

Toward a Process Model of Local Government Restructuring: Evidence From Canada

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Issues and trends in local government reorganisation tend to be portrayed in relation to one specific city-region. For instance, the use of case study analysis is prominent in the local government literature both in Canada and the United States. Canadian examples include Toronto (Bourne 1999; Isin and Wolfson 1998), Halifax (Millward 1996), Winnipeg (Norton 1994), and Vancouver (Hutton 1998). American examples include Portland (Abbott 1997) or various cases reported in Savitch and Vogel (1996). Other studies have concentrated on a particular kind of local government reorganisation, such as annexation (Hasson and Razin 1990; Liner 1990; Meligrana 1998; Razin and Lindsey 2001; Rusk 1995; Skaburskis 1992), amalgamation (Sancton 2000) or regional/metropolitan governments (Barlow 1991; Savitch and Vogel 1996). Another set of literature has dealt with different aspects of urban governance, local government reform and restructuring (Brans 1992; Hamilton 2000; Kearns and Paddison 2000; Sancton 1994; Savitch and Vogel 1996).

Yet this growing collection of work on specific aspects of local government reorganisation lacks in an important area. The literature provides no information about developing a comprehensive model of the temporal and spatial changes of reform initiatives undertaken by city-regions, particular after World War II. This article suggests that city-regions proceed through distinct stages of reform. A descriptive process model is developed, which traces the progress of local and regional government reorganisation for a hypothetical city-region. Evidence, primarily from Canada, is used to identify how the local government system progresses through five distinct, yet inter-related, stages of restructuring: i)

incorporation, ii) annexation, iii) amalgamation, iv) upper tier regional government or unicity incorporation, and v) growth management regulations/legislation. This paper describes each of these stages and the various factors that may shift a local government system into the next stage of reform.

Model of Interlocking Paths of Local Government Reorganisation

The model is developed from two sources: the literature on local government restructuring and reform (summarised in Table 1), and direct evidence from historic events in Canadian and American city-regions. The former is emphasised in this paper. The forms of local government reorganisation are arranged in a process model illustrating both the temporal and spatial nature of local government reorganisation (Figure 1). The events of local government reform are illustrated as boxes, while the arrows indicate the likely path from one type of reform to another. Each stage of local government reform conditions the progress to the next stage, as does the interplay between provincial and local government actors and stakeholders. Thus, local or provincial governments initiate reform paths based on inadequacies determined at the current stage of local government reform.

In this section, first the general spatial and temporal context of local government reform is discussed. Next, the paths of local government reorganisation are presented by referring to local and provincial initiators of reform. Finally, a brief overview of the different types of local government reorganisations is provided.

Spatial and Temporal Context of Local Government Reorganisation

Some scholars have developed the theoretical perspective that recognises local government reorganisation as a public response to urbanisation, particularly fringe developments, and patterns of regional economic growth (Brans 1992; Foster 1993; Sharpe 1988). Such peri-urban development exposes flaws in the existing structure of municipal units of government. These government structures cannot effectively provide urban services to extra municipal settlements. Sharpe (1988) presents a socio-geographic objective to local government reorganisation. This socio-geographic factor is an attempt to cope with both urbanisation and suburbanisation through municipal reorganisation, e.g., boundary adjustments, to establish a political space matching the 'real' urban space.

What emerges from a discussion of the socio-geographic factor is the question of where to draw the political and legal division between city and countryside and focusses attention on the relationship between urbanisation and

local government reform. This relationship provides an important spatial component to any theoretical development of local government reform. Overall, there exists a spatial organisation to the local government system, which is not easily altered radically or basically.



FIGURE 1 A Process Model of Local Government Reorganisation

TABLE 1 Partial List of Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Local Government Restructuring

Topic ¹	Issues	Literature ²
Municipal Annexation	history, legislative procedures, politics, statistical trends	Abrahamson and Hardt (1990), Fleischmann (1986), Liner (1990, 1996), Meligrana (1998, 2000), Rusk (1995), Skaburskis (1992), Teaford (1979)
Local Government Amalgamation	delivery of municipal services, economies of scale, efficiency, political autonomy	Keating (1995), Lightbody (1998), Sancton (1996, 2000), Teaford (1979)
Regional Governments	bioregionalism, city-regions, city-states, metropolitan governments	Abbott (1997), Barlow (1991), Hutton (1998), Savitch and Vogel (1996), Seeling and Artibise (1991), Stephens and Wikstrom (2000)
Growth Management/ Urban Governance	economic development, economic restructuring, legislation, policies and programs, public-private partnerships	Brower et al (1991), Harding, Wilks-Heeg, Hutchins (2000), Hobson and St.-Hilaire (1997), Kearns and Paddison (2000), Meligrana (2000), Nelson and Moore (1996), Kelly (1993), Smith (1996)

