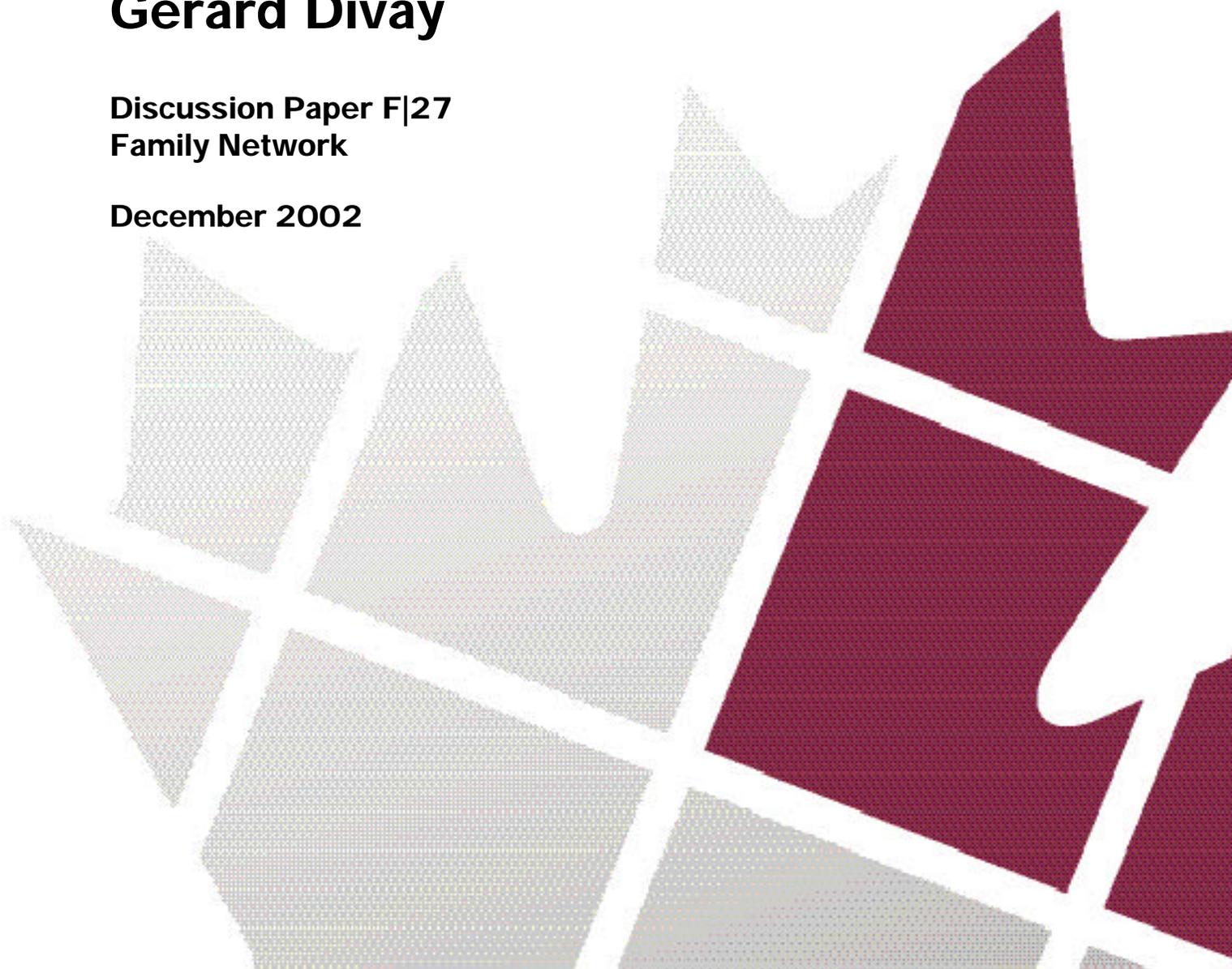


Urban Poverty: Fostering Sustainable and Supportive Communities

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Foreword

It is now widely acknowledged that Canada's cities need help if they are to reach their economic potential and offer a high quality of life to their citizens. Indeed, there is growing evidence that social and economic conditions have deteriorated for many urban citizens, the most vulnerable being single-parent families, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, visible minorities, elderly women, and the disabled.

