

# MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA:

## *Local Perspectives on Shifting Relations and Structures*

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**P**OLITICAL DECISION MAKING in Canada has become increasingly complex and multi-layered in recent years. New actors and political processes have been introduced (or forced) into the local and provincial political milieu and an increasingly intricate concept of governance has thus developed. At the same time, these changes have often resulted in a mismatch between traditional ideas of government/governance and how these operate “on the ground.” In addition, this complex reality has not always been met either with new ways of studying it or with a subsequent shift in understanding how politics is legitimated and held accountable. This article aims to address three main questions in the case of British Columbia:

1. To what extent has political decision making in the province moved from a traditional federalist arrangement to a more nuanced idea of “multi-level governance”?
2. Have these changes resulted in any mismatch in governance expectations between local and provincial levels, and have these changes occurred in the same way in large and small municipalities?
3. How has this affected political decision making in the province?

While I focus on the Gordon Campbell period of government in British Columbia, my research remains relevant. It highlights the changing nature of governance, the involvement of new governmental and non-governmental actors, and the often uneasy fit within Canada’s traditional federal structure. In addition, I provide traction for understanding political processes through a more nuanced frame of governance that moves beyond traditional federalist literature – an approach that has

become increasingly prominent in recent Canadian political studies. Finally, I provide a fine-grained analysis of the relations between local levels of governance and governmental and non-governmental actors at other political levels.

I focus on provincial-local relations in British Columbia in order to illustrate the intricacies of multi-level structures in Canadian politics from an actor-centric perspective. This research gives analytical purchase to the debate over changing governance structures in Canadian and provincial politics, and provides a nuanced understanding of how large and small municipalities deal with shifting structural and relational factors affecting governance.

The first section of the article outlines the idea of multi-level governance and explains why it is useful in the Canadian context. The second section builds on this idea and provides a more nuanced framework for examining local governance and policy making in Canada. The third section looks at structural factors affecting governance in British Columbia, along with how these factors affect local-provincial relations. The fourth section does the same for relational factors, and the fifth looks at policy issues. The final section examines the impacts these structural, relational, and policy factors have upon local-provincial governance as a whole. Analyzing BC politics through a multi-level governance lens reveals structural, relational, and policy factors that affect how the province and local levels of governance work together to make political decisions and to deliver public services.

#### MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE IN CANADA

The concept of multi-level governance (MLG) developed within the context of the European Union (EU), but it has useful applications outside of the EU, particularly in Canada. While in the past the study of politics in Canada was often dominated by federal debates, the changing nature of how all political levels govern has brought into focus the need for a broader understanding of multi-level governance (Bache and Flinders 2004). In fact, there is an emerging literature on how to apply MLG not only within the larger Canadian context but also at the local level (Horak and Young 2012). While federalist debate focuses on the relationship between the centre (federal level) and the periphery (provincial level), MLG examines the dispersal of power upwards towards supranational organizations, downwards towards regional and local governments and – perhaps most important – across to other state and non-state

actors (Marks and Hooghe 2004). The MLG approach allows us to examine governance as non-hierarchical, with power dispersed among several heterarchical governmental levels, rather than as concentrated in any specific level. Governance relationships can be seen as involving influence and interdependence rather than control and clearly delineated power structures (although the existence of hierarchies is not precluded). In addition, within these multiple levels political power may be shared between several different governmental and non-governmental actors.

MLG moves the debate in Canada beyond a traditional federalist dichotomy by (a) providing a framework for considering the roles of all governmental levels as well as non-governmental actors; (b) recognizing policy areas in which power may not be diffused along traditional federal lines; and (c) allowing for the inclusion of more informal relations between different political actors. Much of the research undertaken in this work revolves around the idea of types of multi-level governance first proposed by Hooghe and Marks (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2003). The first type of multi-level governance has its historical underpinnings in the idea of federalism and tends to revolve around the state government and various well-defined subnational governments (Marks and Hooghe 2004). Governmental jurisdictions tend to be finite, general purpose, and fairly rigid. Membership in the levels, which are usually territorial in nature, does not tend to intersect. Finally, there are a limited number of jurisdictions and jurisdictional levels. This type of MLG clearly has traction in the Canadian system through the nation's traditional governance structures. The second type of MLG envisions the boundaries and separation between governmental (and non-governmental) levels much differently than does the first type. In Type II systems, jurisdictions are fluid, flexible, and function-specific, changing depending on the nature of the policy or political issue. They often align along policy lines, overlap at numerous different levels, and are not limited to simple territorial distinctions (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2003; Marks and Hooghe 2004). Type II systems are most predominant "at the edges of Type I governance" (Hooghe and Marks 2001) and may be most clearly exhibited at the local level. Being without the safety-nets of larger, resource-rich governmental structures, they are more likely to need to invoke other, more complex relationships in order to provide and administer governmental services (Marks and Hooghe 2004). These factors create a concept of multi-level governance that is much more fluid – and more messy – than what is found in traditional federal systems or in Type I MLG. Type II systems are also becoming increasingly evident

