ABSTRACT: In the United States, the new regionalism was invented because the old regionalism had proven politically impossible to implement. For Canadian cities, provincial legislatures have frequently imposed various institutional reforms many of which are highly relevant to the concerns of at least some American new regionalists. Canadian policymakers have recently shown great interest in the tenets of the new regionalism, even in places where old regionalist structures have long been established. The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), the Greater Toronto Services Board, and the Montreal Metropolitan Community are all institutions with which American new regionalists should be familiar. The GVRD has been criticized in Canada for being too weak. The fact that the GVRD rests somewhere between the old and the new regionalism is just one of many reasons why it merits more attention from both Americans and Canadians who are concerned with the effective governance of our city-regions.

The new regionalism in the United States emerged because the old regionalism proved politically impossible to implement. For Canadian cities, however, provincial legislatures frequently imposed various institutional reforms of the type favored by the old regionalists. The first section of this article points out what it is that American new regionalists and Canadian policymakers should have learned from the results of the old regionalism as it was implemented in Canada. The second section examines the relevance of the new regionalism for Canada. For those who still accept the tenets of the old regionalism, the new variety will seem irrelevant, if not counterproductive. But, for others, the new regionalism will provide a new perspective for analyzing old Canadian problems. The article's third section shows that, in some respects, Canadian cities have already gone further in implementing new regionalist principles than most American and Canadian analysts have recognized. The relevant institutions that are examined briefly in this section are the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), the Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB), and the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC). In short, new regionalists, wherever they might be, need to know what is going on in Canada.
It is important to realize that, in contrast to municipalities in American metropolitan areas, those in Canada receive virtually no ongoing financial assistance from the federal government and are subject to virtually no federal regulations (other than those applicable to all employers and property owners). The Canadian federal government, for example, has never provided financial inducements for metropolitan areas to establish councils of governments. Instead, provincial governments have frequently intervened to create or amend various forms of metropolitan institutions. Rather than facing an intergovernmental regime in which both federal and state governments loom large, Canadian municipalities are, in fact, as well as legal theory, very much subject to provincial control. There is no municipal “home rule” in Canada. Provinces are so powerful with respect to urban areas in Canada that one observer (Lightbody, 1997) argued that Canadians need not worry much about regional governance within metropolitan areas; provincial governments are really in charge and that is as it should be.

### CANADIAN CITIES AND THE OLD REGIONALISM

There is much about Canadian local government that Americans would consider familiar: different legal regimes in different provinces (states); directly elected mayors; non-partisan elections in most jurisdictions; many special-purpose bodies (including school boards); and reliance on the property tax for most locally generated revenue. Among western democracies, Canada’s system of local government is more like that found in the United States. The great difference is that, since the early twentieth century at least, Canadian provincial legislatures have been much more likely to change local structures of government without first attaining local consent. Why this might be is beyond the scope of this article, but three possibilities can be suggested: 1) the parliamentary system of responsible government within provincial legislatures facilitates the adoption of structural changes favored by the executive; 2) for various reasons—including the legacy of slavery on the racial make-up of the US—the stakes of local politics might be perceived as being greater by Americans than by Canadians; and 3) Canadians might be culturally less attached to local autonomy than Americans. Whatever the reasons, the 10 Canadian provincial legislatures have imposed far more structural change on local institutions than have the 50 state legislatures.

Old regionalists in the United States, most notably Victor Jones, paid a great deal of attention to Canada. American urban government texts in the 1960s and 1970s treated Toronto as an honorary American city. Toronto was literally the textbook example of a functioning, effective two-tier metropolitan federation, and a model many of the authors espoused for the US. But new regionalists in the United States, with the exception of Dodge (1996), seem quite uninterested in Canada.

Two of the best known new-regionalist books—*Cities Without Suburbs* (Rusk, 1995) and *Citistates* (Peirce, 1993)—might have benefited from some acknowledgment of the Canadian experience. Each will be treated in turn. Among the new regionalists, Rusk is the one most concerned with municipal boundaries, so much so that he is perhaps more of an old regionalist than a new one. He argues that metropolitan areas are better off if the territories of their central cities are elastic, i.e., if they expand over time. He applauds the existence of situations, usually found in the southwestern states, in which central cities can easily annex unincorporated areas that are contiguous with their boundaries. He points out, however, that some central cities, especially in the northeastern states, are completely surrounded by incorporated municipalities and, therefore, find that territorial expansion is next to impossible.