Notes: 1. Topics correspond to Stages 2 through 5, inclusive, as found in Figure 1. Topics are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

2. Contemporary and North American literature are emphasised. Not an exhaustive list of published research.

A temporal dimension to the reorganisation of local governments also exists. Brand (1976) suggests that local government reform involves a cyclical process, where perceptions of the territorial status quo oscillate from one of adequacy to inadequacy. Evenden (1985), however, tries to combine both temporal and spatial dimensions. His model of local government reform identifies certain geographic concepts, such as the city-centred region, dominating the reform discourse. At the same time, voices for reform (i.e., developers, politicians) are heard during periods of rapid urban development. Overall, change occurs periodically from specific questions concerning the inadequate spatial or functional design of the local government system.

Paths of Local Government Reorganisation

Reform solutions during such periods of inadequacy can, in the Canadian context, be divided between “top-down” or “bottom-up” origins where the province plays either a leading or reactionary role. ‘Leading’ occurs in the sense that the province initiates various kinds of local government reform, such as incorporating new municipal governments, altering their boundaries (i.e., annexations), amalgamating two or more municipal governments, creating upper tier regional governments or passing growth management legislation. ‘Reactionary’ occurs in the sense that the province merely establishes the rules and regulations for possible types of reform, but the process is triggered by local stakeholders, such as local government officials, rate payers or developers. Thus, within this process model of local government reorganisation, the spatial patterns and temporal sequence of reform can shift between provincial and local stakeholders to change the status quo of municipal territory and/or function.

However, research on local government reform (Table 1) tends to portray different reform options, discussed below, as distinct choices. These choices ignore the importance of the implications different types of reorganisation will have on other types of reforms and solutions to governing a city-region. The proposed model of local government reorganisation illustrates that the movement from one form of local government reorganisation to another may proceed in a linear fashion, but also contains important feedbacks at each stage (Figure 1). Stages 2 and 3, i.e., annexation and amalgamation, show the traditional forms of local government reorganisation. Stages 4 and 5 show more complex innovations to the local government system. The latter involves the creation of unicities or metropolitan governments and more explicit provincial legislation to deal with growth management. Each stage influences the other. The inadequacy of the local government system in addressing changing regional space

economies and patterns of settlement triggers movements between stages. Local stakeholders or the provincial government interpret these changes, while the rules and procedures for reform in provincial policies and laws condition them.

Forms of Local Government Reorganisation

Within a hypothetical city-region, the organisation and reform of local government is conceptualised as five distinct, yet interlocking stages. Each type of reform has received much attention in the literature. A brief overview of the scholarly treatment of various types of local government reorganisation is presented below (Table 1).

The incorporation of local governments has not been closely studied in the academic literature. Most studies tend to provide an historic overview of local governments by province, with little attention given to defining and analysing how different kinds of municipal classifications develop (Tindal and Tindal 1990). This is curious, given the varying types of legal categories of local governments, and their potential to influence local government reform options (Magnusson 1985). Thus, Stage 1 of the model reveals how these classifications of municipal government represent important conditions on how a city-region progresses through various types of political reorganisation.

Research on municipal annexation has focussed on a variety of topics:

- ▶ the politics of boundary disputes (Fleischmann 1986; Meligrana 2000a);
- ▶ annexation laws and procedures (Liner 1990; Higgins 1986);
- ▶ statistical trends in the amount and number of annexations (Abrahamson and Hardt 1990; Foster 1993; Meligrana 1998; Rusk 1995);
- ▶ annexation as a form of local government reorganisation and growth management tool, particularly at the rural-urban fringe (Easely 1992; Meligrana 1998; Razin and Hasson 1994); and
- ▶ the relationship between senior and local levels of government in restructuring municipal boundaries (Hasson and Razin 1990; O'Brien 1993, 1995; Skaburskis 1992; Terhorst and van De Ven 1990).

Government agencies, such as census bureaus, have also closely studied and monitored annexations. They do so to keep proper track of demographic and other trends within correct legal boundaries (Meligrana 1998; Singh 1982; Statistics Canada 1995).

Amalgamation research has usually concentrated on the relationship between amalgamation and improving delivery of municipal services through gains in efficiency and economies of scale (Keating 1995; Lightbody 1998). Others have examined the history of amalgamations (Sancton 2000; Teaford 1979). Regional governments have been examined in several ways: more formal application of an upper tier municipal government (Barlow 1991; Savitch and Vogel 1996),

ecological concerns regarding matching local governance with bio-regional boundaries (Seeling and Artibise 1991), and understanding the relationship of city-regions to the ever changing global economy (Hutton 1998).