in the Canadian context in the form of new public service delivery approaches such as private finance initiatives, the increasing role played by international organizations, and agreements that shift power away from national governments and towards international arbiters (such as NAFTA) and other approaches to governance that do not conform to traditional “government” lines.

### *A New Framework for Multi-level Governance*

Hooghe and Marks’s framework, while useful, groups several discrete factors onto a one-dimensional spectrum, which assumes a neatness that does not necessarily occur in practice. Some work has been done, mainly from a policy perspective, on establishing different frameworks for understanding governance in various contexts (see, for example, Grisel and van de Waart 2011; Howlett, Rayner, and Tollefson 2009; Curry 2015; March and Olsen 1996; Offe 2006; Scharpf 1991; Treib et al. 2007; Weaver and Rockman 1993). In addition to the factors identified by Hooghe and Marks, these frameworks can be broken down according to structural, relational, and policy factors (see Curry 2018).

FIGURE 1

*New framework for multi-level governance*

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES IN CANADIAN POLITICS			
	STRUCTURAL FACTORS		
Type I Multi-level Governance	Rigid institutional structure	↔	Flexible institutional structure
	Multi-purpose jurisdictions	↔	Policy-specific jurisdictions
		RELATIONAL FACTORS	
	Hierarchical relations	↔	Heterarchical relations
	Formalized relations	↔	Informal relations
		POLICY FACTORS	
	Discrete policy responses	↔	Holistic policy responses
	Uniform policy issue	↔	Complex policy issue
			Type II Multi-level Governance

Governance structures, policy processes, and actors may be evaluated according to these criteria as one searches for a more sophisticated, nuanced framework for types of governance. First, institutional structures may be applied either flexibly or rigidly, depending to a large extent on the strength of the legislation underpinning the institutional bounds of actors' jurisdictional powers. Second, these jurisdictions may either be multi-purpose, operating across a wide range of issues (as set out in sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act, 1982, in Canada), or be dealt with on a policy-specific basis (as in inter-local partnerships focused on a specific policy issue). These structures may be overlaid by either hierarchical or heterarchical relations between actors within and between levels, and these relations may be either formal or informal. Examples of both hierarchical (provincial/local) and heterarchical (provincial/federal) relations exist in Canada, and the level of formality differs depending on context. Finally, the policy issues themselves affect the nature of governance. These issues may be dealt with in a compartmentalized fashion or they may be part of a larger policy program. They may be complex (as when solutions are difficult or cross policy areas/jurisdictions) or uniform (as when they may be addressed in a straightforward manner).

These factors come together to produce a range of different structural and relational approaches to governance that are then filtered through particular policy issues. Processes that fall on the left side of Figure 1 in terms of structural and relational factors lead to a process of *sanctioned authority*, whereby control is derived according to a legal or statutory basis and its extent is well defined and closely followed. If both structural and relational processes fall on the right side of the figure, this indicates *mutual responsibility* over the process, with no actor holding clear power over another, and flexibility in how these issues are dealt with and who is held accountable. If structural factors fall on the left side of the figure and relational factors fall on the right, powers may be seen as *structurally delegated*, whereby they are formally parcelled out to certain actors, who are allowed to use them as they see fit. Finally, if structural processes fall on the right of Figure 1 and relational factors on the left, this indicates *discretionary control* over power, whereby actors are able to react to policies as they see fit (within legislative bounds), but only at the discretion of another controlling actor. If the response of the actor is not deemed suitable, this discretionary authority may be revoked. These structural and relational approaches to governance then shape both whether a policy is approached discretely or holistically and the complexity of the policy process as a whole.