Particularly relevant for this article is the fact that, except in the provinces of British Columbia and New Brunswick, there are no urbanized unincorporated areas in Canada. When Canadian central cities expand their boundaries, they generally do so at the expense of areas that are just as much incorporated as the central cities. Residents of such areas are almost as
resistant to being annexed by the central city as American suburbanites; the difference is that Canadian provinces have established procedures that, under some circumstances at least, force suburban areas to be annexed. Rusk would presumably look kindly on such procedures.

Not since the consolidation of New York City in 1898 has such a policy been implemented in the United States, except that on this occasion six counties and all their constituent municipalities were merged. Even the creation of Unigov in Indianapolis in 1969 does not qualify because nine townships and four incorporated municipalities with populations over 5,000 continue to exist (Blomquist & Parks, 1995). At the time Rusk was writing the first edition of his book, there was one Canadian example that was highly relevant. Unicity in Winnipeg came into existence in 1972. It replaced an institution similar to an American urban county—the Corporation of Greater Winnipeg—and all 12 of its constituent municipalities, including the old central city of Winnipeg. The official name of the new entity was the city of Winnipeg. Unicity was brought into existence by a provincial legislature controlled by the New Democratic Party (NDP), the mildly socialist party to the left of the Liberals on Canada’s political spectrum. The NDP’s objectives then were very similar to Rusk’s today: the party leadership believed that merging municipalities would facilitate economic growth and promote equality by ensuring that all residents in the urbanized portion of the metropolitan area would receive equal levels of municipal services and be subject to a common tax rate levied on property assessments derived from a single, integrated system. Unlike many other advocates of municipal amalgamation, neither the Manitoba’s NDP government in the 1970s, nor Rusk in the 1990s, believed that municipal amalgamation would save much, or any, money.

Winnipeg’s unicity has been in existence now for more than a quarter of a century (Klos, 1998). There can be no denying that it eliminated differentials in property-tax levels and in day-to-day urban services. But it has not been without its difficulties. For example, it has had to contend with various secessionist movements. In 1992, a conservative-dominated provincial legislature approved the departure of the largely rural Headingley area from Unicity following a local referendum among 1390 voters in which 86.7% (of the 83.6% of the electorate who voted) supported secession. Residents of Headingley successfully argued that the city had ample land for new development because it was not growing as quickly as the founders of Unicity had predicted. Although it is true that Winnipeg has grown slowly in comparison to other Canadian metropolitan areas, there is no evidence that Unicity has affected Winnipeg’s growth rate.

In 1971, the municipalities that were to comprise Unicity accounted for 99.1% of Winnipeg’s census metropolitan area (CMA, the Canadian equivalent of the SMSA). In 1996, the figure was 92.7%. In other words, the area outside Unicity is growing faster than Unicity itself. This prompted the government of Manitoba in 1998 to create a Capital Region Review Panel. Its work (Manitoba, 1999) has obviously been deeply influenced by the new regionalism, but, ironically, there was no recognition that, in many respects Winnipeg was already blessed with what virtually all American new regionalists (certainly David Rusk) would recognize as a remarkably comprehensive mechanism for regional governance.

But what supporters of Rusk’s approach need most to know about Winnipeg’s experience with Unicity is that it is not at all clear that the central city has been the main beneficiary. This is because, even from its earliest days, it was clear that suburban interests predominated on the new municipal council. As more people lived in suburban subdivisions than in traditional inner-city neighborhoods, this was not surprising. A fairly technical debate was launched in the late 1970s (Axworthy, 1980) about who benefited most—suburbs or central city—from the city’s infrastructure investments. At a minimum, it would appear that Unicity facilitated suburban growth by spreading the costs throughout the new city rather than by concentrating them on new residents or their immediate neighbors within the old small suburban municipalities. It is true that the inner city also benefited from substantial government investment, but
most of these funds came from other levels, especially the federal. In this regard, one of the academics, Lloyd Axworthy (1980), who had argued that one of Unicity’s unintended consequences was to benefit the suburbs became, as a prominent federal politician, the great federal patron of Winnipeg’s inner city. Significantly, Axworthy is a left-leaning Liberal, not a member of the New Democratic Party.

