GLOBALIZATION, GOVERNANCE AND THE NEW REGIONALISM: PLANNING RESPONSES IN MONTREAL, CANADA.

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Abstract. The responses of urban areas to globalization have been many and varied. The ever increasing flows of trade, capital, information, and people have forced a re-thinking of the way in which urban areas are governed and managed. Senior levels of government, in an effort to capture increased economic activity, are endeavouring to find ways in which to improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities.

In Canada this has taken the form of creating super-municipalities through the forced amalgamation of suburban local governments with central cities. This has been the case for Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Halifax, Quebec City and Montreal to name but a few. These new cities have responsibilities in the areas of economic development, urban planning, cultural and social development, environmental control, infrastructure provision, and some social welfare activities although these are partially shared with provincial governments.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the changes to planning practice in the region of Montreal following radical municipal reforms started in 2000, in which the Montreal Metropolitan Community was created and all 28 municipalities of the Island of Montreal were amalgamated, and briefly compares these structures to reorganization in Toronto. The case of Montreal is particularly interesting (a) because responsibilities are shared between the new city and the old *arrondissements* and former suburban municipalities, (b) because a regional Metropolitan Community has been set up to manage supra-city concerns, including urban sprawl and social housing, and (c) because a newly elected provincial government promises to review the forced mergers, and through popular referenda to permit the reconstitution of former municipalities.

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Introduction. Globalization can be generally thought of in terms of flows, of trade, commodities, capital, information and people. Globalization has re-emphasized the importance of cities, transportation and communications. Major urban areas are in general becoming larger, and in most countries, they produce a far greater share of the Gross Domestic Product than their share of the population. Markets are world wide, instead of being just local or national, barriers to trade are diminishing, and it is gradually becoming recognized and understood that the welfare of nations depends on the prosperity of urban centres. Public policy in all countries is thus re-focussing on their promotion.

The government, or the governance, as it has come to be known, of large urban areas has become a matter of some importance since the provision of high quality public services is a necessary ingredient to their economic and social success. In North America there are essentially three schools of thought on this subject: first is the traditional idea of two tier of metropolitan government, second is the public choice school who maintain that fragmentation of local government is efficient in controlling costs to the residents, and third, the "new regionalists".

Traditional metropolitan government exponents, very active in the sixties and seventies, argue for a second tier of local government within an urban area, which brings together the central city and the suburban municipalities for the provision of regional services such as economic development, major infrastructure, public transportation, broad-brush land use planning and environmental control, on a cost-shared basis. Matters of a local nature are attended to by the local governments (Orfield 1997). This was the model adopted, to almost universal praise, by Toronto in 1954, and later on by Montreal (1969) and other Canadian cities. It is worth noting however, that the decision to implement metropolitan government did not come from the participating municipalities; in all cases where it was adopted in Canada, it was imposed by the responsible provincial government.

Public choice advocates, on the other hand, maintain that small independent local governments within an urban area are much more sensitive in providing services to their residents, and that people can choose the level of services that they wish to receive. If they are dissatisfied with their municipality they can "vote with their feet" (i.e. move house). Costs, and thus property taxes, are kept low because all municipalities are in competition with each other, and this leads to greater efficiencies. This is usually known as the Tiebout theorem after its progenitor (Tiebout 1956), but there is an enormous amount of active research on this theme (Orstrom and Orstrom 2000). The public choice arguments are usually invoked in Canada whenever a provincial government starts proposing municipal reform.

The third approach to metropolitan government, that of the new regionalists, appeared in the early nineties as globalization prompted a revived interest in the fortunes of cities. (Savitch and Vogel 1996, Scott 2001, Frisken and Norris 2001). The new regionalists promote the ideas of governance rather than government, which is broadly understood to be the cooperation of the state, the market and civil society in managing urban areas. Partnerships and coordination, both vertically and horizontally, throughout the urban system, are considered absolutely essential for an urban centre to be competitive in a globalizing world. Proponents of the new regionalism advocate strategic alliances for service delivery, and tend to present the whole concept as an inevitable outcome of the global economic restructuring of the last decade or so (MacLeod 2001).