This framework is, of necessity, simplified. Within structural, relational, and policy factors there may be variance regarding how separate factors relate to one another (for instance, you may have rigid institutional structures with policy-specific jurisdictions). In addition, all of them operate on a spectrum and may have significant differences in scale. Nonetheless, the simplified framework presented here allows for a more nuanced understanding of how multi-level governance operates within the BC context.

<p><b>Sanctioned authority</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structurally rigid with multi-purpose jurisdictions</li> <li>• Formalized, hierarchical relations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Structured delegation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structurally rigid with multi-purpose jurisdictions</li> <li>• Informal, heterarchical relations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Discretionary control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structurally flexible with policy-specific jurisdictions</li> <li>• Informal, heterarchical relations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mutual responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structurally flexible with policy-specific jurisdictions</li> <li>• Informal, heterarchical relations</li> </ul>

This institutional differentiation allows us to further develop Hooghe and Marks's approach to multi-level governance by separating, within specific policy contexts, the structural nature of the organization of governance (hierarchy versus heterarchy) and the relational nature of *control*. After a brief discussion of methodology, I attempt to delineate the major factors that shape the structure and relations of local governance in British Columbia and to determine whether they affect large and small municipalities in the same way.

## METHODOLOGY

I employ a bottom-up, backwards mapping approach in order to examine service delivery and policy implementation in British Columbia under the Campbell government. The backwards-mapping approach (Elmore 1979-1980) assesses policy implementation from the implementers' perspective (in this case, local governments and their delivery of services) and plots

it backwards to the actual decision makers (the province) to determine whether the policy process (and concurrent governance structures) have acted in a way that fits both (1) policy goals and (2) actor interests. My focus is on policy implementation and service delivery. While the term “service delivery” is notably broad, it encompasses a large swathe of how policy is implemented and allows for comparison across local cases in the BC context, where services delivered may differ between municipalities. As set out in the research questions, I focus on whether a move to multi-level governance has been witnessed in provincial/local relations in the province and whether this has created a governance mismatch between the two levels.

I take an in-depth look at two cases that vary in size and governance structures: (1) Metro Vancouver, which, as the biggest local conurbation in the province, has a complex governance structure and (2) Skeena-Queen Charlotte, which is one of the smallest regional districts in the province and lacks much of the complex governance infrastructure of larger districts. My methodology involved conducting interviews, examining legislation and statutes, and analyzing policy processes addressing the political and fiscal relations between actors who delivered local services. The interviews were conducted with high-level civil servants (CFOs, managers, etc.) and politicians (mayors and other elected officials) with significant knowledge of the governance relations, structures, and policy issues at play in their regional districts. These interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour, covering a range of questions concerning how governance worked in the regional district, who the main actors were and how they related to one another, their relationships with the provincial government, and specific policy issues. For reasons of anonymity, the interviewees are identified only by a letter signifier, with the regional district in which they worked and position (politician or civil servant) identified in the bibliography. This study took place between 2009 and 2012, and I home in on local perspectives on provincial/local governance relations.

## STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Under the Constitution Act, 1867, power over municipal and local governments, including the structure of these governments, is given to the provinces, and only powers given to the provinces under the Constitution can be conferred upon municipalities. Given the nature of Supreme Court of Canada decisions and the broad interpretation of provincial

powers, this still allows provinces to give many powers to municipalities (whether temporarily or permanently). These may include powers dealing with health, education, natural resources, and/or infrastructure development, all issues of prime importance in the domestic policy realm. In the past decade, provinces have tended to decentralize power and to give municipalities a bigger role in governance, and the Supreme Court has conferred upon local governments a broader area of municipal power, rarely overruling a municipal decision (unless it is clearly beyond that municipality's mandate). With this increase in powers devolved from both federal and provincial levels, municipalities have had increased responsibility, often without a concurrent increase in their ability to raise revenue (Lidstone 2007).