In terms of municipal structures, Winnipeg’s Unicity was deliberately created in 1971 as a city without suburbs. It was not the haphazard result of easy annexation laws of the kind found in the southwestern United States and, arguably in other Canadian prairie cities where there is virtually no municipal fragmentation of metropolitan areas. When Rusk wrote *Cities without Suburbs*, Winnipeg was the one Canadian city that seemed to fit perfectly what he wanted for American cities. Since he wrote the book, other major Canadian municipal amalgamations have been implemented, but Rusk can hardly be faulted for not including what even Canadian observers failed to predict (Sancton, 1996). These recent Canadian amalgamations will be treated later when we examine what it is that Canadians have learned—or not learned—from the central tenets of the new regionalism.

In *Citistates*, Peirce (1993) looks favorably on two-tier systems of metropolitan government, with the upper tier being directly elected.

The ongoing drawback of COGs [councils of governments] is that, in the final analysis, they are made up of representatives of local governments, not the populace directly, and that a dissident local government can effectively torpedo a major COG initiative (pp. 317–318).

He specifically approves of a proposal from the L.A. 2000 Partnership for a directly elected southern California regional council.

Like Rusk, Peirce makes no mention of governance arrangements for Canadian cities. But new regionalists who share his views should know about the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Metro), an upper-tier metropolitan authority created in 1953 whose council had been directly elected since 1988. They might rightly claim, however, that Metro was not really a mechanism for metropolitan governance because, by 1991 it comprised only 54% of what the provincial government had defined as the Greater Toronto Area (Sancton, 1994). But the council of the nearby Regional Municipality of Niagara—which does cover an entire metropolitan area—has been made up of directly elected members and mayors of the constituent municipalities since it was created in 1969. They might also want to examine the Corporation of Greater Winnipeg (1960–1971), whose council was directly elected from wards deliberately constructed to include territory from more than one municipality. For six years prior to 2001, a similar system existed in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton.

None of these experiences with directly elected upper-tier authorities can be considered a success. Each of the cases mentioned above was (or has been) characterized by constant conflict between the two levels, so much so in the cases of Winnipeg, Toronto, and Ottawa that the relevant provincial government abolished the two-tier system and replaced it with a single amalgamated municipality. In both Winnipeg and Toronto, direct election to two tiers of local government lasted for only about a dozen years. In Niagara it has lasted for more than 30 years, but throughout this period there has been constant questioning of a cumbersome and slow-moving system. The only reason the existing system has continued is that no one can agree on an alternative, especially because complete amalgamation for such a large and diverse territory would mean the end of local government for some quite substantial cities (Niagara Falls, for example).

Given that direct elections to upper-tier local authorities are commonplace in Europe, perhaps American proponents of direct election can ignore the Canadian experience. There are two main reasons why this would not be wise. First, the European countries that do have di-
Direct election to an upper tier of local government are not federations. Canada is a federation. When Americans talk of adding a directly elected tier of regional government, they are interposing this between state and local, not between national and local, as in Europe. Directly elected Canadian regional governments have never been able to establish themselves in voters’ political consciousnesses because they have not been able to carve out a credible niche for a fourth level of government. Urbanists can claim that city-regions make more sense geographically than the boundaries of states and provinces, but such a claim makes little sense to the middle-class suburban resident of Toronto or Chicago who would rarely worry about the boundaries of Ontario and Illinois, but who would think that talk of metropolitan areas is simply a ploy to extract extra funds for big-city politicians and unions.

The second point is that non-partisan local elections do not exist in Europe. They do exist in all parts of Canada and in most parts of the United States. It is true that Americans are used to electing county supervisors (or their equivalents) on a partisan basis, but such partisan elections are surely a reflection of the fact that, in most parts of the United States, partisan elections for county officials are seen as more an extension of state elections than of local. In any event, it is unlikely that anyone who favors direct elections to regional governments in the US would unthinkingly assume that such elections would best be conducted on a partisan basis. But even if they were, American parties are notoriously incapable of structuring clear sets of policy alternatives that bind those who are elected under their respective banners. Furthermore, it is likely that suburban local governments would still continue to be led by non-partisan mayors and councilors whose loyalty to protecting their municipalities would likely be greater than their loyalty to any party. In contrast, in European countries, party politics pervades all forms of local politics. Among other things, this means that local politicians are expected to have loyalties that go beyond their own municipal organization. Jurisdictional battles are, of course, common in European local politics, but they are at least tempered by the fact that various groups of local politicians share certain declared political objectives that transcend institutional loyalties.