More recent research has examined the rise of provincial (Meligrana 2000b) or US state (Kelly 1993; Nelson and Moore 1996) legislative initiatives in establishing more comprehensive rules and regulations to manage growth better. This research is complemented by growing interest in new methods of urban governance. These methods include public-private partnerships and the economic development of city-regions (Kearns and Paddison 2000).

Stage 1: Incorporation

This process model begins from the position that a municipality starts as an incorporated area having particular legal and political powers to provide services and planning to areas within its boundaries. The municipality is surrounded by unincorporated territory (Figure 1, Stage 1). Incorporation usually occurs in response to changes in settlement density and the form and intensity of economic development. Legal definitions of the municipal classes for each province are outlined in Table 2.

Provincial Definitions of Municipal Incorporations

The demographic and density criteria that an area needs to incorporate as a municipal government are summarised in Table 2. In this table, the emphasis is placed on the standard classifications of lower-tiered municipal governments (e.g., city, town, village, etc.) incorporated by general municipal acts. It does not deal with regional forms of government and the numerous single or special purpose municipal governments (e.g., improvement districts) that may exist. This table reveals several areas of convergence and divergence, with respect to the building blocks of provincial local government systems.

A strict legal division of urban and rural space, where cities and towns govern urban areas, and rural governments govern rural areas, defines most provincial local government systems. Most provinces recognise urban municipalities (cities, towns and villages) as well as rural forms of government, e.g. districts (Alberta and British Columbia), townships (Ontario) and communities (Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland/Labrador). In reality, however, settlements that are neither rural nor urban come up against a neat and simple legal definition. Therefore, the political boundary's clarity, with its sharp distinction between urban and rural forms of governance, may impede resolving problems that occur when urban development "invades" non-municipal territory.

Furthermore, beyond demographics and density, provincial legislation

provides no other criteria to define urban and rural areas. No legal guidelines exist for actually drawing the incorporating boundaries of a municipal government, except that boundaries must be coterminous. Therefore, given the lack of foresight or planning of municipal boundaries, this situation might set the stage for reform.

What defines urban and rural, in a legal sense, differs between provinces. This appears in the varying population thresholds and densities needed for a

TABLE 2. Municipal Government Classifications Defined by Population and/or Density Criteria as per Provincial Statute

Prov	City	Town	Village	Hamlet	Other
BC	5,000+ persons	2,500 to 5,000	less than 2,500	none specified	District
AL	10,000+ persons lot sizes less than 1850m	1,000+ persons lot sizes less than 1850m	300+ persons lot sizes less than 1850m	unincorporated; 5+ dwellings parcels less than 1850m boundaries	Municipal District Summer Village occupancy
SK	5,000+ persons	500+ persons	100+ persons, 50+ dwellings-businesses	well defined unincorporated; 5+ dwellings, 10 subdivided lots average size less than one acre	Specialized Municipalities: opinion of Minister Rural municipality : 1000+ persons and residential : 75 separate dwellings; 6 months
MA	(10,000+ persons)	1000+ persons and > 400 per km	Urban Municipality (1,500+ persons, municipal assessment > \$6,000,000)	none specified	Rural Municipality Community northern areas resort municipality
ON	15,000+ persons if previously a village or town; 25,000+ if previously a township	2,000+ persons	500+ persons	none specified	: < 1000 and < 400 per km Township
QU	2,000+ persons	2,000+ persons	none specified	none specified	: Minister : 1,000 persons
NB	none specified (10,000+ persons)	none spec. (1,000+ persons)	none specified	none specified	Rural Community municipalities
NS	none specified	none specified	none specified	none specified	none specified
PE	none specified	subject to recommendations	none specified	none specified	Community Resort Municipality
NF	none specified	subject to recommendations	none specified	none specified	Community Resort Municipality

Notes:

: subject to recommendation

: tourism /seasonal residents

settlement to incorporate as a city, town, village or some form of rural municipality. Most provinces have adopted a hierarchical classification of urban and rural municipal governments based, in part, on population and density. In lieu of population gains, different municipal classes have received increased borrowing powers, wider planning authority and greater “autonomy” from the province. In other words, the greater the population, the higher the municipal class and the greater the legal powers and responsibilities afforded to an incorporated place. Yet, no uniform definition of the population or density required by different municipal classifications occurs among the provinces.

Legislation to form new municipalities in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland-Labrador stipulates no specific demographic criteria, which is perhaps understandable given this region’s stagnant postwar population and economic trends compared to other provinces. British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan have no density requirements for the formation of urban municipalities; Manitoba requires over 400 persons per square kilometre, and in Alberta, lot sizes must be less than 1850 square metres to incorporate as a city, town or village. A district municipality in British Columbia must have more than five persons per hectare. For the incorporation of a district municipality, only British Columbia requires that the boundaries contain a minimum area, i. e., 800 hectares. This raises an interesting question: what areal unit should be used to calculate population density in those provinces that have already established a specific density criterion to form a new municipality?

