Review: The Limits of Boundaries: Why City-Regions Cannot be Self-Governing, by Andrew Sancton

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constituted global demos is not a precondition for global democracy; the demos may emerge gradually once the world’s citizens have been invited to think of themselves—and act—as powerful and important agents in global governance.

Why would states, the current power wielders, agree to this project? Archibugi accepts the realist premise that states are self-interested and generally resist the procedural and ethical constraints of democracy in their foreign policy choices. Indeed, he criticizes mainstream liberals for assuming that democracies are intrinsically virtuous and pacific. Instead, Archibugi endorses an evolutionary view that states are likely to be pressured to accept reforms by powerful economic, technological, and political currents beyond their control. States have already begun to adapt to transnational and democratic pressures in order to remain legitimate and effective in certain policy areas. He offers the European Union as evidence but at the same time laments the position of the United States, particularly during the recent Bush administration’s tenure.

American imperialism and militarism have led many to recoil at the discourse of cosmopolitanism, for the Bush administration claimed to act on global interests to spread human freedom and democratic governance, yet did so unilaterally. Archibugi acknowledges that critics of cosmopolitan democracy worry that the powerful states simply use themes of universality and post-sovereign politics as tools to dominate and intervene in weaker states. Hence, cosmopolitanism is frequently viewed as a threat to international legality and order. Archibugi successfully rebuts the view that cosmopolitanism is inherently or necessarily coercive and hegemonic. However, his dismissal of the norms of non-interventionism and sovereign equality as quaint relics that do little to curb the abuse of great powers is perhaps too hasty. The choice, for both cosmopolitan partisans and global citizens, need not be framed as one between the “old” and “new” (or sovereignty and cosmopolitan democracy). Moreover, it is difficult to prove that existing procedural norms and constraints are utterly ineffective checks on power. To be a cosmopolitan partisan, then, does not necessarily entail a rejection of sovereignty, full stop. It may be that a non-absolutist form of sovereign equality is an important and legitimate element in the transition to a global constitutional order.

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The Limits of Boundaries: Why City-regions Cannot be Self-Governing
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This book is a welcome addition to debate about the politics of cities and city-regions. It examines two fundamental questions of global and Canadian importance. First, should cities and city-regions be self-governing? Second, if yes, how are the boundaries of these territorial units to be determined, particularly in light of urban demographic change, the physical expansion of cities, service and infrastructure deficits, and the challenges of multilevel governance? These are critical questions that have received surprisingly little attention in political science, particularly given the call for more autonomy by urban advocates and big city mayors in Canada and the global challenge of advancing models of metropolitan management and governance that can keep pace with the scale of urban change.

Sancton’s understanding of the importance of cities in innovation and wealth creation in society is clear. What he asks, however, is whether the global, national and regional economic significance of cities should necessarily lead to them becom-
ing more autonomous and self-governing. Moreover, even if this is desirable, practically, how would this occur? Given that self-government “requires that there be a territory delimited by boundaries,” city autonomy is failed from the start, he argues, because “boundaries will never be static, will never be acceptable to all, and will always be contested” (3). In short, Sancton argues that cities cannot be self-governing. “Boundaries fatally limit the capacity of cities to be self-governing” (3) due to the number of practical problems that would have to be addressed even if self-government was desirable. For example, what process would be used to determine and negotiate boundaries? Sancton builds his position by challenging the arguments of leading city advocates like Jane Jacobs and Alan Broadbent, and by surveying the theory and evidence of other experiments and experiences with urban self-government.

The Limits of Boundaries is a small book with only 137 pages of written text. As such, it is concise and covers a lot of ground quickly. Following the introduction, the next chapter lays the foundation for the remaining discussion in the book. It examines Jane Jacobs’ ideas for urban autonomy, the role these ideas played in inspiring other Toronto-based advocates to lobby for provincial-like authority for Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and how the politics of boundaries and autonomy have or have not been addressed in existing literature. In her 1985 classic, Cities and the Wealth of Nations, Jacobs explained the economic benefits a city-region may gain through the export of goods and services produced in a city with an independent currency. Sancton reconsiders the argument and city examples used by Jacobs—Singapore, Copenhagen and Amsterdam and Rotterdam. He does not disagree with the assessment that more economic benefits may be achieved through an autonomous city-state, or that a city currency may be beneficial to some small-scale city exporters. The issue is that debates about greater economic independence, particularly but not exclusively tied to a single city-state currency, cannot begin until the territorial boundaries of a city-region are agreed upon and confirmed and that the global economic relations of cities today are carefully considered in relation to more independence. This is important given that the economic fortunes of many cities that might be good candidates for more autonomy are intimately bound up with other nearby cities that exist in different states.