What the Canadian experience shows is that having two levels of directly elected non-partisan municipal politicians within a two-level federal system is likely one level too many. There is simply not enough political space for four levels of multi-purpose government. Crowded politicians squabble with each other about issues of function and jurisdiction. Such a system is not sustainable for long periods of time.

Perhaps American new regionalists have ignored Winnipeg and Metro Toronto because their structures were not new. What this section of the article has shown is not just that Canadian provincial legislatures enacted old regionalist solutions, but that some of the policy prescriptions of American new regionalists are really quite old. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that there is nothing new about the new regionalism. Even Rusk and Peirce, not to mention other new regionalists, are more concerned with promoting inter-municipal and public-private partnerships within metropolitan areas than they are with designing new governmental structures. These are the features of the new regionalism that make it new. Ironically, it is precisely these features of the new regionalism that have generally not been appreciated or accepted within Canada.

**THE NEW REGIONALISM IN CANADIAN URBAN DISCOURSE**

During the 1990s, Canadian provincial governments paid a great deal of attention to the organization of municipal government within metropolitan areas. In 1995, for example the Nova Scotia provincial legislature enacted a law that amalgamated all four municipalities in metropolitan Halifax, creating a Halifax Regional Municipality whose territory is almost as large as that of the province of Prince Edward Island. (The picturesque fishing community of Peggy’s
Cove, which received world-wide attention as the community nearest the crash site of Swiss Air Flight 111, is now in the same municipality as downtown Halifax.) Although the merger was supposed to make Halifax more economically competitive (as well as save money), there is no reference to new regionalist literature in the main government document justifying the merger (Nova Scotia, 1993).

In provincial-government circles, the apparent highwater mark for the influence of the new regionalism in Canada arrived in January 1996 when the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Task Force released its report (Ontario, 1996). The task force was appointed in April 1995 at a time when economic growth in Toronto remained stalled, apparently as a result both of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and of the recession of the early 1990s. The belief was that local government in Toronto was inappropriately structured and that the property-tax system required overhauling. Members of the task force, or at least their research staff, seemed thoroughly familiar with the new regionalism. The report paid a great deal of attention to the economy of the city-region as a whole and to the ways in which it was influenced by government policies at all levels.

Peirce’s (Ontario, 1996) definition of a city-region is cited on the first page of the report’s first chapter. The chapter entitled “Governing the City-Region” begins with Peirce’s statement that,

> Without a regional governance structure that has at least the power to resolve differences among municipalities, how can one be certain that plans for economic development are brought on-line and in balance with conservation, quality land use, and the goal of compact, cost-effective growth (p. 159).

The quotation at that point in the report is remarkably incongruous. Here we have a Canadian task-force report—on Toronto of all places—quoting an American about the need for “a regional governance structure.” Would the state of Louisiana appeal to a Canadian music critic if it were investigating the well-being of jazz in New Orleans?

At an earlier point in its report, the task force states that, “The creation of Metro Toronto, North America’s first and most admired system of metropolitan government was a bold and far-sighted move” (Ontario, 1996, p. 31). Perhaps it is testimony to the importance of the new regionalism that the task force appeared to be more influenced by the writing of Peirce than by the original written justifications for Metro’s creation in 1953. Or, perhaps writing that was recent and American was assumed to be more persuasive than writing that was old and local.

Significantly, when the task force actually started to assess various structural options, there was no reference to the American experience, not even in a negative sense. The task force ended up recommending the replacement of the five existing upper-tier authorities (including Metro Toronto) “with a single Greater Toronto regional government with a more limited range of functions” (Ontario, 1996, p. 165). Although the task force received written briefs, it held no public hearings. There was no significant program of public consultation. Not surprisingly, then, the task force did not quote this passage from *citistates* (Peirce, 1993):

> the right kind of citistate governance must be developed in a consultative, “bottoms-up” process involving a wide range of civic players, neighbourhood leaders up to the level of corporate leadership. Mutual trust needs to be built among the parties. It would be an error for a state government to impose a regional government without broad consultation with the local community (p. 320).

