

*Fields of Authority: Special Purpose Governance in Ontario, 1815-2015* by Jack Lucas

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and political roots. Regional geography, the scholarly subject, and government interest in regional development intersected to influence planning in Toronto and its surrounding geographical areas. White's account of how these discourses became relevant in Toronto not only lends the book applicability outside the city, but also underscores Toronto's place in within the broader trajectory of planning history.

Over the book's five chapters, the narrative unfolds as an utterly potent and interesting angle with which to explore the city's broader history. The successes and failures of past planning efforts, and their ideological underpinning, reveal how we got to where we are and offer a glimpse at

the constraints with which future efforts will contend. Thus, to call this book a monumental accomplishment in the academic nooks of Ontario history or planning history would insufficiently represent its contemporary relevance and potential appeal. *Planning History* merits wide readership. I hope that Toronto's elected officials and career civil servants count as many among them. The lessons of Toronto's history are presented too eloquently, and too pointedly, to ignore.

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### *Fields of Authority: Special Purpose Governance in Ontario, 1815-2015*

by Jack Lucas

IPAC Series in Public Management and Governance.

Toronto, Ontario: U of T Press, 2016. 320 pages. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN 9781487500184. ([www.utpress.utoronto.ca](http://www.utpress.utoronto.ca))

**I**nstitutional change is often a slow process that takes place on a timescale perhaps comparable to a glacier; “taken individually, political institutions often seem solid as granite, unmoved and unchanging for decades” (3-4). In *Fields of Authority*, Jack Lucas turns his attention to a particular type of political institution that is responsible for many of the public services Canadians have come to expect and take for granted: the special purpose body, more commonly known in the field of public administration as “agencies, boards, and commissions” or ABCs. To extend Lucas’ geology metaphor, special purpose bodies are responsible for managing many of the types of public goods and services that form the bedrock of society: park boards, conservation agencies, school boards, boards of

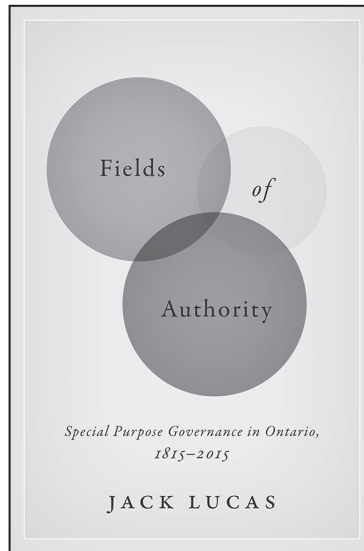
health, and hydro power commissions are just a few examples. So ubiquitous are these institutions and so wide-ranging are their responsibilities that they have somehow managed to attract little scholarly attention. Perhaps the lack of study stems from the assumption that these institutions have always existed largely unchanged. In any case, as Lucas asserts, “when we step back the magnification, so that we can see many institutions at once we soon realize that Canadian institutions, like all others, float atop a roiling sea of change” (4).

*Fields of Authority* is an impressive work that fills a gap on a subject that has otherwise received little attention. Both a history of special purpose governance in Ontario and an examination of institutional change, Lucas uses special purpose bod-

ies as a vehicle through which to examine institutional change. Lucas' systematic analysis of special purpose bodies is based on exhaustive archival research of "two centuries of political history, collecting hundred of instances of institutional change" (11). Lucas employs the theories of policy fields and punctuated-equilibrium to analyze the evolution and institutional change of ABCs. These small, incremental instances of change, perhaps unremarkable in and of themselves, is what leads to long-term change.

Lucas' study is divided into two parts. Part I examines the history of special purpose bodies, using Kitchener, Ontario as a case study. Lucas selected Kitchener because it was an "aficionado" (8) or early adopter of special purpose bodies in many cases. Lucas' work is so impressive that it is hard to find fault. While Kitchener was enthusiastic about ABCs, this part of the book may have benefitted from greater contextualization—were there towns in Ontario that were more weary or resistant to employing ABCs as a method of governance? If so, why? How do other towns' histories of special purpose governance compare with Kitchener's experience?

Lucas' history of Kitchener's experience with special purpose bodies in Part I culminates in the province taking a greater interest in its municipal creatures. This makes for a smooth transition to the second part of Lucas' study in which he examines three fields of special purpose body at



the provincial scale and how these fields came to be governed by ABCs: education and school boards, public health, and hydro commissions. From these three case studies, it appears that a pattern of institutional change emerges—creation, specialization, consolidation, and generalization—but Lucas cautions that “we have abstracted from the particulars of each case in order to observe this general sequence” (201).

Lucas' engaging writing style makes the subject of special purpose governance accessible to a broad audience. *Fields of Authority* is a valuable addition to the field of local governance in particular. Lucas' systematic approach to the history of special purpose bodies and institutional change would serve as a good model for similar studies of ABCs in other jurisdictions. Those interested in education policy or municipal governance in Ontario will be particularly interested by the history of school boards in Chapter 5 and local boards of health in Chapter 6. Policy practitioners will also find Lucas' approach to the history of special purpose bodies useful for greater historical context when undertaking reviews of ABCs.

*Fields of Authority* demonstrates that institutions—despite in some cases being older than the province itself and seemingly constant and static bodies—are in fact ever changing.

Vanessa LeBlanc