This paper examines the recent process of metropolitan restructuring and its implications for planning in the region of Montreal, Canada, and compares it to that in other Canadian urban areas, notably the Toronto urban region. It is particularly striking that despite the world wide regard for the two-tier metropolitan government of Toronto, that recent Canadian metropolitan government reform has concentrated on the solution of amalgamation – the widespread fusion of suburban local governments with the central city, to form a mega-city. These include; London (Ontario) 1993, Halifax-Dartmouth 1996, Toronto 1998, Ottawa 1999, Hamilton 1999, Montreal 2002, Quebec City 2002, and Gatineau 2002.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first looks at the nature of the reorganisation in Montreal; the second at the changes to the planning system; the third at the challenges to the system. The final section concludes that much of the change is due to the arguments brought to the fore by globalization.

It is interesting to speculate on why so many provinces have adopted such a radical approach to the problems of metropolitan government. Both Ontario and Quebec have cited all the well known reasons, the need for integrated service provision, equity, cost-sharing and accounting for externalities, better economic, social and physical planning and an integrated public transportation system. To this fairly traditional list, widely argued since at least the fifties, the new approach highlights the need to be competitive. It seems fairly evident, although not always stated in so many words, that globalization has been a key factor in the move towards uni-cities. This has happened all across eastern Canada in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes. In the west, Winnipeg was constituted as a uni-city in 1972, and the other prairie cities, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary and Edmonton have for the most part grown by the annexation of surrounding territories when warranted by the needs of urban expansion. The notable exception is British Columbia.

It should be remembered that Canada is a federal state made up of ten provinces and three territories. Under the division of powers and responsibilities under the British North America Act of 1867 (now reincarnated as the Constitution Act of 1982), the provinces are responsible for all local government matters, including education and health. Each province thus has its own laws and policies governing municipalities and land use planning which differ in each jurisdiction. The form, extent, responsibilities and governance structures of municipalities are the sole responsibility of each province, who can change or modify them at will. It must be emphasized that local government has no constitutional recognition in Canada. The role of the federal government in urban affairs is indirect (Wolfe 2003).

Restructuring Montreal. The census-defined metropolitan region of Montreal has a population of 3.6 million (2001). Located at the confluence of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers it is spread over two major islands, the Island of Montreal, and Ile Jesus, and along the north and south shores of the rivers. Before the reform, the urban region (roughly the same as the CMA) consisted of over 100 local municipalities, distributed between twelve regional county municipalities (RCMs), (a second tier of local government introduced in the early eighties), and the Montreal Urban Community. The last named was a metropolitan government responsible for the island of Montreal, containing the City of Montreal, population 1.2 million, and 27 suburban municipalities for a total of 1.8 million people.

Municipalities and Population of the Region before the reform (Source: Quebec 2000)

	Island of Montreal	Ile Jesus (Ville Laval)	South Shore	North Shore	TOTAL
Population (millions)	1.8	0.3	0.8	0.4	3.3
Municipalities	28	1	49	27	105

The amalgamation of the twenty eight municipalities on the island of Montreal did not happen overnight: there has been a long history of restructuring in the region as the

population has grown and urbanization spread (Fischler and Wolfe 2000). In the early nineties a task force was struck to examine the problems of the metropolis. The Pichette Commission (1993) decried the lack of overall integrated planning for the region, the wastefulness of urban sprawl, the uneven quality of services, infrastructure and environmental control. It proposed a Regional Council to govern the City-region, the abolition of the twelve RCMs and the formation of four territory-wide service boards for major infrastructure. The cover page of the final report was very typically new regionalist: "Montreal, a city-region; efficient, prosperous and vibrant; international by vocation; at the service of its citizens."
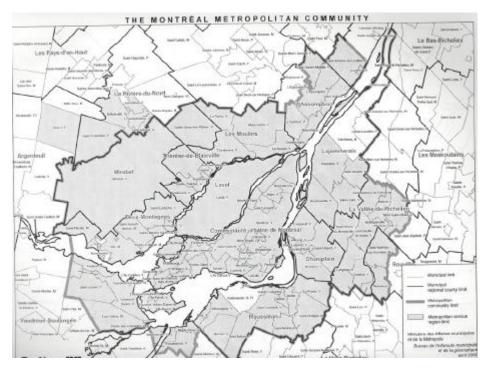
Further studies, debates and proposals followed. The associations of municipalities were on the whole opposed to change. The provincial government instigated another enquiry, the Bédard Commission (1999), to examine the whole question of local government finances and taxation. (In Quebec most municipal revenues are derived from local sources: the property tax, along with user fees, licenses and permits). Bédard's searching analysis of the inequities in the system, and the fiscal burden of the central cities in comparison to their suburbs, led to proposals for wholesale reform in all urban regions. The problem of municipalities within an urban region being in competition with each other for jobs and development was underscored, the duplication of effort, the multiplicity of local units and the interwoven inter-municipal agreements with high transactional costs were found to be hopelessly inefficient, and often counter-productive.

