COMPARATIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
Organized Complexity, Creativity and Resilience

Focus and Scope of the Course

A widespread belief is that many of the problems and anxieties that citizens experience are beyond the proper sphere of their local units of government. There is some truth in this but it is not the whole truth. Most essential public goods and services are produced at the local level, often with a high degree of citizen involvement. In this way, people are, or can be, co-creators of the world in which they live. The course explores opportunities and limitations for co-creation and coproduction in different political systems over the world. The focus of the course is on organized complexity, institutional creativity and resilience.

The case studies used for illustration range widely, involving democracies in Europe and North America and other forms of governance in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Special emphasis will be given to the Canadian experience and what makes that experience similar to that of other federal societies and what makes it unique. The course is truly comparative in method and content.

The course unpacks the meaning of organized complexity, institutional creativity and resilience in at least three ways:

1. To present and discuss why we have different political systems – unitary and federal - and what difference do these contrasting forms of democratic governance make in the organization and conduct of local government and for the capacity of people to govern themselves. France and Italy exemplify unitary states, while the United States and Canada serve as representatives of federal systems.
2. To explore how people in other parts of the world creatively confront collective action challenges in political and economic development. The meaning of local public economy goes beyond the formal institutions of government and draws attention to what rules can people give to themselves to enhance and enrich collective existence.
3. To offer examples of the capacity of people to be good neighbors and the extent which they engage in the realization of “democracy of everyday life” and what often generates conflict over environmental resources and uses.
Poli 318. Comparative Local Government: organized complexity, creativity and resilience in collective action. Fall 2018

Items on Order in the Bookstore
The following works are available for you to acquire as part of your working library.
Course Pack.


Methods of Work and Requirements
The presentation in the lectures will follow the general sequence of the topical outline. The development of effective work habits for independent scholarship is essential if students are to be able to pursue their scholarly and educational interests on their own. Each person will be responsible for sustaining an active reading program. To facilitate this, I have assigned readings according to the expected time we shall be spending on each topic.

Grading:
Option A:
conference attendance and participation (10%);
midterm exam (30%);
final exam (40%);
a no-more-than-10 pages paper (double-spaced) (20%) that can take different forms: what democracy of everyday life looks like in your neighborhood (or if you are from Montreal, focus on your borough), or a critical assessment of one of the required texts noted above I am open to other essay topics that focus on the creativity in collective undertakings the world over.

Option B:
midterm (30%);
final exam (55%),

Poli 318. Comparative Local Government: organized complexity, creativity and resilience in collective action. Fall 2018

conference attendance and participation (15%)

You would need to tell me, in writing, no later than October 29, 2018, which option you choose for grading purpose.

May I also remind you about plagiarism and intellectual integrity.

Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information in English and French).

TOPICAL OUTLINE AND ASSIGNED READINGS

Topic I.

Creativity, Resilience and Organized Complexity

1. Mental Methods and Memory: New Strategies for Thinking (Sept. 5, 10, 12, 17, 19)

Required Readings: Course Pack.


Topic II.

Federal and unitary political systems and relationship to public services

2. Modern Centralized Government and Administration: Moving away from Gargantua (France and Italy) (Sept. 24, 26, Oct. 1, 3, 10)
Poli 318. Comparative Local Government: organized complexity, creativity and resilience in collective action. Fall 2018

Required Readings: Course Pack

- Two diagrams: French administrative organization and evolution of ideological political families in French politics. Study these carefully.

Midterm exam: October 15. (in class)

3. Federalism, Gargantua and Diversity: Inherent Tensions. The USA and Canada (Oct. 17, 22, 24, 29, 31)

Required Readings: Course Pack


**Topic III.**

Democracy of Everyday Life: Civic Competence and Conflict
4. Good Neighbors and Conflict (Nov. 5, 7, 12, 14)
Required Readings: Text and Course Pack

5. Creating and Maintaining Peace, Order and Security (Nov. 19, 21)
Required Readings: Course Pack

6. Creativity, Resilience and Collective Efforts (Nov. 29, Dec. 4, 6)
Required Readings:

And choose 2 readings from the following:

8. Conclusions: What We Have Done and What Remains To Be Done
Poli 318. Comparative Local Government: organized complexity, creativity and resilience in collective action. Fall 2018
Poli 318. Comparative Local Government: organized complexity, creativity and resilience in collective action. Fall 2018