In comparison to that of other provinces, BC legislation tends to favour giving relatively large, but often conditional, amounts of control to municipal governments (Smith and Stewart 2009). However, a lot of this power is more theoretical than practical, with the province often legislating in one direction and acting in another. This behaviour continued with the introduction of the Community Charter in 2003, whereby many powers were devolved to local governments and their autonomy increased, but no concurrent powers to raise municipal finances were introduced (British Columbia 2003). The Community Charter greatly changed the legislative powers and scope of municipal governance in British Columbia, mostly (seemingly) in favour of municipalities. On paper, these powers are extensive and compare favourably to those available in other provinces, but there is a significant rift between formal structures and the informal relational reality in British Columbia, which remains largely controlled by the province (Lidstone 2007).

Perhaps the most significant factor affecting a municipality's *de facto* power, as opposed to its theoretical legislative power, is whether or not that municipality has adequate financial resources (or the capacity to raise them). In general and compared to most American or European municipal governments, municipalities in Canada "do not have adequate financial resources to provide good government and services locally" (Lidstone 2004). Municipalities are almost entirely self-sufficient with regard to funding their activities, with 85 percent of their funds coming from own-source revenue such as property tax and only 7 percent coming from federal or provincial transfers (Smith and Stewart 2009). With little legal or political room to increase their own sources of funding, municipalities are being further stretched as provincial and federal governments withdraw from providing services or download responsibility for them



without providing corresponding increases in funding (Boadway and Kitchen 1999). While provinces have recognized that municipalities require further sources of revenue, fiscal transfers have not been forthcoming (Lidstone 2004). Indeed, in the later Campbell years, the federal gas tax was the only significant source of increased municipal funding. Although the legal capacity of British Columbia's municipalities has increased, the general consensus is that financial capacity has remained very limited (Interviewee B, personal interview, 1 April 2008).

### *Municipal Differences*

While Vancouver did wish for more autonomy regarding finances, it also has the population and business base to develop economies of scale. However, Skeena-Queen Charlotte is very reliant on provincial grants as it lacks the financial resources to deal with many issues unilaterally. The question then becomes whether these provincial grants should be conditional or unconditional. Skeena-Queen Charlotte, even if not necessarily supportive of provincial restrictions on grants, seemed to be more accepting of the fact that the money arrived with strings attached (Interviewee G, personal interview, 16 June 2008), whereas Metro Vancouver took umbrage at this (Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008). Ultimately, though, the province has the power to dictate how and why financial resources are apportioned, and, as of yet, there has been little movement to indicate that it will allow for increased local financial autonomy. British Columbia has used its financial power over municipal relations to either help or hinder municipal actions, as it sees fit.

### RELATIONAL FACTORS

While the actors involved in the process of governance have expanded in recent years, governance in the province of British Columbia has remained quite government-centric (Smith and Stewart 2009). Viewed broadly, this indicates that the BC case hews closer to "multi-level government" than to true multi-level governance, which is typified by increasing horizontal integration and the full involvement of non-governmental actors. However, there are still important extra-governmental relations, some of which have increased in importance in recent years.

The organization that is most significant to municipalities in British Columbia is the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). Although UBCM (2009) sees itself as multi-faceted, its main role is to act as an advocate for municipal interests (Interviewee A, personal interview,

17 April 2008; 2012). However, this role is not seen as confrontational; rather, it aims to promote cooperation between municipalities and the province. During the Campbell years, the UBCM's role as a bridge between the province and municipal interests became more contentious as the organization took on new roles, most notably as administrator of provincial funds for municipal purposes. In addition to this, it administered the federal gas tax without any intervention on the part of the provincial government (Interviewee A, personal interview, 2008). Not all local government members saw this as a positive step, and some felt that it compromised UBCM's role as an advocate for local governments (Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008).

Another significant relationship that municipalities must manage is that between business and private interests. At the local governmental level, many have seen the move towards public-private partnerships (P3s) as politically problematic, but there may be benefits with respect to non-core services (Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008). Regardless of political stance, the issue of P3s has changed the nature of the power structure of municipal initiatives (Interviewee C, personal interview, 17 March 2008). This has become more of an issue as the province pressures for local initiatives to make increasing use of P3s when it comes to large projects (Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008). The BC provincial government has actually institutionalized the idea of P3s through the development of Partnerships BC, a company that is fully owned by the provincial government and whose purpose is to promote public-private partnerships. Under this initiative, any public works contract valued over CDN\$50 million is required to go to tender through Partnerships BC, thus compelling local governments to develop P3s (Partnerships BC 2009).

