



CANADA-EUROPE TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE:
SEEKING TRANSNATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO 21ST CENTURY PROBLEMS

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Research Report

November 2013

**Comparing Modes of Governance in Canada and the European Union:
Social Policy in Multilevel Systems**

Key Messages from Research, by theme

Key messages relating to various themes were derived from groupings of articles (as indicated in the footnotes) from a special issue of *Canadian Public Administration* June 2013 Volume 56, Number 2, devoted to the topic of comparing modes of governance in the EU and Canada. The key themes were extracted by Ivan Dumka, PhD candidate in the Political Science Department at the University of Victoria.

Theme 1: *The Intellectual and Policy Case for Comparing Social Policy Coordination in Canada and the EU*¹

- There has been little systematic comparative work of Canada and the EU because existing frameworks have been conceptually imprecise and failed to emphasize intergovernmental relations.
- Because policy-making in Canada is increasingly decentralized, while in the EU it is increasingly centralized, the two political systems are becoming increasingly comparable. In both there has been a need to promote coordination between different orders of government in order to meet shared goals, suggesting that the two might learn from each other.

- This comparison finds shared principles underlying intergovernmental relations in both Canada and the EU, but that institutional design (i.e. the centralized Westminster parliamentary model used by Canadian provinces and the federal government, and the porous design of EU institutions) plays an important role in deciding how open the process is to non-governmental actors.
- Coordination is an imperfect instrument for policy-making, but may be the only way to effectively govern such large and diverse multi-level systems.

Theme 2: On the Inclusion of Non-State Actors in Policy-Making and its Implications in Canada and the EU²

- Both the Canadian federal government and the European Commission have sought to include civil society groups in social policy since the early 1990s, with the aim of legitimizing their role. However, European groups are included in policy-formation whereas Canadian ones are limited to service delivery.
- In the EU, allowing these groups a role in decision-making has helped alleviate conflicts over goals without the cumbersome auditing used in Canada, and gives governments and service-deliverers means and incentives to improve the performance of social policy.
- Although the EU's approach is imperfect, giving non-state actors a larger role in Canada could help create new links between orders of government, encourage policy learning, and confer greater legitimacy on the policy-making process.

Theme 3: Comparing Employment, Pensions, and Post-Secondary Education Policy in Canada and the EU³

- In Canada a federal constitutional and spending role in several policy areas has complicated coordination with the provinces, resulting in a tangle of federal and provincial programmes. Limiting its role to coordination, the EU has had more success coordinating social policy on a pan-European basis among its members.
- Insular institutions in Canada have excluded civil society actors from policy-making, limiting the scope for coordination and mutual learning, as compared with the more open approach of the Commission.

- Canadian social policy would benefit from borrowing benchmarking, public reporting, peer review, and institutionalized interaction between orders of government. The chief barrier is a lack of political will and public awareness. Non-state actors in Canada may need to be approached differently than the EU by providing a separate forum for exchange and learning.

¹ Erika Arban “La subsidiarité en droit européen et canadien: Une comparaison”, pp. 219-34; Herman Bakvis; “‘In the shadows of hierarchy’: Intergovernmental governance in Canada and the European Union”, pp. 203-218; Thomas Hueglin, “Treaty federalism as a model of policy making: Comparing Canada and the European Union”, pp. 185-202; and Amy Verdun and Donna E. Wood “Governing the social dimension in Canadian Federalism and European integration”, pp. 173-84.

² Rachel Laforest, “Shifting scales of governance and civil society participation in Canada and the European Union”, pp. 235-51; Heather Millar, “Comparing accountability relationships between governments and non-state actors in Canadian and European international development policy”, pp. 252-69; and Julie M. Simmons, “The role of citizens in the “soft law” of select social policy areas in Canada and the European Union”, pp. 270-86.

³ Barbara Haskel, “‘Where there’s a will...’: Reforming postsecondary education in Canada’s and the European Union’s decentralized systems”, pp. 305-22; Patrick Marier, “Who pays the piper calls the tune? Comparing Canada’s and the European Union’s expansionary roles in pensions”, pp. 323-38; Thomas Townsend, “Networked learning in complex policy spaces: A practitioners reflection on the open method of coordination”, pp. 339-50; and Donna Wood, “Comparing employment policy and governance regimes in Canada and the European Union”, pp. 287-304.