Furthermore, given the differing demographic criteria for the incorporation of municipal governments, what impact does this have on the structure of the local government system and the ability to reorganise it? For example, British Columbia has the highest population threshold needed to incorporate as a town or village compared to other provinces, while Manitoba has a comparatively low cut-off of only 1,000 persons to form an urban municipality. Have these differing definitions led to provincial variations in the frequency of incorporated places? Therefore, do they have an impact on the occurrence of reform options, such as amalgamation and regional governments?

Most municipal governments are incorporated by local petition. But in some cases, such as ‘instant towns’ in British Columbia and Alberta, the provinces took a more active role in establishing municipal governments. However, when it concerns changing municipal classification, it is unclear whether provincial legislation forces an incorporated place to (re)incorporate as a higher or lower municipal class because the municipality either gains or loses population, respectively.

Year of Municipal Incorporations

Thus, Stage 1 of the incorporation of municipal territory into largely urban or rural units of government represents the starting position from which later

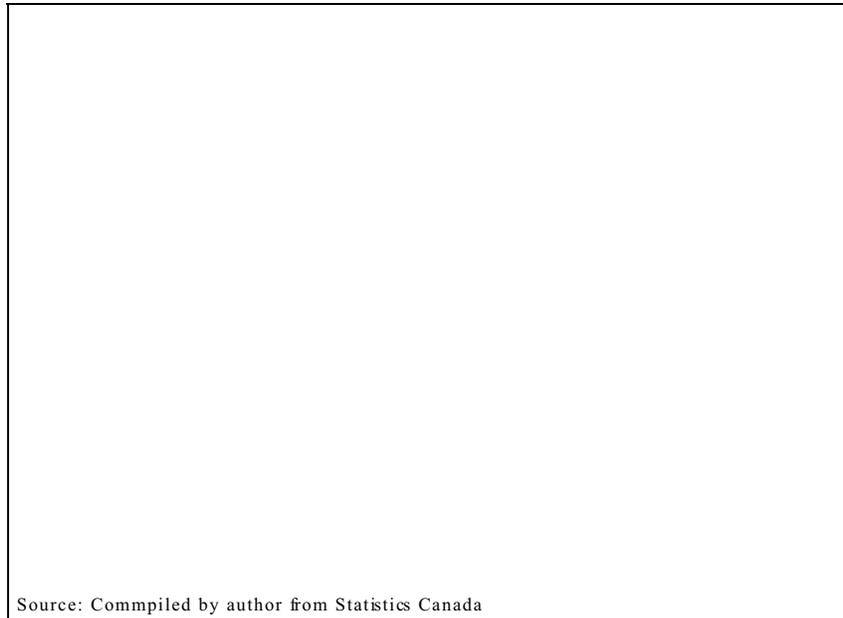


FIGURE 2 Frequency Distribution of Urban Municipalities by Year of Incorporation, Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta

reforms are considered and enacted. This starting point, however, varies by province. This suggests one reason why local governments in one province might deal with annexation problems, while the local governments in another province might deal more with questions of amalgamation or regional reform. The frequency distribution of municipalities by year of incorporation for the three most economically prosperous and urban provinces, i.e., Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, is provided in Figure 2.

Obviously, the age distribution of incorporated places reflects the east to west development of the nation. Ontario, with over 60 % of its urban municipalities incorporated during the 19th century, has the most mature local government system. Both Alberta and British Columbia have a bimodal distribution in the years their urban municipalities incorporated. British Columbia's local governments were incorporated mainly during two distinct periods: one, as with Ontario, occurred in the pre-1900s, the result of coastal development and mining (gold rush), and the other, during the 1950s and 1960s, when the interior of the province began to develop and the provincial enactment of "instant towns" legislation began. Almost 50 % of Alberta's urban municipalities were incorporated during the first two decades of the 20th century, peaking during the land and immigration boom that occurred across the Prairies between 1912 and 1920. The other peak in new incorporations, some as "instant towns," took place during the 1950s in response to the urbanisation of the

province and the development of the petroleum industry.

Since the 1970s, new incorporations born out of rural or unincorporated communities are rare for all provinces. Most new incorporations are the result of the amalgamation of two or more existing municipalities. Thus, two questions are raised by Figure 2. What influence does the age of municipal governments have on the process of reorganizing local governments? Do older municipalities in Ontario have more outdated boundaries than the relatively younger municipalities in Alberta?