Despite the quotations from Peirce and the fairly comprehensive analysis of the economy of the Toronto city-region, the report of the GTA task force ultimately owes less to the new re-
ionalism and more to a long tradition of Canadian provincial-government reports on local government in which distinguished personages receive expert advice, weigh the alternatives, and declare what needs to be done. Like many other such reports, that of the GTA task force was largely ignored, as we shall see in the next section of this article.

As noted earlier, the Manitoba government created a panel in early 1998 to review Winnipeg’s regional problems, notwithstanding the fact that the city of Winnipeg (Unicity) is so dominant within the metropolitan area. In its final report, the panel noted that “we particularly valued the advice of Representative Myron Orfield of the Minnesota Legislature, through his Metropolitan Institute of Minneapolis” (Manitoba, 1999, p. 2). Orfield, of course, is one of the best known of the American new regionalists. His influence is reflected in the panel’s section on “Regional Frameworks Elsewhere.” It begins by describing “regional legislation and organizations in other provinces as examples of possible legislative frameworks that might be considered for Manitoba and its Capital Region” (Manitoba, 1999, p. 61). In fact, the only Canadian institution mentioned in the section is the Greater Toronto Services Board. The following American institutions are each described in two or three paragraphs: the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, the Metro authority for the Portland area, regional agencies in Ohio, the Metropolitan Council for the Twin Cities, and the Metro Denver Network. That policy-makers in Winnipeg would seriously view such institutions as models that apply in their city is bizarre; these models were created to work around problems that result from municipal fragmentation. By American standards, there is no municipal fragmentation in Winnipeg.

What is even stranger, and unforgivable, is that the section contains no references to regional districts in British Columbia (especially the Greater Vancouver Regional District), urban communities in Quebec, or regional service boards in Alberta. In the end, the panel recommended that the government introduce a Regional Associations Act, the effect of which would be to create new institutions quite similar to regional districts in British Columbia.

A similar phenomenon occurred with the Alberta Capital Region (Edmonton) Governance Review, chaired by former provincial cabinet minister, Lou Hyndman. In its first report, dated March 2000, Hyndman recommended the establishment of an Edmonton Capital Regional Council to be made up of elected municipal councilors from the various member municipalities. Here is how he began his answer to the question “What are regional councils?”

Regional councils exist in more than 500 metropolitan areas. In the United States, the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) represents 175 regional councils

- They are created by joint agreement of the local governments they serve, usually in accordance with “enabling” legislation; and
- They are governed by boards of directors that are usually made up of local elected officials appointed by the local governments that created the council . . .

Mr. Curtis Johnson [of the American Citistates Group] noted that areas like ours have not yet experienced the problems that are plaguing many American metropolitan regions. However, he cautioned that we are not managing our future to avoid these problems (Alberta, 2000a, pp. 13–14).

The point Hyndman was trying to make was that his proposed regional council had nothing to do with Ontario-style regional government, and that American experts (on the new regionalism) are advocates of his proposed solution. Once again, there is no mention in the report of regional districts in British Columbia, notwithstanding the fact that one of his Canadian-based
academic advisors was Robert Bish of the University of Victoria, an expert on, and proponent of, the British Columbia system of local government.

One of Hyndman’s major problems is that the city of Edmonton, while only one of 22 municipalities in the region he was asked to study, includes 71.4% of the population (Alberta, 2000a, p. 19). The city’s preferred solution, as it has been for many years, was amalgamation. When it became clear that Hyndman would not support a “megacity” solution or a regional institution that Edmonton could control, the city’s response was to refuse further cooperation with the Hyndman review. In August 2000, Hyndman responded by withdrawing his proposal for the regional council. He stated that there had been too much opposition to a plan that was perceived as establishing a second level of municipal government. Instead, he was going “to focus on the integration and coordination of services in the region to ensure efficiencies and cost savings for citizens” (Alberta, 2000b, p. 1). In his final report in December 2000, Hyndman went further than any other Canadian official document in recommending a new regionalist approach:

Of the many option available, partnerships are the best option for this region. Partnerships involve networking, negotiation and mutual investment for mutual gain. The old style, centralized approach with command and control from the top is not the way to govern our region (Alberta, 2000c, p. 11)

A greater contrast with the approach taken since 1995 in Ontario can hardly be imagined.