There are several other relations between governmental levels and other actors that are important with regard to shaping the domestic governance structure within British Columbia. Of course, the federal government still plays some role in local issues. Areas of joint jurisdiction have allowed the federal government to make direct liaisons with local governments through a variety of means, mostly financial. BC municipalities have numerous direct links with the federal government. Most interestingly, in British Columbia, through the UBCM, the federal government has given the gas tax directly to the local governments. However, it is important to note that this federal/municipal arrangement required the approval of the province (Interviewee A, personal interview, 2008). Another significant factor that often involves local, provincial, and federal governments is

the issue of First Nations involvement in, and governance of, municipal processes. Recently, in the Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District, which has a significant Indigenous population, efforts have been made to improve relations and coordination between municipal governments and the reserves. The Community to Community Forum, a provincially and federally funded UBCM administered initiative, brings together representatives from municipalities and First Nations groups in order to facilitate discussion and to involve Indigenous groups in regional governance that extends beyond their reserve boundaries (Interviewee H, personal interview, 18 June 2008). This is one of the biggest areas of overlapping local and federal jurisdiction as collaboration with Indigenous communities comes under federal, rather than provincial, control. This often results in tension when it comes to dealing with community issues in areas that involve both municipal and Indigenous relations, whether in Skeena-Queen Charlotte or Metro Vancouver (Interviewee G, personal interview, 16 June 2008).

### *Municipal Differences*

Relationships differ, depending on whether they occur in large or small municipalities. For example, the use of the UBCM for lobbying, funding, and information purposes differs significantly depending on whether it occurs in a large or a small municipality. This is mostly due to the availability of resources, with larger municipalities being able to tackle some issues themselves and thus being able to use the UBCM to focus on lobbying purposes (Interviewee B, personal interview, 1 April 2008), whereas smaller municipalities may need the UBCM to deal with a wider range of issues (Interviewee G, personal interview, 16 June 2008). The UBCM plays a significant, but very different, role in local relations with the provincial government. While larger municipal and regional districts often have the size and population to directly engage the provincial government, smaller municipalities require the UBCM to provide them with a relatively strong voice, keep them informed, and help them develop programs (Interviewee F, personal interview, 8 January 2008; Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008). Despite its being utilized for different purposes, the UBCM operates in a heterarchical manner, treating all its members' interests as equal and thus allowing for flexibility in dealing with relevant policy issues.

The pressure for involving corporate interests in municipal service delivery is felt more acutely in larger areas (Interviewee C, personal interview, 17 March 2008) than in smaller communities. "Private en-

terprise out there isn't really in a rush to come to Prince Rupert to build" (Interviewee F, personal interview, 8 January 2008). This move on the part of the provincial government towards increased involvement in private and non-governmental interests is indicative of the increased use of non-traditional arrangements in dealing with policy issues. However, the increase in the use of more policy-based, flexible, and overlapping relations is in its nascent stages, and it is difficult to ascertain how it will affect future governance in the province (Interviewee C, personal interview, 17 March 2008; Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008).

The primary factor affecting both large and small municipalities is their relationship with the provincial government. The continued existence of provincial control is reflected in the attitudes of municipal government officials, who feel that the relationship between municipal and provincial governments remains excessively hierarchical (Interviewee D, personal interview, 7 April 2008; Interviewee C, personal interview, 17 March 2008; Interviewee A, personal interview, 2008; Interviewee H, personal interview, 18 June 2008). It is clear that local officials recognized, with more or less animosity, that municipalities and regional districts operate at the behest of the province and that, ultimately, any power they wield is provided (and revocable) by the province. Yet even though these relations remain hierarchical, the province has made some moves to show that it is at least willing to foster new arrangements and to address local governance issues. This includes the ad hoc restructuring of regional districts to deal with local governance issues (e.g., promoting the splitting of the Vancouver Island Regional District) and regional cooperation (e.g., promoting the Okanagan partnership of regional districts) (Smith and Stewart 2009).

#### POLICY FACTORS

The structural and relational factors outlined above are filtered through specific policy contexts before being implemented at the local level. In several ways, policy complexity and separation affected how governance processes operated between provincial and local levels.