Stage 2: Annexation

Once incorporated, the municipality may find cause to expand its limits (see Stage 2 in Figure 1). Thus, the initial change to the local government system is usually achieved by altering the municipal government's areal jurisdiction. Evidence from Canada and the United States, particularly the northeastern US cities, shows that annexation was a popular reform option during the immediate postwar years (Abrahamson and Hardt 1990; Meligrana 1998). In recent years, however, the wide-spread use of annexation as a reform option has diminished greatly. Ontario, in comparison to Alberta and British Columbia, quickly moved out of Stage 2 (annexation) as the frequency of annexing municipalities peaked during the 1950s and declined substantially in later years. The local government system in Alberta and British Columbia, however, continued to rely on annexation as municipalities frequently expanded their boundaries during every decade until the 1980s (Meligrana 1998). It could be further argued that the local governments in these provinces continue to have chronic boundary problems and thus are 'stuck' in Stage 2 (Figures 3 and 4).

Types of Annexation

But in all this research and discussion of boundary extensions by municipal governments, it is hard to find a coherent definition of annexation (Table 3). The literature usually defines annexation in a rather generic and simplistic manner. For example, Barlow defines annexation as a "... legal process by which a municipality acquires surrounding territory, thereby increasing its size and extending its jurisdiction" (Barlow 1981: 16). Abrams offers a similar definition stating that annexation is "...the process by which a municipality or other governing authority absorbs surrounding land and brings it under its jurisdiction." (Abrams 1971: 7). The simplicity of such a definition lends itself to the statistical analysis of annexation trends (Abrahamson and Hardt 1990; Meligrana 1998). However, defined this way, the term "annexation" has a rather dull analytical edge. Annexation, seen simply as an expansion of municipal boundaries, masks the legal, political and economic determinants of boundary

change that become apparent when the definition is refined to include the legal status of annexed lands, and the motivation behind municipal enlargements.

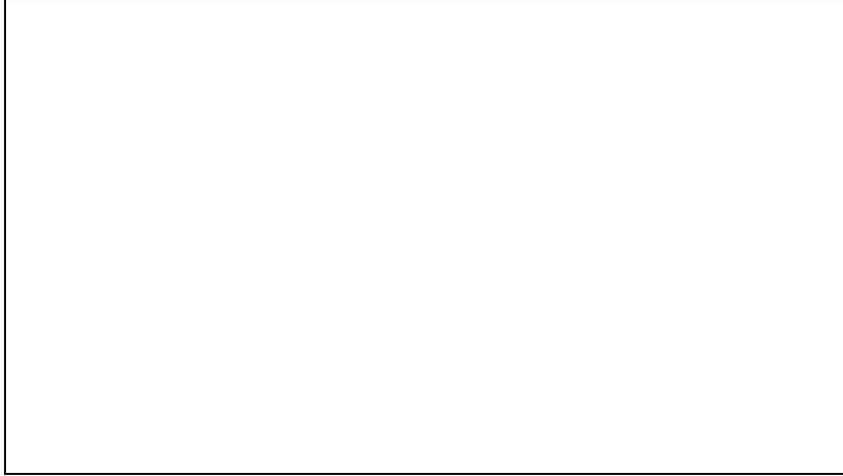


FIGURE 3 Urban Municipalities and Unincorporated Areas: Regional District of Nanaimo

For example, Fleischmann's (1986) definition of annexation considers only the acquisition of unincorporated land by a municipality (Table 3). Specifically, he defines annexation as ". . . the expansion of municipal boundaries to include adjacent *unincorporated* territory" (Fleischmann 1986: 128. Emphasis added). This definition is too limited, because it fails to address adding territory to a municipality from another incorporated place.

Annexation has also been used to apply to the addition of whole incorporated territories within the boundaries of a municipality. This is sometimes referred to as "municipal amalgamation" or "consolidation", with the latter defined by Abrams as "the absorption of one municipality by another or the merging of two or more municipalities . . . to create a single new government unity; a technique for enlarging local units to a size conducive to efficient administration" (Abrams 1971). However, within this definition a blurring occurs in the distinction between annexation and amalgamation, the



FIGURE 4 Edmonton's Annexation History, 1950 to 1981

latter shows not only an enlargement of municipal area, but also a joining of

municipal units. In general, three distinct types of annexations can occur during Stage 2 in the model of local government reorganisation of a city-region.

Annexation of unincorporated land

Annexation occurs at the expense of rural areas not yet politically organised (Table 3). For example, fringe development beyond the boundaries of municipalities in British Columbia and New Brunswick occurred within unincorporated areas (Forbes and Forrest 1997; Meligrana 2000). As discussed above, this type of urbanisation blurs the legal division of urban and rural spaces found in most legislation governing municipal incorporation. It also presents planning challenges, and raises questions of equity and efficiency in distributing the costs and benefits of municipal services to developments beyond municipal boundaries.

Annexation of a portion of another incorporated place

Annexation can also refer to the transfer of territory from one incorporated area to another (Table 3). Usually this reallocation of territory occurs between municipalities with different legal classifications, i.e., an urban municipality (city, town or village) obtaining land from a rural municipality (township or county). This results in one municipality gaining territory without reducing the total number of municipalities in the local government system. It also involves two separate political organisations with differing political power and resources. The political inequity makes this type of annexation, at times, a difficult and politically charged dispute.