This chapter also examines some of the theoretical arguments for local autonomy advanced by leading urban scholars like Warren Magnusson. For admirers of Magnusson or Jacobs, Sancton’s focus on how these authors do or do not treat the issue of boundaries may seem too selective given their overall contribution to the field of local and urban politics. For example, Sancton principally examines Magnusson’s 1996 book, Search for Political Space, but he does not consider more recent work by Magnusson in which the author considers the problems of boundaries and autonomy directly (“Protecting the Right of Local Self-Government,” Canadian Journal of Political Science 38.4, 2005: 897–922). The issue here, however, is more about Sancton’s style and scope rather than substance. Sancton is interested in assessing how the issues of autonomy and boundaries have been addressed by urban scholars. It is not a review of the legacy of scholarship on Canadian urban politics.

The chapters that follow build on the arguments and observations in chapter 1. Chapter 2 considers the history and stability of boundary creation and the role of central governments in this endeavour. Chapter 3 examines these same issues but in relation to municipal corporations and the practical problems municipalities confront if they want to or try to change boundaries, or when trying to create alternative governing arrangements that encompass larger territorial boundaries, such as two-tier systems. Chapter 4 examines existing “city-states” in theory and practice using examples from Europe, such as in Switzerland, Germany and Spain. Throughout, the book is interspersed with discussions and hypothetical scenarios about provinces and cities in Canada, but with a clear emphasis on Southern Ontario and the Greater Toronto
Region, which is taken up in the penultimate chapter. The conclusion is a short recap of arguments advanced. At the same time, it also offers a small glimpse into central issues that readers might have liked Sancton to treat in more detail.

Sancton states that it is not necessary to “redesign the ways in which our city-regions are governed; rather we need to make better use of the wide array of institutions we already have” (134). He continues, stating that debate and conflict about the relative role of provincial governments and local authorities are endemic: “We need strong municipalities and local authorities involved in a great variety of public services, and we need strong provincial governments that lay down the general policies and ensure that they are not violated” (136). In light of Sancton’s focus on refuting the theoretical argument and practical ability to provide municipalities with more autonomy, it would have been valuable if the final chapter or an additional chapter had elaborated on these observations about the future relationship between local authorities and other levels of government.

In the preface, Sancton acknowledges that the book may be considered too negative and institutionally conservative (xii). While some may agree, the area of greatest potential improvement is not necessarily in tone, but in the choice to focus so much attention on refuting the arguments for self-government in lieu of advancing a vision for how cities may be positioned in the future federation and to answering some of the important questions the author advances. If self-government is not achievable, what does it mean to accept that complexity is a natural part of urban governance (102)? How does this challenge or facilitate policy innovation at the local level? Indeed, there may not be a definitive answer to the question of “who does what” (134), but some consideration of “how much of what” (see Thomas Hueglin, “The Principle of Subsidiarity: Tradition-Practice-Relevance,” Constructing Tomorrow’s Federalism, ed. Ian Peach, Winnipeg MA: University of Manitoba Press, 2007, 202) would have been a welcome addition to the book given the ongoing absence of a clear federal urban agenda and Sancton’s contribution to discussions and debates about the place of cities in the Canadian federation. Given that more self-government is not desirable or practically feasible according to Sancton, what theoretical and practical insights follow?

This book is concise, readable, well referenced and researched. It makes an important contribution to the study of cities in Canada and it will serve as an excellent reference for practitioners and scholars. It can also serve to spark debate and discussion in Canadian university courses on federalism and Canadian urban politics. Further, where the book ends, other scholars should begin by carefully reflecting on the practical and theoretical problem that remains: what is the place of cities and city-regions in the future federation and how will their potential be realized?

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Les idéologies politiques
Danic Parentau et Ian Parenteau
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La table des matières de ce petit ouvrage de moins de 200 pages n’est pas sans rappeler celle du classique Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal de Terence Ball et Richard Dagger, dont nous avons fait la recension dans cette même revue, il y a une dizaine d’années. Cependant, bien qu’il s’agisse des mêmes idéologies, les perspectives sont différentes. Ball et Dagger remontent jusqu’à la Grèce antique pour mesurer les idéologies à l’aune de l’idéal démocratique. Danic et Ian Parenteau, quant