The response of the Quebec government came in a white paper published in March 2000, entitled "Changing our Ways to Better Serve the Public" (Québec 2000). This paper had two thrusts, one to encourage rural municipalities to amalgamate, and the second to reform urban areas. For the urban areas there were two approaches. First, Metropolitan Communities were to be established for the three major urban areas of the province, Montreal, Quebec City and the Outaouais (Hull-Gatineau), to replace the existing urban communities, but these were to be of much larger territorial extent, essentially covering the census-defined metropolitan areas in each case. (In Montreal this is a roughly circular area extending about 30 km. from the centre). The existing RCMs would not be called into question except where they are affected by municipal amalgamations. This is an odd situation since a suburban municipality not in a new city but within a metropolitan region is now subject to four levels of administration: municipal, regional county municipality (RCM), metropolitan municipality, and provincial.

Second, reorganization was to include the amalgamation of municipalities in metropolitan cores, and advisory committees were set up consisting of one administrator and selected local politicians, to examine ways of instituting tax-base sharing and to recommend on possible merger scenarios. For Montreal the proposals debated varied from that espoused by the then mayor of Montreal, Pierre Bourque, "one island-one city", to combining small municipalities into geographic groups. After much debate, and to most people's surprise, the governmental recommendation for Montreal, made public on October 11, 2000, was one island-one city.

It is a curious fact that for all the major urban areas in Quebec, the recommendations of the administrators examining possible merger scenarios were all the same: the total amalgamation of the central city and the surrounding municipalities. Similarly, in Ontario, after the amalgamation of the six municipalities making up Metropolitan Toronto on January 1st. 1998, through the City of Toronto Act (Bill 103), the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing appointed four Special Advisors to make recommendations on the

future of local government in four regions, Ottawa-Carleton, Hamilton-Wentworth, Sudbury and Haldimand-Norfolk. After a ninety day consultation process, all the advisors recommended total regional amalgamation to form mega-cities, with the exception of Haldimand-Norfolk where the proposal was to collapse the region into two cities. These recommendations were honoured by the passing of the "Fewer Municipal Politicians Act" (Bill 25) in 2000, a title which suggests that provincial legislators may hold their local brethren in contempt.
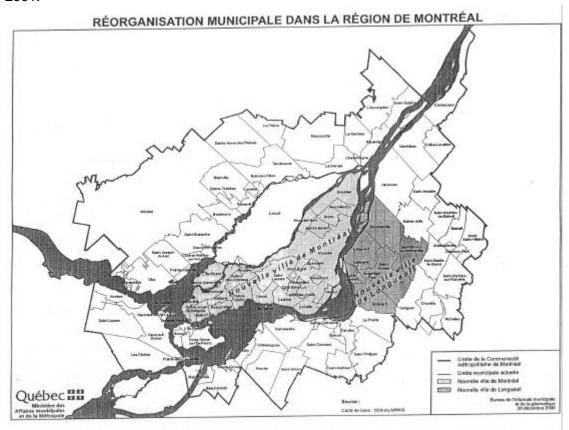

Source: Government of Québec. Municipal Reorganization: Changing Our Ways to Better Serve the Public (2000)

The legislation setting up the **Metropolitan Community** (Loi sur la Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal, L.Q. 2000 c.34) came into effect on January 1, 2001, (as did that for the other metro areas). The Metropolitan Community is responsible for five areas: land-use planning, public transportation, economic development, social housing (a new departure for Quebec second-tier governments, designed to ease the burden on the central city where most low income people live) and tax-base sharing. The council is elected indirectly: it consists of the mayors of the largest municipalities, and representatives of municipalities throughout the region under the chairmanship of the Mayor of the new Montreal. Funding is through assessed shares of local municipalities, and user fees.

In Toronto, by comparison, after the forced fusion of the municipalities of Metro Toronto, a Greater Toronto Area Service Board was set up to manage services in the larger urban region surrounding the new city rather than a metropolitan structure, despite the fact that urbanization, as in Montreal, has spread far outside the new city and is expanding rapidly. The Board was soon declared dysfunctional and disbanded.