TABLE 3 Forms of Local Government Reorganization: Incorporation, Annexation, Amalgamation, and Restructuring

Form of Local Government Reorganization	Description/Explanation	Result
Stage 1 Incorporation	→ creation of a new municipality	→ establishment of municipal boundary → increase in municipal units
Stage 2 Annexation of unincorporated areas	→ incorporation of unincorporated areas	→ number of municipal units stays the same → boundary increase in length
Stage 2 Annexation of a portion of other incorporated areas	→ annexation of a portion of other incorporated areas	→ number of municipal units stays the same → boundaries of annexing municipality usually lengthen → boundaries of municipality losing territory usually shorten
Stage 2 or 3 Annexation of an entire incorporated area.	→ incorporation of an entire incorporated area	→ increase in municipal units → boundary increase in length
Stage 3 Amalgamation	→ two or more municipalities merge	→ increase in municipal units → boundary increase in length

Annexation of an entire incorporated place

Another type of annexation, included under Stage 2 (Figure 1) is reflected in the municipal history of many of Canada's large cities that absorbed smaller incorporated places (Table 3). For example, in the late 1920s, Vancouver absorbed the Village of Point Grey and, in 1963, the Town of Beverly merged with the City of Edmonton. In all these cases, the absorbing municipality was usually much larger and of a 'superior' municipal class. This is sometimes referred to as an annexation, although it is closely related to the next stage of reform, amalgamation. The legal distinction between annexation and amalgamation, however, is clear. Annexation refers to the enlargement of the area of an incorporated place. Amalgamation is the creation of a new municipality when two or more municipalities join, resulting in a net reduction in the number of municipalities (Sancton 1994, 1996, 2000). Nevertheless, this type of annexation does not create a new municipality through the merger of two or more municipalities, as much as it dissolves the municipality through its absorption into the territory of an existing municipality. The result is the reduction in the number of municipalities. Yet, this type of annexation does not affect the absorbing municipalities as fundamentally as an amalgamation of similar classes of municipal units (see below).

Annexation and Local Government Reorganisation

Annexation has a number of important impacts on other types of reforms within a city-region. First, annexation can influence the number of incorporated places. A substantial annexation may prevent the incorporation of adjoining communities that might have wanted to form their own local government, but now find themselves part of an existing municipality. Alternatively, a settlement adjacent to a municipality may incorporate in an effort to avoid annexation. This was the strategy of Westminster Township, which incorporated as a town in 1988 in an attempt to avoid annexation by the City of London.

Second, a substantial enlargement of a municipality may enhance the relative regional power of the annexing municipality. This enlargement may allow the municipality to further influence regional policy making. A substantial annexation, therefore, can also hamper the development of a regional government. As an example, one can point to Calgary's achievement of unicity through annexation, a process and outcome that effectively prevents more formal metropolitan government from taking shape.

Third, several annexations in a given region may reflect a need for a regional coordinating body. For example, subjurisdictions within Waterloo County in Ontario experienced numerous annexations during the 1950s and 1960s before the formation of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo in the early 1970s. Where a regional government already exists, a large number of

annexations may lead the regional government to develop general policies on annexation. This occurred with the Edmonton Regional Planning Commission (Masson 1981).

Fourth, the initiators of annexation as a reform option are usually local stakeholders, either property owners or municipal governments. However, provincial legislation governing annexation generally contains few, if any, specific guidelines regarding the amount, type or planning purposes for annexing lands to municipal governments. Instead, most provinces have concentrated on establishing procedures that provide for methods of public accountability. These include petitions by property owners or municipal governments for annexation, and their determination, either by a binding public vote, as occurred in British Columbia (Meligrana 2000), or through an independent tribunal, as occurred in Alberta (Masson 1994; Plunkett and Lightbody 1982). Thus, annexation is applied in an *ad hoc* manner over time and across the provincial local government system. Therefore, annexation does not necessarily lead to a more “efficient” boundary, but can create irregular boundaries based on the political outcome of a series of annexation applications. This is exemplified by the municipalities in the Nanaimo region of British Columbia (Figure 3) and the City of Edmonton (Figure 4).

There are only a few specific instances of provincial governments that initiated the move from Stage 1 to Stage 2. For example, the government of British Columbia extended the area of the cities of Kamloops and Kelowna during the 1970s. Usually, the provinces directly involve themselves in boundary extensions during Stage 4 using two methods. With the first, the province broadly restructures municipal boundaries to form upper-tier regional governments. With the second method, they revamp the spatial organisation of rural municipalities. An example of the former was the establishment of regional municipalities in Ontario during the 1970s. An example of the latter was Alberta’s co-terminous boundary commission that sought to redraw rural governments in line with school board boundaries during the 1950s.

