

**Title:** Cities and the World: Interrogating the Promise and Perils of Political Decentralization in Age of Trumpism

## **Abstract**

As recognized for decades, many nation-states have been weakened in the face of ongoing globalizations and a corresponding series of legitimization crises. Often scholarly work has lamented this weakening, usually characterizing it as resulting from the historical development of the neoliberal order over the last half-century. However, of late a number of keen observers – coming from the left, right, and center – have discerned salutary – even emancipatory – possibilities in these trends, especially for a structural change in the scalar basis of political power toward greater decentralization. In particular, the possibilities for enhancing bottom-up community control of subnational units, especially cities and regions, has been suggested as a means both for resisting the directives of increasingly authoritarian and neoliberalizing centralized organs of power, as well as for advancing egalitarian and democratic forms of political-economic reconstruction. Embedded in this promise lie a number of potential perils, however, which need to be understood analytically and normatively in order to develop appropriate prescriptions for both policy and institutional design.

Given this context, recent attention has been given to an eclectic array of framings of the broad notion of political decentralization. These include the idea of regional autonomy (within a framework of multilevel governance), secession (in various forms), Lefebvrian autogestion and rights to the city, subsidiarity, David Harvey's "rebel cities," Ben Barber's "vertical separation of powers," Bruce Katz's "metropolitan revolution," Warren Magnusson's "seeing like a city," Gar Alperovitz's "pluralist commonwealth," Bulkeley et al.'s "enhanced urban autonomy," Elinor Ostrom's "polycentrism," and many, many others. In the US, out of these impulses have come specific struggles and practices including the sanctuary cities movement, participatory budgeting, the Fight for \$15, etc., as well as the self-governing and autonomy-enhancing measures taken by state-level governments like California and large cities such as New York. Outside the US, we see innovative democratic institutions at the local level at the same time as growing inequality and economic forces limit the potential for democratic urban development. How cities respond to the challenges of multilevel governance reflect the extent to which decentralization brings about progress for city dwellers across the globe.

1:30-1:45      **Introduction**

Ronald K. Vogel, Ryerson University

1:45-2:45      **Panel 1 Normative Perspectives on Political Decentralization**

Moderator:      David Imbrsocio, University of Louisville

Panelists:      Warren Magnusson, University of Victoria

                  Loren King, Wilfrid Laurier University

                  Russell Arben Fox, Friends University

                  David Imbroscio, University of Louisville

3:00-4:00      **Case studies of Political Decentralization and Urban Politics Across the World**

Moderator: Maureen Donaghy, Rutgers University, Camden

Panelists: Eduardo Moncada, Barnard College, Columbia

Emmanuel Frimpong Boamah, University of Buffalo

Alison Post, University of California, Berkeley

4:15-5:00      **Decentralization and Its Discontents in Comparative Perspective**

Moderator Jeffrey Paller, University of San Francisco

Panelists Ruth Carlitz, University of Gothenburg

Adam Harris and Felix Hartmann, University of Gothenburg

Yue Zhang, University of Illinois at Chicago

5:10-5:30:      **Summary and Conclusions**

Richard Stren, University of Toronto