Major questions remain as to what kind of help the cities need and from whom. And here much attention has turned to the federal government, even though the constitution says that municipalities are the "creatures" of the provinces, and most provinces guard this role jealously.

To help clarify the potential roles for Ottawa, CPRN commissioned four papers. The first four focus on urban poverty, immigration, Aboriginal people, and housing. A fifth provides an overview of the ideas in the first four papers, and includes the reflections of a diverse group of Canadians from many sectors who participated in a Roundtable. Each of the papers provides a summary of the state of knowledge in their area and then sets out possible actions for the federal government.

All four papers point to the challenges of governance of our cities. And, despite the constitutional division of powers, there is no question that the federal government is one of the key actors in Canada's cities by virtue of the fact that so many people live in cities and so much economic activity takes place there. The government is an actor as an employer, as a regulator, as a source of transfer payments to individuals, and as a taxing authority which sets many of the incentives with respect to social and economic behaviour. However, the federal government is only one of many actors. None of the policy actors – federal, provincial, municipal, corporate or voluntary – is in a position to function effectively on its own. The actions of all the actors are part of a densely woven fabric of governance which shapes the economic and social sustainability of cities.

This paper, by Anne-Marie Séguin and Gérard Divay, explores the role of the various levels of government, particularly the federal government, in fostering socially sustainable communities in Canada's major urban areas, especially in poor neighbourhoods. I would like to thank the authors for their excellent survey of the literature, their thoughtful proposals and their active participation in the Roundtable, as well as Leslie Seidle, who ably conceived, organized, and edited all the papers during a six-month assignment with CPRN. I also wish to thank the funders, listed at the end of the document, who provided essential financial support for the project.

Judith Maxwell
December 2002

Executive Summary

This paper addresses the spatial distribution of poverty and its effects, and, from the perspective of policy development, discusses issues related to the objective of fostering socially sustainable communities in Canada's major urban areas, especially in poor neighbourhoods.

The first section provides an overview of the "geography of poverty" in Canada's largest cities. Research shows that in 1996 poverty was on the rise, accompanied by an increase in the spatial concentration of poverty in several major metropolitan areas. However, it would be wrong to conclude that this revealed extreme contrasts, with some neighbourhoods experiencing multiple deprivation, while others remained free of poverty and social problems. In fact, studies show that there is still a social mix within poor areas and that not all poverty is concentrated in the inner cities of major urban centres. The paper then deals with the question of neighbourhood effects. Does living in a neighbourhood with a high concentration of poverty seriously diminish the life chances of a child or adult? A survey of studies carried out elsewhere reveals that neighbourhood effects influence the lifelines of children and adults living in poor neighbourhoods, but to a lesser degree than individual or family characteristics. The paper raises two other elements that have not been sufficiently studied: the varying abilities of communities to take responsibility at the local level, and the existence of certain obstacles (such as commercial "redlining") that accentuate poverty.

The Sgro report (2002) recognized that two trends – the increase in and concentration of poverty – are significant social issues; it called for sustained governmental intervention to halt impoverishment and to reduce the negative effects of the relative concentration of poverty in major Canadian cities. What forms of intervention will create socially sustainable neighbourhoods, regardless of the wealth of their residents? What is the appropriate "responsibility mix" among governments, municipalities and community organizations, and what areas should be given priority? The example of Montreal is somewhat helpful in this regard. This paper observes that actions directed at individuals (in their family context) are very important. Montreal, which has numerous characteristics that make it highly vulnerable (serious poverty, a fairly high concentration of poor people), attests to the importance of policy intervention by central governments (federal and provincial) in key areas such as education, health and social security. These "aspatial" policies have territorial effects, especially in poor neighbourhoods, since they provide poor populations with high quality services wherever they live, as well as encouraging a social mix in both under-privileged and other neighbourhoods. Thus, we must not underestimate the long-term spatial effects of either universal or general policies (which target all individuals) as compared to the effects of spatially focused (targeted) initiatives that are more visible (including politically) in the short term.