Stage 3: Amalgamation

Over time, a municipality may find itself surrounded by other municipalities. Amalgamation might occur to obtain economies of scale in the delivery of urban services or to obtain more effective planning and coordination within an urban region (Figure 1, Stage 3) (Lightbody 1998; Keating 1995; O’Brien 1993). Amalgamation is a process by which two or more municipalities come together with the expressed objective of restructuring the operations and administration of local governance. For example, the towns of Chatham and Newcastle formed the new City of Miramichi, New Brunswick. Amalgamation can provide a means for achieving cost savings in the delivery of local public goods and services (Keating 1995; Lightbody 1998; Sancton 1996).

Amalgamation of urban municipalities, however, is not necessarily a solution to “urban spill over” because it deals with the restructuring of the existing legal space of local governments and does not directly tackle urban growth in unincorporated or rural areas. For example, the recent amalgamation of the City of Toronto with five adjoining suburban municipalities was presented as a means of rationalising the operations of local government. Yet it left unanswered the governance of the much larger Greater Toronto Area with its complex mixture of urban, suburban and rural land uses.

The exception to this is the amalgamation of an urban municipality and a rural municipality. The City of Kingston’s 1997 amalgamation with Kingston and Pittsburgh Townships brought a considerable amount of productive farmland and other rural land uses within the “new” city’s boundaries. This precipitated the development of a strategic plan that established rural, urban and suburban land use policies and growth management strategies, including a rural-urban growth boundary (Gummo et al. 2001).

According to Sancton (2000), recent amalgamations in both Ontario and Quebec found their origins in provincial policies regarding the restructuring and streamlining of government operations. Ontario Premier Harris’s 1995 election platform centred around the “common sense revolution”. This platform obtained its clearest expression in the omnibus Bill 26, entitled *An Act to achieve Fiscal Savings to promote Economic Prosperity through Public Sector Restructuring, Streamlining and Efficiency and to Implement other aspects of the Government’s Economic Agenda*. Schedule M of Bill 26, Amendments to the *Municipal Act*, established a process to restructure municipalities in a “timely and efficient manner”. The amendment did not confine itself to the narrow issue of municipal boundaries, but was to “. . . facilitate municipal restructure of a *significant* nature” (emphasis added), which could include the transfers of powers or responsibilities among municipalities.

Stage 4: Regional Government/Unicity Incorporation

The creation of a hierarchy of spaces, in the form of a regional government, to provide cooperation among urban municipalities and between rural and urban areas (Figure 1, Stage 4) represents a major territorial and functional redistribution within an urban region (Barlow 1991). Overall, a city region’s achievement of corporate status is a modern phenomenon that usually involves reducing and enlarging existing municipal units of government (Sharpe 1988; Paddison 1983). Furthermore, the establishment of upper-tier governments places another condition on the frequency and occurrence of municipal annexation and amalgamation (Figure 1, Path 8). For example, the development and incorporation of regional municipalities in Ontario during the 1970s virtually eliminated further applications and requests for the extension of local government boundaries. In contrast, the establishment of the regional districts

during the 1960s and 1970s in British Columbia had no measurable impact on the rate or frequency of annexations by urban municipalities (Meligrana 1998). For example, the incorporation of the Regional District of Nanaimo in 1967 did not affect the advancement by annexation into the unincorporated area by the three municipal governments (Qualicum Beach, Parksville, Nanaimo, Figure 3) (Meligrana 2000a; Strongitharm 1975).

In Ontario, the first metropolitan government established was Toronto, in 1954, followed by the creation of regional municipalities during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Metropolitan government was heralded as the solution to the problem of governing an urban area encompassing several municipalities, both rural and urban. It involves establishing an upper-tier local government responsible for area-wide municipal functions, such as planning, water, sewerage, transit and police. At the same time, the lower-tier municipalities retain functions, which are defined as pertaining to purely local issues. In theory, metropolitan government brings region-wide governance, while at the same time preserving a degree of local control.

However, this form of local government reorganisation has the disadvantage of a strong potential for conflict between upper-tier and lower-tier municipalities as well as a potential duplication of municipal services. Furthermore, local residents often have difficulty assigning responsibility for certain local services to the appropriate tier. Residents can become confused regarding which level of local government is responsible for a particular urban service. Also, the politics within the upper tier can lead to polarisation between the rural/suburban viewpoint and the urban/city viewpoint.