The next feature of the Quebec urban reform was the amalgamation of all the core municipalities of the urban centres. For the **new Montreal** this meant the amalgamation of all the twenty eight municipalities on the island, and on the south shore of the St. Lawrence opposite Montreal, the merger of all the former municipalities of the former RCM Champlain to form the new city of **Longueuil**. There was never any hint that Montreal and Longueuil should be amalgamated. The Act to reform municipal territorial organisation in the metropolitan regions of Montreal, Quebec and the Outaouais (Loi portent réforme de l'organisation territoriale municipale des regions métropolitaines de Montréal, de Québec et de l'Outaouais. L.Q. 200 c.56) came into effect on January 1st. 2001.

Source: Government of Québec. Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

There were immediate and extensive public complaints about such draconian measures: some former suburban municipalities had held referenda which demonstrated wholesale opposition to the amalgamations. There were also unsuccessful court cases challenging the changes on the grounds of their threat to local democracy as there had been in Toronto (Moore Milroy 2001, Serré 2003). Nevertheless, transition committees were put into place to oversee the mergers, elections were held in November 2001, and the new cities became operative on January 1st, 2002.

The new City of Montreal, like that of Longueuil and other Quebec cities, was organized into boroughs each with an elected chairperson and two to four councillors, which have the obligation to provide local services, such as garbage removal, local parks and recreation, and including the administration of land use zoning. Some of these boroughs are simply new incarnations of former suburban municipalities, nine are reincarnations of

the old city of Montreal *arrondissments*, while yet others are the product of mergers among small former suburbs. The net result is 26 boroughs making up Montreal and eight in Longueuil. In Montreal, those that were former suburbs have less power than previously, but those that were former *arrondissements* are assuming responsibilities that they did not have before and this latter has involved an interesting decentralization of manpower from City Hall to the newly created borough offices. This is in sharp contrast to Ontario where there is no devolution in the amalgamated cities to a local level: control is severely centralized.

The new city is governed by a 71 member council, but power is in fact concentrated in the hands of the mayor and executive committee, whose members the mayor can appoint and fire at will. The boroughs receive their budgets from the city. The central city retains all powers of taxation, and is the sole employer of city workers.

Planning in the new political entities

The legislation setting up the new metropolitan community and the new cities gives detailed instructions and timetables for the preparation of plans, a process which is now underway. The Metropolitan Community is obliged by law to adopt a plan by December 31st. 2006, and the City of Montreal by December 31st. 2004.

The Montreal Metropolitan Community published an analytical document in 2002 (C.M.M. 2002), which outlines the evolution of the urban region, its major problems, compares the socio-economic characteristics with twenty five other metropolitan areas in North America with a population of over 2 million, and outlines the challenges for the future. The comparative study includes only two other Canadian centres, Toronto and Vancouver.

A second document produced in April 2003, is a vision statement for the year 2025 (C.M.M. 2003). Entitled *Cap sur le monde* (steering towards the world), it sets out an image of the future region which emphasises (a) economic competitiveness and sustainability, (b) solidarity and a shared vision, (c) a tolerant and open society, and (d) an accountable, accessible participatory administrative structure, and outlines in broad general terms, the actions needed to achieve these goals. Public hearings were held throughout the region in May and June, and a more detailed plan will be prepared by the end of this year (2003).

In the new City of Montreal, since January 2002 the newly configured planning department now includes the planning staff of all the former suburban municipalities. The process is very interesting because the department is not starting from zero: the former Urban Community had been engaged in island wide planning since 1970 and its constituent municipalities each have an urban plan and zoning bylaws, many of which have been in operation at least since the sixties.

The process of planning so far has been much more engaged in the task of building consensus around issues than producing physical plans. In 2002 the administration held a number of "Summits" on the future of Montreal – consultation meetings to which were invited stakeholders from the business community, unions, NGOs, representatives of the social sector, especially from education, health and welfare, financial experts, urban specialists from academia, and both politicians and civil servants from the three levels of government, municipal, provincial and federal. The first two rounds of meetings were

held in April (Montréal 2002a). One set was clearly focussed on sectorial issues such as economic development, social and community development, sustainability, democratic life, housing, public security, culture, recreation and sports, infrastructure, and urban planning and transportation. Each was attended by between thirty five and fifty people for a day-long structured debate aimed at identifying priorities for action. The other set was a series of borough consultations, 27 in all, which were aimed at identifying priorities for action in each *arrondissement.* Preparations for these consultations included the publication of a summary document on each of the 14 sectors tackled, and a profile of each of the 27 boroughs.