In British Columbia, complexity was introduced by the multi-level considerations of policy making and delivery, which were exacerbated by national and international considerations introduced by the Winter Olympics in Metro Vancouver. For example, this policy complexity affected service delivery in structural ways through the introduction

of Translink. In anticipation of the Olympics, the province decided to establish a new rapid transit line to the airport – a project that required significant political and financial input from all three governmental levels as well as from non-governmental partners. There was significant opposition to the project at the local level as it was felt that local long-term needs and priorities were being overridden by provincial and federal political issues (Hutton 2012). This came to a head in 2007, when the provincial government overhauled Translink in order to assert control over the process. Kevin Falcon, then provincial transport minister, dissolved the existing Translink board, which was made up of elected officials appointed by the municipalities, and replaced it with a government-appointed board of independent members, relegating the mayors to the Mayors' Council, which was responsible for long-term planning (Translink Governance Review Panel 2007). This was seen by many local officials as an unwieldy, top-down change that prioritized provincial over local interests (CBC 2007). While the Translink case is an especially dramatic example of this, it does show the willingness and ability of the provincial government to encroach on the implementation powers that should typically fall to the local level.

To deal with this complexity, we may look to a holistic, multi-level approach towards other policy issues related to the Olympics. In governance terms, the benefits of new relationships forged to address event-specific issues (clearly Type II governance in Hooghe and Marks's parlance) were mixed. On one hand, the bid process for the Olympics and its organizing committee (VANOC) were both multi-level enterprises involving governmental and non-governmental actors. In general, this arrangement worked well, facilitating both day-to-day and longer-standing relations as well as opening the door to increased municipal-federal dialogue (Hutton 2012). However, there were notable failures. Project Civil City was an attempt to align various aspects of policy – such as infrastructure, sanitation, parking, zoning, and policing – with private actors in a way that aimed to improve civility and livability in Vancouver during and after the Olympics (Boyle and Haggerty 2011, 3186). However, due to questions regarding whether this money was being well spent, along with tensions between public and private provision of services (especially regarding security and policing), this initiative was cancelled before the Olympics began. As a result, many reforms were “shallow” and did not tackle root causes (3197-98). These examples show that there is still significant conflict involved in developing complex multi-actor funding arrangements, and it is clear that there was public anger over the lack of transparency with regard to funding roles.

An example of policy related multi-level complexity was evident in Skeena-Queen Charlotte as well in the building of the Prince Rupert Fairview Terminal. It was initially envisaged as a true multi-level governance initiative, involving multiple governments, international concerns, and private investment. However, this multi-levelness also created problems as the port's growth was hampered by provincial and federal governments, corporate interests, competition with Vancouver, and the limited influence of local concerns (Young 2008, 53). In policy terms, the multi-level involvement in the building of ports creates complexity. Ports fall under federal jurisdiction, but the lack of political, electoral, or economic clout in Prince Rupert, especially compared to Metro Vancouver, resulted in a lack of federal support. Similar concerns also undermined provincial support, and the City of Prince Rupert lacked the property and resources to invest in further growth (Young 2008, 53-54). More positively, this multi-levelness did allow the neighbouring province of Alberta to play an active role in developing the port: in the 1970s, the Alberta government and other actors in that province funded some investment in the port (Young 2008, 55). This cross-province support continued during the Campbell years, with Alberta premier Ed Stelmach stating in 2007:

I'm very proud of the spirit of cooperation that has grown over the years between the Alberta and British Columbia governments. And I'm not surprised to see that same spirit is alive and well at the municipal level ... What's good for Prince Rupert and Prince George is good for Alberta. Because at the end of the day, there is no "us" and "them." We're all in this together. (Stelmach 2007)

The example of the Prince Rupert port provides a clear case of governance over government and few examples of governance mismatch between levels. It is a policy-specific approach that involves local, provincial (and cross-provincial), and federal governmental levels and, as a public-private partnership, it incorporates non-governmental interests as well (Wilson and Summerville 2008, 2).