Following its decision to create the Toronto megacity (which took effect in 1998), the Ontario government appointed special advisors for three other metropolitan areas with troubled systems of two-tier metropolitan government: Ottawa, Hamilton, and Sudbury (Sancton, 2000). Not one of their reports demonstrated any awareness whatsoever of the new regionalism. One of them advanced the claim that a proposed suburban municipality having a mixed residential, commercial, and industrial tax base and a population of 65,000 would not have “enough economic strength to survive,” given the harsh forces of global competition (Ontario, 1999, p. 37). All of the advisors recommended complete amalgamation and that is what the government implemented, effective January 1, 2001. This is the old regionalism in its most extreme form. Late in 2000 the Quebec government followed suit by sponsoring legislation that amalgamated municipalities around Quebec City, Hull (across the Ottawa river from Ottawa), and in metropolitan Montreal (Quebec, 2000).

WHAT NEW REGIONALISTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TORONTO, MONTREAL, AND VANCOUVER

Canada’s three largest city-regions are Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Each now has its own institution for regional governance that covers the entire census metropolitan area. Vancouver’s is the oldest and Montreal’s is the newest. Each will be described, in the order in which they were established.

The origins of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) can be traced back to 1926 when the legislature of British Columbia established the Greater Vancouver Water District (GVWD). In 1967 the legislature created regional districts throughout the province. The one for Vancouver, originally known as the Regional District of Fraser-Burrard, comprised four separate legal entities that still exist today: the GVWD, the Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District, the Greater Vancouver Housing Corporation, and the GVRD itself. They share a common administrative staff and boards of directors with almost identical memberships.

In 1999 the common regional services provided by the GVRD included: liquid waste collection and treatment, water supply and distribution, regional parks, social housing, air-
quality management, solid waste management, transportation planning, strategic planning, emergency telephone systems, and employer labor relations (collective bargaining) for all constituent municipalities. Through the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, it also has indirect responsibility for intermunicipal transportation, including roads, buses, and rail transit (Meligrana, 1999). Except for social housing, it has no jurisdiction over the more difficult lifestyle and redistributive issues for which regional governments in Ontario (under tight provincial supervision) have been responsible for many years.

The GVRD comprises 21 municipalities. There are 35 members of its board of directors, who cast 112 weighted votes depending on the number of people each member represents. Not surprisingly, the most difficult political issues facing the board have related to regional planning. Provincial laws about the role of the regional districts have changed significantly over the years. Since 1995, regional districts have been encouraged by the province to approve regional growth strategies. Consultation with constituent municipalities and other affected parties is mandatory. Prior to formal adoption, all municipalities must agree but, in cases where some or all do not agree, the issues in dispute are sent to binding arbitration. If a regional district does not act at all with respect to a regional growth strategy, then the provincial government has the right to require that one be adopted. The GVRD adopted its regional growth strategy in 1996 (Bish & Clemens, 1999).

The Vancouver (or British Columbia) model deserves more attention than it has received, even in Canada. For example, the GTA Task Force in 1996 described the GVRD as a “consensual model,” a category that also included a non-statutory committee of Toronto-area mayors. The task force failed to note that the GVRD actually provides many important services. In a footnote, the task force acknowledged that “the British Columbia planning system has recently been amended to require conformity between regional and local plans” but the main text rejects the GVRD as a model to emulate in Toronto because “the voluntary consensual approach embodied in the GVRD structure would be a major departure from Ontario’s planning system” (Ontario, 1996, p. 163).

Ironically, the new regional authority that came into existence for Toronto in 1999—the Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB)—is functionally weaker than the GVRD. The GTSB is not well known, in part because so much attention has been paid to the prior decision by the provincial government to amalgamate the six constituent municipalities of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto into one “megacity.” It is significant that the current Ontario government has been quick to impose structural change within Metro, where its political support was relatively weak, while it has been much more cautious with respect to Toronto’s suburbs beyond the old Metro boundaries. These outer suburbs have formed the territorial core of the government’s political support.

