R. Young, P. Faucher, and A. Blais, “The Concept of Province Building: A Critique,” *CJPS* 17:4 (December 1984)

**Overview:**

“Province-building” as a concept has gained a wide currency. Article examines the literature on province building, and the concept more generally, and determines that the generalizations that constitute province-building are not adequately supported by the evidence. Lines of research are suggested; it is also suggested that the term/concept be abandoned.

**Province building:** encompasses (in part) a picture of the changing federation. Term was coined by Black and Cairns in 1966 article – and has since been incorporated widely within the PS literature. Concept is highly amorphous and complex – with analysts picking and choosing which facets to explore at any one time. Moreover, concept has obscured interesting variations in provincial policy that deserve study.

Term generally applies to the following process:

* Post WWII, provincial constitutional responsibilities increased with rise of welfare state
* 1960s saw provincial docility with respect to taxation and shared-cost arrangements evaporate
* Growth in provincial states (capacity) enabled provinces to mind their own backyards, intervene more readily on policy and with a mind to provincial growth
* Trends have 2 major effects:
  + Conflict between central and provincial governments has increased
  + Provincial economic policies seriously fragment Cdn common market, impeding coherent response to international economic forces
* Despite differing definitions – general agreement with respect to 2 basic features:
  + Province building considered to be a *recent* phenomenon
  + Understood to be a *general* process occurring in all Cdn provinces

**Analysis:**

Authors reject the concept on 3 main grounds:

* Generalizations often ignore important exceptions
* Changes in the provinces may not have affected either state operations or the federal system in the way depicted in province-building image
* Inadequate account is taken of pre-1960 events – discontinuity often described where none exists, and recent change is magnified.

**Conclusions:**

* Empirical evidence advanced in support of trends constituting “province-building” not very convincing – concept is over-general and users often find hx discontinuity where none exists
* Staunch jurisdictional defence and exigent demands on Ottawa are not new, nor are they uniform across policy fields or provinces
* Revenues have increased, but this does not necessarily go hand in hand with increased autonomy
* “Province-building” does not constitute a recognizable whole and its deployment as such impedes precise analysis of provincial and federal-provincial activity. For a concept to be used scientifically, the elements that constitute it must be logically interrelated, and they must occur together empirically. Otherwise, the concept is merely a rhetorical device or a loose description”Implications of the concept are profoundly anti-federalist. It de-emphasizes the regional distinctiveness, which acts as a basic justification of the establishment of federal vs. unitary states.

“If the concept has served some hx purpose, this has probably now run its course and the use of province-building will decline. We think it should”