#### TOWARDS A NEW FORM OF GOVERNANCE?

There have been some signs in British Columbia, at least rhetorically, of the development of some multi-level governance structures and relations that extend beyond traditional federal arrangements. The introduction of the Community Charter to govern local governmental structures is,

on paper at least, empowering and welcoming of a new, more fluid and open process that would enable local governments to have a stake in governance of service delivery and policy issues. However, the reality more closely resembles traditional top-down power structures. Many of the powers granted to the regional and municipal levels have not been accompanied by an increase in the financial capacity of local governments, and, at any time, the province can revoke any powers or heterarchy created under the Community Charter. In general, the forces operating between governments in British Columbia tend to still favour a hierarchical, territorial, and clearly defined governance structure not dissimilar to that accepted under the traditional federalist view. Where structural shifts have allowed for a more flexible approach to governance, the relations that shape the nature of the power involved has not necessarily shifted as well. In other words, although there has been movement along the structural axis to embrace more flexible approaches to governance, this has not been matched by a shift in traditional hierarchical relations.

At the local level, there appears to be greater acceptance of new governance approaches, with more flexibility in relationships and functions, but this has manifested itself in different ways in different municipalities. UBCM, although developed as a formal structure to oversee municipal affairs, plays an important role in dealing with municipal relations and acting as a bridge between levels. This role varies depending on the needs of the given municipality, and it can provide some flexibility with regard to tailoring issues so as to meet the needs of both large and small municipalities. In terms of relations between municipal and regional levels, as well as inter-municipal and inter-regional levels, local levels have been willing to operate with ad hoc, cross-municipal coalitions designed to fit specific needs or policy areas. Although, again, not perfectly heterarchical, these relations often serve as a levelling agent, with large and small municipalities sometimes working together out of either necessity or structural design.

The nature of these governance relations differs between municipalities. Relationships have developed, either ad hoc or in more institutionalized ways, between actors based on size (e.g., big cities), role (e.g., municipalities in international affairs), and policy area (e.g., First Nations communities and businesses). This has increased the number of actors with whom municipal leaders may interact, but the actual impact of this is less clear. Legislation and formal processes, as well as informal indications provided by interviewees, indicate that relations with provincial governments remain paramount in the governance process. Given their

size, larger municipalities are often more able to take advantage of these new relations than are smaller municipalities, but even if some actors may feel more “empowered” at the international level, or feel that they can engage some of these other extra-governmental actors, these connections are often made within the confines of the provincial-federal structure. The control of municipal finances is still governed by provincial processes, with formal, structured tax powers and apportionment of funding. There has been some movement towards processes that are less hierarchical, with the UBCM taking over the administration of some funds, but this is done only at the behest of the province and could, theoretically, be overridden by it. The complexities of these issues illustrate the need for a nuanced approach to categorizing and understanding multi-level governance in British Columbia.

By teasing apart the structural, relational, and policy aspects of governance in the province, a clearer picture begins to emerge regarding the development and implementation of service delivery policy in British Columbia. If one is to look at Type II multi-level governance as being both flexible and heterarchical, then the BC case cannot be accurately described as fitting this type. However, neither can it be completely explained as a Type I system consisting of rigid structure and hierarchical governments. Rather, it is an amalgam of the two systems: it fits into the hierarchical mould of Type I but displays some of the flexibility of Type II. This flexible, hierarchical system of government and politics may be described as multi-level government. It should be noted that its flexibility is most evident at the horizontal level, with the vertical level continuing to rely on more formal, hierarchical approaches to policy.

Plotting relations, structures, and policy issues shows a much more complex relationship between government and governance, with many actors and relations not fitting into Hooghe and Marks’s typology of multi-level governance systems. In terms of structures, the province has shown a willingness to work flexibly with local governments but only within certain parameters, which can be revoked at any time, and usually maintaining the traditional local/provincial jurisdictions.

Relationally, the nature of hierarchy plays a more significant role than does the formality of relationships, which varied greatly (and are thus not plotted). Governmental actors tend to remain grouped on the hierarchical side of the horizontal axis. Non-governmental actors and arm’s-length organizations are somewhat more spread out but tend to favour a heterarchical approach. Relations along the hierarchy/heterarchy axis remain relatively discrete, with little integration between governmental levels.





