D. Cameron and R. Simeon, “Intergovernmental Relations in Canada: The Emergence of Collaborative Federalism,” *Publius* 32 (2002): 49-71

**Overview**

Article describes and explains recent trends in Cdn fed-ism and IGR in Canada. “Executive federalism” or “federal-provincial diplomacy” has long been considered a defining characteristic of Cdn IGR, with its combination of federalism and Westminster-style cabinet govt. However, in recent years, there have been a number of changes. Cameron and Simeon argue that executive federalism has increasingly been informed by practices of “collaborative federalism” which is characterized by the principal of co-determination of national policies rather than Ottawa-led cooperative federalism, or the later periods of competitive federalism.

**Background**

* Cameron and Simeon admit up-front that they are not posting a dramatic break with past conceptualizations of federalism in Canada (new trends have roots in what preceded it and there is much continuity)
* Hx of IGR in Canada:
  + Cooperative fed-ism made the Cdn welfare state possible
  + Fed-prov conflict began with the Quiet Revolution, and came to a head with NEP program with Alberta, and the Constitution with Quebec
  + Divided country regionally and posed difficult questions about the character of Canada’s political communities, and the role of govts in defining/shaping them
  + By mid-1980s IGR agenda had changed again, and Mulroney attempted to bring Quebec back in through Constitutional amendment – Meech Lakc
  + Citizen opposition to executive federalism grew during this period
  + Big change in the provinces in the 90s – with the politics of fiscal deficits driving the shift to a new model of IGR – broad consensus that public sector debt too high
  + Ottawa’s power over provinces reduced with cuts to fiscal transfers, which resulted in “secondary downloading” of monies from provinces to their agencies (hospitals, municipalities, universities/colleges, schools, social agencies, etc)

**Collaborative Federalism**

* These developments set the stage for collaborative federalism – a process by which national goals are achieved not by federal govt acting alone or even shaping provincial behaviour through exercising its spending power, but rather by some or all provinces and territories active collectively
  + Can take two forms: (1) Fed/Prov/Territory acting all together in a balance; or (2) Prov/Territory acting together with Ottawa on the sidelines
* Collaborative model has important impact of institutions of IGR – perhaps the most obvious being on the role/position of the Annual Premiers Conference (APC)
  + APC has evolved into significant IGR institution – and has become more prominent as the frequency and significance of fed-prov First Ministers’ Conferences (FMC) have declined
  + Ministerial Councils are also on the rise (in terms of numbers as well as institutional status) – i.e. the Provincial/Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal has been particularly active
* Common threads in Collaborative Federalism
  + Equality btw provinces and Ottawa underlined by fact that councils/meetings co-chaired by a federal and provincial minister
  + Northern Territories are now integrated with the provinces
  + Relative absence of Quebec – though usually its representatives participate in the meetings, it has disassociated itself from some agreements
  + Most agreements stress that formal constitutional powers assigned to govts remain unchanged – goal is to exercise these powers in a “coordinated manner”
  + Consistent with doctrine of NPM
* Hwr, compared to Germany or EU, Canadian IGR remain highly fluid and ad hoc – process has no constitutional or legislative base, little backup by bureaucrats, no formal decision-rules, and no capacity for authoritative decision-making
* Additionally, there are many potential costs to the collaborative model (coming out of the EU):
  + Joint-decision trap: emerges when autonomous, interdependent actors committed to consensus decision making seek to make a decision
  + Time and cost of coordination can escalate and solutions may be avoided or be distilled to lowest common denominator
  + Political/institutional concerns of actors – for status and recognition – can dominate the substantive issues
  + Issues meeting the democratic expectations of citizens
    - Banting: federalism values and democratic values are often in tension

**Conclusion**

* Collaborative federalism needs to be set in larger context of Cdn multi-level governance
* Strong forces push for further elaboration of the collaborative model:
  + Relatively even balance of federal and provincial power and statue
  + High degree of interdependence among govts
  + Desire for administrative efficiency and clarity
  + Interests of citizens in the collective ability of govts to meet their needs
* Yet, much of the logic of Cdn federalism stands in the way – including the lack of a unifying national party system, lack of mobility of officials and politicians btw the two levels, competition to gain credit and avoid blame, the importance of regional and ideological divisions among govts, inequality in wealth distribution among provinces – all push towards adversarial relationships
* Collaborative federalism will grow, or not, depending on the needs of federal and provincial elites, and their constituents.
* Regardless, it is part of the federal “condition” in Canada