

# Book Review

*Spheres of Governance: Comparative Studies of Cities in Multilevel Governance Systems*, edited by Harvey Lazar and Christian Leuprecht. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, 300 pp., \$75 hardback, \$29.95 paperback

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The late 20th century witnessed a profound and prolonged change toward promoting and strengthening federal or quasi-federal systems, a movement that accelerated after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Each of these new, as well as the older, federal systems grow organically, rooted in their own political traditions and cultures and aware of their potentialities and promises. In fact, even as the new systems adapt certain features of the established systems, the older federal polities have evolved to be different from what they at one time were. Numerous studies document and explore these important changes in governance today. Yet, the role that cities play within this larger federal system is often unexplored or lost on students of federalism. Cities are often ignored, it seems, due to their status as creatures of their states, or underappreciated due to the emphases of political changes on states, provinces, and Länder. This tome places cities at the center of this web of intergovernmental relations. Indeed, the notion of cities' constitutional and political existence within a "multilevel" system of governance allows the reader to think about federalism from the vantage point of cities, an important, rare, and essential contribution to our understanding of the continuously evolving federal polity.

A characteristic of many edited volumes is the lack of a coherent thesis or framework to bind all the disparate contributions into an integrated whole. A strength of this volume is that the authors followed an explicit framework such that the reader can elect to read through the volume's eight case chapters (and one overview chapter) or select a specific topic or theme, such as "Municipalities' Functions and Responsibilities", and examine how each of the eight federal polities has fared around that particular theme. Each chapter is divided into the following nine themes: Introduction; Constitutional Position of Municipalities; Municipalities' Functions and Responsibilities; Fiscal Position; Organization of Federal-Municipal Interaction; Municipalities and International Relations; Case Studies: Infrastructure and Energy Planning; Recent Trends; and Concluding Notes and Observations. The book opens with an overview of the findings from all the chapters by Christian Leuprecht and Harvey Lazar and then proceeds with each of the eight federal polities, Spain by Robert Agranoff, Switzerland by André Bächtiger and Anina Hitz, Australia by Douglas Brown, France by Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Germany by Rudolf HrbeK and

Jan Cristoph Bodenbender, Mexico by Allison Rowland, South Africa by Nico Steytler, and the United States by Ronald Vogel.

The volume was written with three explicit purposes that weave together the stories of the eight disparate federal polities. First, the authors seek to "ascertain the *nature* and *extent* of the multilevel/networked governance systems..." (p. 1). Here, the authors seek to understand if these networked systems have developed and institutionalized capacities and competencies that can adequately handle the problems that modernization brings. Second, they seek to understand whether these networked systems of governance have been designed to effectively address these urban challenges. The issue then is one of performance and evaluation. And third, they investigate the extent to which "the trends that are emerging are consistent with democratic values and processes" (p. 2).

The book ends with the last case-study chapter and no attempt is made to integrate the findings and extend the analysis of the major themes that are quite thoroughly explored in each of the chapters. As an integrated book, this omission is probably the only one of note. And in fairness to the editors, the opening chapter does synthesize the findings of the nine chapters around the four key "purposes" of the book, although not explicitly around each of the themes. The editors' synthesis is found in the opening chapter. Concerning the "nature and extent" of multi-level governance systems, they find a growing formal interdependence among levels of government, although they note that in two of the eight cases, Australia and the United States, "formal" institutional arrangements with the national government are muted. They also note that municipal governments are evolving as only "junior" members of the intergovernmental system, with the noted exceptions of France (the most unitary of the eight) and Switzerland (in which local governments are considered as coequals). In the end, then, the authors of each of the chapters and the editors find that multilevel governance is growing in importance and complexity.

Regarding the "effectiveness" issue, they find a great deal of variation, but conclude that there is an overwhelming urge on the part of the national governments to mandate certain behaviors on the part of their local governments, a regulation that is frequently unaccompanied by national funds or administrative support capacities and increasingly abhorrent to the recipient governments, not to mention to the concepts of diversity and experimentation that are a few of the hallmarks of federal systems. Their third, and last, evaluative question is the impact of changes on democratic values and processes. Here, they are the least sanguine: "... the concerns that arise most often are that systems of multisphere governance frequently lack transparency, mute accountability, and have insufficient legislative oversight" (p. 17). This observation, based as it is on their assessment of the eight cases, presents serious challenges to federal systems and certainly to proponents of federal structures.

Each of the themes in the eight case studies is explored to the extent possible within its individual importance to the federal polity. The authors are to be applauded for their "sticking to the script" in ensuring that each theme is covered quite thoroughly. Clearly the one theme that resonated the least, and was the least integrated, is the one that allowed each author to explore something of interest, namely, the theme on "Case Studies: Infrastructure and Energy Policy." Readers might expect a thorough and systematic analysis of "infrastructure policy" and of "energy policy." But within the confines of just a few pages, that is not possible. Instead, each author explored something of interest to the author, which could not be assessed from a comparative framework. Although interesting in its own right, the authors could not, and did not, explore the linkages of multisphere governance to each

of these two policy issues thoroughly. Surely, page restrictions forced truncating what could have been a complex and rich assessment of the policies. Nevertheless, one is left searching for more in an attempt to discover the linkages between multilevel governance and infrastructure or energy policy.

The book provides an excellent overview of the "location" of cities in eight federal polities. The authors remained true to their mission of ensuring that each of the basic themes is covered sufficiently so that the reader has a well-informed understanding of cities' existence, performance, and promise within multilevel governance systems. Readers (and students, for this is an excellent book for upper-division undergraduate and graduate courses in comparative political systems and federal systems) will benefit with a strong foundation of understanding important dimensions of federal structures, a foundation that can be built upon for exploring additional comparative political, institutional, and federal frameworks around city and local governments.

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