Reports on these consultations were written up and widely distributed on the web and in the offices of Accès Montreal for further comment and debate by the population at large. The priorities, identification of issues, and commentaries were then brought together by the staff of the planning department, and sorted out into 19 areas for debate in a second round of meetings in June (Montréal 2000b). These were then re-grouped into five major themes; economic development, sustainability, quality of life, democracy, and administration. Questions relating to urban planning, namely environmental management, urban development, and natural and historic preservation were largely discussed under the heading of sustainability, although transportation was subsumed under economic development.

In all areas, issues for debate were clearly outlined before the meetings, and ideas and recommendations were widely publicised afterwards. The mayor of the new city, Gérald Tremblay (2003), reported one year later that over three thousand Montrealers actively participated in the summits, and that more than eighty priorities were identified for immediate action.

One of the outcomes has been the setting up of continuing *chantiers*, task forces on key issues such as economic development, culture, sports and leisure, housing, sustainable development, democratic life and the central area. These are each made up of between 15 and 70 key stakeholders from the business sector and civil society, supported by two full time professional staff. They are intended to ensure the follow-up of the proposals adopted during the summits, and are supposed to meet at least three times a year.

A second outcome was a formal promise by the provincial government to help the new city materially and financially (Montréal 2002b). Most observers see the contribution as too small.

At the same time, a public consultation office has been set up, a feature of the Montreal scene which used to exist in the eighties (during the regime of the Montreal Citizens Movement under Jean Doré, but was abolished in the nineties by the pre-amalgamation regime of Pierre Bourque). The *Office de consultation publique de Montréal* must hold consultations on all planning matters, and on development projects such as institutional complexes, major infrastructure proposals, commercial, industrial and residential developments exceeding 25,000 sq. metres in floor area, and projects relating to historic or cultural buildings or precincts (OCPM 2003).

The nature of discontent and proposed modifications

The debates surrounding restructuring through the forced amalgamation of contiguous urban municipalities to form mega-cities have most often centred on local issues in

addition to the broader traditional arguments of increased efficiency in the planning and management of major infrastructures, the control of sprawl, the fragmented wasteful use of land, the effective management of public transportation, waste management and the environment, in addition to equitable cost-sharing for metropolitan-wide services. However most of the local debates have focussed on much more particular matters. A large segment of the population of Toronto is convinced that the then Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, a conservative, had a personal dislike of the City, and passed the Act to spite its more radical population.

Other observers have suggested that the creation of mega-cities is to do with down-loading the activities of senior levels of government. All through the nineties the federal and the provincial governments underwent extensive restructuring in order to balance their budgets. Many programs were cut out or reduced. The federal government downloaded program costs to the provincial governments, who in turn downloaded certain responsibilities to municipalities. It has been suggested that larger municipalities have greater administrative capacities than small ones, and thus a greater ability to manage downloaded services, so in the future, this will be easier.

In Montreal the debate has also encompassed the language issue (Serré 2003). Municipalities in Quebec have the right to offer bilingual services if more than half the population is Anglophone, and several west-end municipalities on the island of Montreal previously had this right. The new City of Montreal has a majority of francophones, and many english-speakers interpreted the reconfiguration as a plot by the separatist government to deprive them of their democratic rights to debate in their own language. This point was also argued in the court cases.

At the same time, a large part of the debate in both Quebec and Ontario has centred on the loss of local democracy, which is close to the hearts of most urban residents. Big local governments mean much less accessibility to politicians, since the ratio of politicians to residents is much reduced. Further, fewer politicians means that each politician is extraordinarily busy with committee work and the like, and has little time to attend to the minute of day to day local problems. People get lost and feel alienated in faceless government. It was to allay these fears that the Quebec government has opted to invent the boroughs.

Another contentious point is the frequently advanced claim that amalgamation results in economies of scale, largely by eliminating the duplication of services. In line with the public choice theorists, critics point out that this has never been proven. For instance, wages for local government workers will inevitably drift upwards to those of the highest-paid municipality, usually those of the central city, as union negotiations proceed, leading to higher overall costs. Meanwhile advocates of consolidation claim that this is offset by a higher quality and more even distribution of services.