The weaknesses of the metropolitan system of local governance can be overcome by creating a unitary form of local government. A unitary local government, also called a unicity, is one large municipality whose territory covers the entire city-region. Winnipeg provides a good example of a unicity. The movement into Stage 4, unicity, usually results from substantial annexation(s) (Path 4) and/or amalgamations (Path 6). Edmonton's extensive annexation in 1981 (Figure 1), however, failed to move this city-region into Stage 4. By the late 1990s, debate regarding amalgamation to achieve unicity or some form of regional governance for the greater Edmonton area resurfaced (McKeen 1999). Thus, Edmonton appears to be stuck in Stage 3, while other cities such as Calgary, Halifax, and Winnipeg have already moved into Stage 4.

Classic arguments for one large municipality are as follows: it makes for effective planning and development of the entire city-region; it avoids fragmented authority, which could result in considerable dissipation of resources and energy; it reduces wide disparity in the level of services between one municipality and another; it corrects for the potential inequitable exploitation of the tax base because tax revenues from any given industry benefit the municipality where the industry is located; and the central city provides a wide variety of regional cultural, recreational and entertainment facilities. The cost of this should be borne by the entire city-region. In theory, a unified system of

government, under a single administration, and represented by one large elected council would provide for a comprehensive, unified government. This government would complement and further the social and economic interdependence characteristic of a city-region.

Stage 5: Growth Management Regulations/Legislation

The final stage in the proposed conceptualisation of local governments is the development and establishment of provincial urban growth management goals (Figure 1, Stage 5). This has shifted the focus of local government reorganisation as a local concern to how it relates to broader objectives of senior levels of governments (Skaburskis 1992). In theory, traditional reforms such as annexation and amalgamation should be consistent with provincial growth management objectives.

Stage 5 represents a new period where the province makes a more concerted effort to form specific land use principles, either through legislation or policies, regarding growth management across the entire local government system. This effort finds its clearest expression in British Columbia's 1993 passage of the *Growth Strategies Act*, which contains specific statements regarding the long-term planning and design of the urban and rural landscapes (Meligrana 2000b). Similar issues are dealt with, albeit on a smaller scale, in the 1993 British Columbia Round Table's report on the Georgia Basin. However, in this case, the spatial form of local governments was not altered. Thus, the final stage represents prescriptive provincial guidelines to form the basis of growth management by existing local governments.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, a process model of local government reorganisation has been proposed in which it is suggested that a city-region can pass through five stages of reform. The first stage is incorporation of local governments, representing the building blocks of the local government system where reforms are made later. The next stage of reform is annexation of surrounding territory by the municipal governments. Here, the urban areas outside municipal limits are brought into the city. Attempted annexations may have an important feedback on the local government system, as settlements may incorporate to avoid coming into the jurisdiction of an adjacent municipality. Stage 3 is represented by the amalgamation of municipal governments of either similar or different municipal classes. Attempts to rationalise municipal services and planning across an urban region is usually motivated by the former situation. The latter case involves bringing the rural areas into an urban municipality. Extensive annexations or

amalgamations may lead to the fourth stage, the creation of a unicity or some form of regional government. This merges rural, urban and suburban areas into one jurisdiction; this may resolve the need for further annexations or amalgamations. The final stage is represented by developing and establishing provincial urban growth management policies and regulations. Yet, such regulations, as found in British Columbia, are prescriptive in nature and do not greatly alter the territorial or functional structure of the local government system.

The model illustrates that the reform of local government is not just an isolated event, but that it can proceed through various stages with important feedbacks to previous stages. Moving from one stage to the next is the result of either “bot tom-up” local initiators of reform, or imposed from the “top-down” by the province. Future research could investigate more closely the reasons why different city-regions have taken divergent paths or appear to be “stuck” at particular stages of reform, while others have been more aggressive in moving through the five stages of reform. Moreover, the above discussion suggests that a comparative study of city-regions needs to be complemented by a wider comparative study of provincial local government systems. Why do provincial systems of local government converge or diverge with respect to the application of various types of reform?

Moreover, there has been an attempt in this paper to sort out the various terms and concepts regarding local government reform, which are used inconsistently in the literature and in government legislation. There must be an understanding of what types of incorporated places are found in a city-region and what is meant by annexation, amalgamation or upper-tier municipal governments. Only after a coherent vocabulary is established can effective solutions to the modernisation of local governments be uncovered.

Many reform initiatives consider the spatial reorganisation of the local government system. However, clear geographic ideas remain absent from provincial legislation for incorporation, annexation, amalgamation or forming regional governments. Crude definitions of urban and rural form the basis of many provincial classifications of municipal governments. Yet many Canadian city-regions contain a complex pattern of rural, urban and suburban land uses. Future research should concentrate on new forms of urban and rural governance that examine both the spatial organisation and the functional aspects of local governments. In this respect, greater attention needs to be placed on what happens in Stage 5. Specifically, how much of a leadership role will the provinces take to identify sound urban and regional growth management principles? How will they effectively enforce these principles as province-wide standards through creatively reforming their municipal acts?

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