Given the continued dominance of hierarchical processes, it appears that multi-level governance is not as established as some like to claim. For all the talk of new governance and practice, central governmental actors still tend to control the process, and this is felt within local governments (Interviewee B, personal interview, 1 April 2008; Interviewee C, personal interview, 17 March 2008; Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008). While more flexibility has been introduced into how these governance processes are used, this has in some ways exacerbated the hierarchy by allowing those in power (in this case, the province) to shift the rules of the game depending on the situation. In the absence of any hierarchical change, municipalities have, to a certain extent, become creative and have made use of relational flexibility with regard to certain aspects of local-level service delivery. This may be seen in the voluntary regulation and planning occurring in Vancouver and in inter-municipal agreements as well as in the collaboration occurring in Skeena-Queen Charlotte. Interestingly, smaller municipalities seem to embrace this flexibility more readily than do larger municipalities. One possible reason for this is the former's need for creativity, given their small sizes and tax bases. However, this flexibility only benefits actors at the local level, doing little to bridge the gap between vertical levels of government and governance. When looking at provincial-local relations, provinces remain hierarchically more powerful and use structural flexibility to ensure that provincial motivations receive priority, as is shown in provincial control over Translink. In other words, MLG in the BC case tends to remain more multi-level *government* than multi-level *governance*.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article examines governance processes in British Columbia from the local level on up in order to ascertain to what extent new multi-level governance processes have taken hold and what the implications of this might be. To do so, I offer a nuanced MLG framework within which to assess structural, relational, and policy factors affecting governance. First, I show that an MLG approach to understanding provincial politics is useful and that the interplay between structural, relational, and policy factors helps us to understand the nature of provincial/local governance in British Columbia. Second, I show that, while governance in this province is more structurally flexible than a traditional federalist arrangement would suggest, relations – especially provincial-local ones – remain highly

hierarchical, thus forging a type of multi-level government and limiting a true move to multi-level governance. Reactions to these limitations differs between larger urban municipalities and smaller rural ones. Where the former has more influence on the provincial stage than does the latter, this is accompanied by more provincial oversight and interference. For their part, small rural municipalities, while lacking provincial clout, are more flexible in their approaches to policy issues than are larger municipalities and are also less critical of provincial involvement.

Overall, this shows a complex patchwork of governance in the province. Practically speaking, it appears that the tension between hierarchical relations and flexible structural approaches to governance can have a significant effect on the government and governance of municipalities. Previous research points out the difficulty of reconciling different orientations towards democratic practice (Flinders and Curry 2008), and the same difficulties appear to hold with regard to dealing with different governance orientations. This mismatch between governance orientations may result in difficulties when it comes to applying policy related to both traditional federal structures and new modes of governance. Various municipal leaders have voiced significant levels of frustration due to their inability to affect policy development, despite the expectation that they play a significant role in policy delivery (Interviewee B, personal interview, 1 April 2008; Interviewee C, personal interview, 17 March 2008; Interviewee E, personal interview, 15 April 2008). While certain organizations, such as the UBCM, help to alleviate this perceived lack of power (Interviewee A, personal interview, 2008), there remains a clear divide between the two policy processes – a divide that may be felt more in certain municipalities than others. Larger municipalities, especially those in Metro Vancouver, which previously had a significant level of control over policy areas such as transit at both the development and delivery stages, feel this loss more than do small municipalities, who may never have had this level of autonomy. Many formal constraints on municipal power *have* been removed, thus, at least theoretically, leaving more autonomy for municipalities. However, this autonomy is toothless without increased financial capacity, something that hasn't been forthcoming. In addition, these examples of increasing municipal autonomy appear to be discretionary, with the province willing to step in if it disagrees with the direction in which a municipality is moving. This does not paint a very positive picture for municipal powers in British Columbia, and it is being echoed in other Canadian provinces (Finbow 2012; Marquis 2012; Dunn and Pantin 2012; Leo 2012).

Even though their goals and needs differ, there is some agreement between the case studies regarding how these changes should be instigated. Local governments in both jurisdictions feel that the impetus for change must come from the local level and that room for such change is dependent upon well-established rules governing relations between levels – rules that allow for flexibility within the governance processes in place. This fits with other research that shows that coordination and involvement must occur at one level before it can spread to others (Horak and Young 2012). While such changes must be developed and perhaps started locally, both sides recognize that they will occur within the confines of the overarching governance structure. If such changes are to be effective, they must be met by a provincial willingness to adhere to clearer – and more binding – guidelines regarding municipal autonomy. Without these, local BC politics do not fit within the concept of multi-level governance.

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