The GTSB comprises the amalgamated city of Toronto and 24 other municipalities contained within four regional governments. (Ontario’s regional governments are similar to American counties except none of them contain unincorporated areas.) Although the provincial government has maintained that the GTSB is not another level of government, it is in fact a form of supra-regional authority that has been imposed on top of the four existing two-tier systems. Its board is made up of 40 members, most of whom are mayors. The mayor and 10 councilors represent the new city of Toronto. A system of weighted votes accommodates the fact that some mayors represent many more people than others. The GTSB has jurisdiction over Toronto’s commuter rail system. For this purpose, it also includes the city of Hamilton, at the western tip of Lake Ontario. For the GTSB to adopt by-laws establishing GTA planning and infrastructure strategies, a two-thirds majority of weighted votes is required. So far no such strategies have been adopted.

Prior to the mid-1990s, the provincial government itself was directly involved in planning for the Toronto city-region (Frisken, 1998). This role is now largely abandoned, and the GTSB
has been incapable of filling the vacuum. In September 2001, the Ontario government announced that it would take over direct responsibility for the commuter rail system and that the GTSB would be phased out. It is to be replaced by a Smart Growth Management Council for Central Ontario, the boundaries and functions of which are still to be determined.

By American standards, the GTSB ranks as a significant institutional innovation. But urban development in Greater Toronto now proceeds in ways that are more similar to those found in most American cities than to past practices in Toronto. Perhaps the main difference is that, in Toronto, there is a complete absence of ongoing federal programs for infrastructure planning and financing. Some members of the city’s economic and social elites have become publicly concerned about Greater Toronto’s apparent drift towards chaotic expansion and the lack of funds for new urban infrastructure. Their efforts will briefly be discussed in the concluding portion of this essay.

Legislation creating a Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC) was approved by Quebec’s National Assembly (provincial legislature) in mid-2000. This ended a tortuous debate that began in 1992 (long before the creation of the GTA Task Force in Toronto) when the provincial government established its Task Force on Greater Montreal (Quebec, 1993). In 1997, the government finally responded to its recommendations by appointing a minister with special responsibility for Greater Montreal and proposing legislation to create a 40-member Commission of Development for the Metropolis (CDM) to be presided over by the minister. Of the remaining 39 members, two-thirds were to be elected politicians from the constituent municipalities and one-third was to be appointed by the minister to represent various socio-economic groups and institutions. This effort formally to integrate non-municipal concerns into a metropolitan governmental structure met with very little support. The legislation creating the CDM was never implemented.

In 2000, the government tried again, this time without the socio-economic representatives. The Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC), which began operations in 2001, is made up of 28 elected municipal officials, presided over ex officio, by the mayor of Montreal. As of January 1, 2002, there will be 13 other representatives from the newly amalgamated city of Montreal, the population of which comprises just over half the total MMC population of 3.4 million. The MMC will have jurisdiction over metropolitan planning and economic development, artistic and cultural development, social housing, planning for public transit and solid-waste disposal, the mitigation of air and water pollution, and various metropolitan facilities (Chenard, 2001). Opposition to membership in the MMC was intense in the outer suburbs because of a fear of higher taxes. But ultimately, the government prevailed, as it usually does in parliamentary systems.

It should be clear from these descriptions that there is no shortage of metropolitan governmental institutions in Canada’s three largest city-regions. In each case the relevant provincial government has been careful to proclaim that these are not distinct levels of government. Provincial officials in British Columbia have always made such claims about their regional districts, justifying their position on the grounds that, for most regional-district activities, constituent municipalities remain free to opt out if they so desire. Because they are so new, the status of regional bodies in Toronto and Montreal is even less clear. It would appear, however, that the MMC will be a stronger institution than any new regional body to be established in Toronto.

CONCLUSION

The GVRD and the GTSB were created with relatively little public controversy, largely because, initially at least, they were each seen as being generally unimportant. The GVRD has successfully raised its profile, mainly as a result of some highly participative processes
involving the adoption of its regional plans and growth strategies. The GTSB is virtually
unknown by residents of Toronto, in part because people’s attention has been occupied by
debates about municipal amalgamation. Despite the opposition to the creation of the MMC in
the outer suburbs of Montreal, it too is relatively unknown. Throughout 2001, media attention
in Montreal has been focused on forced municipal amalgamations rather than on the potential
activities of the MMC.