These arguments are not going totally unheard in the region of Montreal. The sweeping changes to the structure of the region were introduced by a *Parti quebecois* government: the Metropolitan Community on January 1st 2001 and the new City of Montreal on January 1st. 2002. In April 2003, the government changed: Quebec elected a Liberal government, who had as part of its platform the promise to permit the de-merger of newly amalgamated municipalities. True to its election promises, the *Loi concernant la consultation des citoyens sur la réorganisation territoriale de certaines municipalites, (Projet de loi 9)* was introduced into the National Assembly in June 2003, and is

presently in the committee stage. If passed it will permit discontented former municipalities to engage in a process leading to succession.

This will not be achieved easily. The draft law requires that such re-organization entails that appropriate proposals be made, that the wish for a local referendum be established (through citizens signing a register), that studies be made on the costs and implications of the resurrection of a former municipality, that a referendum be held, and if positive, that the de-merger occurs. Costs will be borne by the locality. Even if re-constituted, a municipality must make an agreement with the central city on the provision of certain essential services, notably, property assessment, the management of water courses, fire protection, police services, civil protection, municipal courts, public transportation, the disposal and recycling of solid wastes, and arterial roads. Further, it is proposed that a re-constituted municipality must make financial contributions to the central city for social housing and for local economic development, and be subject to the overall structure plan for the urban area.

This process will require that proposals for re-organizations must be made to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs by December 31st. 2003, and it will probably take at least another year for the whole procedure to unfold. There are 42 "new" municipalities in Quebec affected by this legislation, made up of 212 former municipalities.

At the same time the administration of the new City of Montreal, in an effort to counter the threat of succession, has recently proposed a series of reforms to the legislated structures currently in force (Montréal, August 2003). It proposes the further devolution of powers to the boroughs, to give them a greater sense of autonomy in strictly local matters. This includes setting their own operating and capital works budgets (though not collecting taxes), having the rights to charge user fees for increased services, to hire and fire staff, to take part in contract negotiations with unions, purchase local equipment and land, and conduct calls for tenders. Borrowing for capital works would still be the business of the central city, but the borough could have the city borrow on its behalf with the undertaking that such debt would be repaid locally. Under this proposal, boroughs would become responsible for local roads, pesticide use, revenue from parking meters and tickets, and any local matter not listed in the current merger legislation. The number of councillors in each borough would be increased. It is evidently a brave attempt to improve the present situation.

Conclusion – Globalization and the restructuring of Canadian metropolises

While there is much speculation on the precise reasons for provincial governments imposing amalgamation as a solution to the government of urban regions, even a casual reading of the contemporary official documents suggests that the over-riding drive for mega-cities is the global urge towards becoming economically "competitive". They are couched squarely in "new regionalist" terms.

These observations are particularly well illustrated in the case of Montreal. In Quebec's white paper on reorganization, the urban section begins "The importance of urban areas lies in their role in structuring Quebec's territory and the relationship between this territory and the rest of the world. Not only are big cities increasingly taking over from States in the realm of international trade and cultural ties, but medium size urban areas are also encouraged to participate in this trade network." (Québec 2000).

The Montreal Metropolitan Community's background planning document has 114 pages (out of 307) devoted to comparing the Montreal region to twenty six similar regions in North America, something previously unseen in a public planning report, and the title of its visioning document *"Cap sur la monde"* is a direct call to global action (C.M.M. 2002 & 2003).

The Summit meetings preparatory to making a plan for the new City of Montreal have firmly embraced contemporary notions of governance; the cooperation of state, market and civil society. All three sectors are well represented in the various fora that have been assembled and in the follow-up task forces that have been created. Reports of meetings always refer to participants as partners. Planning, above all, has taken a consensus-building turn.

Is the choice of restructuring urban regions through the creation of mega-cities a uniquely Canadian phenomenon? (Sancton 2000). Certainly in North America, this seems to be the case, since the United States, our usual country of reference, has made has made no moves in this direction (Collin *et al.* 2002). Despite the lip service paid to the principal of subsidiarity (which seems to be largely accepted by the European Union), much of Canada does not see this as an option, although the present administration of the new Montreal seems to be moving a little in this direction. For half a century Metro Toronto was considered to be the leader as a model of metropolitan management: one can only wonder if the move towards mega-municipalities will also come to be so admired.

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