverty, and thus is targeted towards a particular type of poverty. Finally Quebec has both a poverty reduction strategy as well as an inter-ministerial homelessness plan. The latter coincides perfectly with Montreal's plan, and indeed the two seem to be in sync on a number of key points, such as the need to share public space, the role of the police, and the timeline.

Vancouver is the only city that is located in a province that does not currently have a provincial poverty reduction plan, though Alberta's plan was introduced after Calgary introduced its own plan. Quebec and Ontario have at least adopted policies to reduce homelessness and poverty, though with varying levels of commitment. More specific similarities and differences between municipal and provincial plans will be presented in detail at the conference.

To better understand the extent to which local autonomy explains the similarities and differences between the municipal plans and their respective provincial contexts, I will quantitatively measure and compare the degree of local autonomy in the four cases. In other words, I will measure the extent to which the municipality is autonomous from the province. To do this, I will create my own index; this will be an adaptation of an index proposed by Sellers and Lidström (2007) in their article "Decentralization and the Welfare State" and will be informed by *Foundations of Governance* by Sancton and Young.

The index created by Sellers and Lindström is an important place to start for the measurement of local autonomy, for it outlines the factors that are important to consider when measuring local autonomy, such as local tax autonomy, access to grants, and political supervision and control of local affairs. The weakness of this approach, however, is that it was originally designed for multiple countries and not just Canada. Given their emphasis on decentralization and the welfare state in various countries, notably in unitary European countries, Sellers and Lindström only measure the relationship between the local government and the central government. They thus conclude that all of Canada can be classified the same way, a problematic conclusion, for Canada is a federation and municipalities are constitutionally the responsibility of provinces. A close look at the intergovernmental responses to homelessness will certainly include an assessment of the involvement of the federal level, for all three orders of government are involved in this question, but given the strong provincial role in social policy, provincial governments are perhaps more important to measure for the purposes of this study. I will therefore adapt the index proposed by Sellers and Lindstrom so as to allow for an exploration of the municipal-provincial relation as well.

Sancton and Young (2009) have convincingly argued that true local autonomy requires a legitimate, democratically elected, and accountable local government. A measurement of local autonomy must also, therefore, consider and measure political accountability. To identify political factors to include in the list of indicators, I will rely largely on Sancton and Young's edited work *Foundations of Government*, an important contribution to the understanding of local-provincial relations in Canada. This book is an important place to begin for my examination of local autonomy, but it must not be the sole basis of this measurement for it has a number of weaknesses. First, it is an edited work, meaning Canada's 10 municipal-provincial relationships are evaluated in 10 chapters by 10 different authors (or series of authors as is often the case). The advantage of this is that scholars who are closely associated with each province describe them richly and perhaps with more detail than an outsider, but the weakness is that it is not a systematic study. Indeed, Sancton and Young admit that each chapter focuses on a slightly different element of the municipal-provincial relationship. The chapters are also qualitative assessments of this relationship. The index that I propose

to use has been greatly influenced by these two works, but at the same time it corrects the key weaknesses just discussed. The index will also be presented in greater detail at the conference, as well as initial research that suggests that Quebec maintains relatively close relationships with its municipalities, whereas BC has generally given more autonomy to municipalities. Alberta and Ontario have also recently undergone changes that have resulted in greater autonomy of municipalities. The complete index will also be presented at the conference in greater detail.

The data used to measure local autonomy will primarily come from local government budgets and reports, Statistics Canada, as well as acts (such as the Stronger Toronto for a Stronger Ontario Act). Sancton and Young's book will also be an important source of information for democratic accountability. If all of this information is not available publically, I will seek out the missing data through interviews, which will be conducted in the winter of 2014 to fill in the gaps.

This research has important practical and theoretical implications. In terms of the former, the mayors of big cities, such as Naheed Nenshi and Gregor Robertson (2012) have argued powerfully that cities in Canada are underfunded. A nuanced understanding of the role cities play in meeting the front-line needs of some of their most vulnerable citizens is key to ensuring that they have the funding and the mandate to fully meet those needs. As Canada become increasingly urban and unequal, the question of how cities respond to homelessness is of increasing importance.

The theory on the state of social security in Canada has, until now, focused largely on provincial and federal governments. Debates in this literature have often focussed on the extent to which the Canadian welfare state is centralized or decentralized, or the implications of national standards. Looking at the welfare state from the municipal level may lead to different conclusions about the Canadian welfare state, namely, that there is not one single Canadian welfare state, nor are there just ten welfare states in each of the provinces. A look at the urban role in the welfare state may in fact lead to the conclusion that there are many municipal welfare states in Canada. Building on this conclusion, research will also shed light on the important question of where large municipal governments fit in the Canadian intergovernmental system.

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