**Models of Territorial Autonomy**

**Dr Stephen Tomblin[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. Regionalization

* Slippery concept with different meanings.
* Can be both centralizing while also decentralizing.
* Involves experimenting with unity-diversity, divergent forms of autonomy, respecting cultural differences without sacrificing democracy or good policy practices.

1. Highlights

* Canada interstate federal system – highly decentralized and competitive.
* Province building has persisted and enjoys much autonomy and capacity.
* No national economy: provinces trade more outside than inside.
* Boundary disputes have persisted and undermine development.
* Decision making more bilateral than multilateral.

1. Development/Underdevelopment

* Competing perspectives/frameworks on Canada Regionalism, regional definition.
* Canadian Staples Theory - different versions (relational/formal) that focus on “internal” problems or “external” exploitation.
* Modernization did not prove “inevitable” and drove province-building phenomenon, efforts to control borders, associational activities, ideas, institutions, and interest mobilization.

1. Function Versus Form

* Critical issue in pooling sovereignties is: where does power lie and where should it lie?
* Public policy models offer different insights on role of ideas, institutions, and interests.
* Assumption of functionalists (policy wonks) in post-war era was that territoriality (whether nation-state borders or federalism) would decline – but these forces have not.
* Choice of policy instruments has remained soft: for example, the Canadian fiscal federal system relies a great deal on “unconditional” transfers.

1. Territorial–Functional Balances

* Territorial pluralism, old forms have been underestimated.
* Examples: America-First; Brexit, NAFTA; territorial battles in Canada over pipelines, trade, equalization, decline of multilateral venues, forms of knowledge construction and rise of bilateral zero-sum conflicts.

1. Economic Development

* Issues of territorial and jurisdictional defence persist in Canada.
* Despite efforts to collaborate and avoid zero-sum conflicts.
* Provinces own and control natural resources, including energy resources.
* The system has produced powerful provincial states tied to natural resource dependencies in economies where most direct employment is in knowledge-service economies.
* Canada has had three national policies, but the idea of having a national policy was abandoned in the 1980s and replaced by free trade.
* These national policies produced through history much provincial resistance and suspicion of functionally based policies.
* Lesson: avoid using public policy as a political weapon, find ways to focus, engage citizens based on evidence, and build integrated functional communities rather than territorially divided-competitive societies

1. Pan-Canadianism

* 1957 saw launching of Pan-Canadianism.
* Regional Development policies.
* Tax coordination.
* Equalization (unconditional fiscal transfers intended to encourage modernization without fear of domination).
* Equalization remains highly controversial and provincial premiers play for different audiences.
* Due to unconditional design has reinforced even further provincial state autonomy.

1. Decentralization persists

* Canada is one of the most de-centralized federal systems in world.
* It operates more like an international system.
* Multilateral, pan-Canadian approaches have declined (as have resources for popular programmes like Medicare).
* Territorial competition, especially in energy-natural resource sectors, has produced bad decisions and outcomes.
* Territorial actors (premiers) remain dominant and isolated.
* Growing democratic deficit, inability to work across systems and borders in all directions (north-south/east-west).

1. Professor in the Department of Political Science and Medicine (Community Health) at Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)