In none of these three Canadian cities has there been anything like the intense private-
sector involvement in regional issues that has been either described or prescribed by Ameri-
can new regionalists. In Canada, regional issues remain the preserve of the developers, the
land-use planners, and a small band of academics from various disciplines who are concerned
with urban governance. Regional issues have, however, caught the attention of provincial gov-
ernments. They have responded either by implementing old regionalist solutions (one munici-
pality for one city-region as in Halifax, Hamilton, Ottawa, and Hull) or by creating the kind
of institutions (GTSB and MMC) that new regionalists in the US have to fight for over in-
tense local opposition.

This raises an interesting question, one that would never arise in the US: Is it possible for
new regionalist institutional prescriptions to be successfully imposed by a central-government
(provincial or state) legislature without the mobilization of strong local support? Could it be
that it is the local battle for new regional institutions that itself forges the degree of regional
consciousness that is necessary for new regionalist solutions to have any prospect of work-
ing? Perhaps the greatest obstacle to the success of the GTSB was not that it has so little for-
mal authority but that it was created without large numbers of activists having to spend a few
years convincing their fellow citizens of the importance of region-wide government action to
solve region-wide problems.

As suggested earlier, another obstacle facing both the GTSB and the MMC has been that
local politicians holding office within their constituent municipalities have been looking at al-
most all metropolitan issues through the lenses of municipal restructuring. Interestingly, such
centrally imposed restructuring has never been the policy of any provincial government in Brit-
ish Columbia. Could it be that the GVRD appears to work in part because each municipality
is at least assured of its continued existence? If this is the case, then the GVRD works be-
cause it operates in a political environment that is more like that of the United States than it is
like most other Canadian provinces.

Socio-economic elites in Canada have traditionally expected their provincial and municipal
governments to look after the well-being of their cities. To the extent that municipalities do
not perform as required, they expect the provincial government to intervene, either by doing
the job themselves or by forcing the municipalities to behave differently, sometimes by creat-
ing new and powerful regional institutions. In Toronto at least, this faith in the provincial gov-
ernment has, at a minimum, been called into question. One of the interesting results has been
the creation of an informal group, led by a public-spirited financier, that comprises a wide
range of community leaders, including Jane Jacobs, three former mayors of various political
persuasions from the old city of Toronto, and a few prominent businesspeople. The group has
adopted a Toronto Charter whose first article states that the Toronto Region should form an
order of government that is a full partner of the federal and provincial governments of Can-
da (Rowe, 2000). Is this the truly Canadian variant of the new regionalism? Can Canadians
only conceptualize the governance of large city-regions by injecting it into the quintessen-
tially Canadian debate about the relative status of federal and provincial governments?

Institutions for regional decision-making are relatively easy to establish in Canada and much
more difficult to establish in the United States. In the US, the creation of such an institution
generally requires the mobilization of considerable support from the most powerful economic
forces in a city-region. Such support is crucial if sufficient votes are to be mobilized within a
state legislature and/or municipal councils in which party labels, if they exist, mean little or
nothing. In Canada, such economic forces are easily by-passed as disciplined partisan major-
ities in provincial legislatures casually tamper with various kinds of municipal institutions.
Policy-makers in both countries have much to learn from each other. For Americans, how-
ever, the structural machinations that dominate provincial-municipal politics in Toronto and
Montreal will likely seem exotic, if not irrelevant. For Canadians, the difficulties involved in
mobilizing support for regional policies in metropolitan areas having hundreds of highly in-
dependent municipalities (many with their own police forces) will seem quite insurmountable.
If both sides look to patterns of regional governance in Greater Vancouver, they will likely
find institutions and practices that are recognizable, practical, and worthy of emulation. Iron-
ically, the GVRD has been criticized by old regionalists in Canada for being too weak, yet its
creation in 1967 pre-dates new regionalism in the United States. The fact that the GVRD rests
somewhere between the old and the new regionalism is just one of many reasons why it mer-
its more attention from both Americans and Canadians who are concerned with the effective
governance of our city-regions.

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