The second lesson is that initiatives that target poor neighbourhoods can also have positive effects; these initiatives may be undertaken by central governments (often in partnership with local organizations) or by other institutions, such as municipalities and associations (often with the financial support of the two higher levels of government). There has been a deterioration of the physical environment and the social fabric in some of Montreal's more vulnerable neighbourhoods. Where neighbourhood conditions have deteriorated significantly, certain targeted initiatives have been developed to support general policies. This paper reviews certain

examples of this type of initiative. It suggests that the positive effects of general policies aimed at individuals and families can be reinforced if they are supported by targeted actions, especially if these policies help to integrate complementary actions throughout the urban area.

The paper raises questions about inter-sectoral initiatives and methods used to structure comprehensive action, particularly methods used in inter-organizational relations (especially multi-level relations). With regard to targeted interventions, there are a number of cases involving experimentation with inter-sectoral initiatives based on partnerships. These initiatives, which must be complementary, can take several forms: from basic agreement on strategy to developing contractual agreements in which each party commits itself to a specific contribution and all the parties commit themselves to certain results; or even the integration of resources under a single stakeholder. Joint assessments of strategic options and operating methods are necessary to delineate the most appropriate strategies to combat urban poverty.

A final question remains concerning areas of concentrated poverty. Does each general policy eventually need to be adjusted at the local level, not in terms of its objectives (anticipated results), but in terms of its implementation methods? How can different policies be shaped locally in order to maximize the effect of each (taking into account the different types of poor people and neighbourhood characteristics)? Given the number of programs, the wide range of neighbourhoods and the limited number of evaluations of these types of actions (considered alone or in combination), there is no simple answer.

Key Words: Cities, poverty, neighbourhoods, social sustainability, multi-level collaboration, social exclusion, social policy.

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Urban Poverty: Fostering Sustainable and Supportive Communities*

By

Anne-Marie Séguin¹ and Gérard Divay²

I. Introduction

This paper begins with a discussion of the spatial distribution of poverty and its consequences; then, with a view to developing policy, it examines the challenge of fostering supportive and socially sustainable communities in poor neighbourhoods in major Canadian metropolises. What is meant exactly by socially sustainable neighbourhoods and urban centres?

Most definitions address the phenomenon of social sustainability negatively. This is particularly evident in American literature focusing on the neighbourhoods of the urban underclass, that is, areas of social exclusion (Greene, 1991; Herpin, 1993; Hughes, 1990; Massey, 1994; Wackant and Wilson, 1989). The social exclusion concept has economic, political and social dimensions. It means being deprived of basic resources, both monetary and those provided through access to community services and facilities. It also means being socially marginalized (Castel, 1991), that is, disconnected from various systems of affiliation, including family and friends, neighbours and neighbourhood networks, and the workplace. Lastly, it means not fully exercising certain rights associated with citizenship (Strobel, 1996; Taboada Leonetti, 1995).

Based on this definition of exclusion, we can outline the characteristics of a sustainable city: all residents in all parts of its territory are guaranteed a minimum level of monetary resources and adequate access to good quality public services and facilities in areas such as education, health and recreation. A sustainable city should also have neighbourhoods with dynamic associations and community life, and that promote civic integration. Like networks of personal acquaintances, access to good quality services and a rich associational life provides individuals and families with the resources to support them in various facets of their lives. Finally, it is in a city that adults have satisfying, well-paid and fairly stable jobs.

This vision of the major components of a sustainable and supportive community allows us to select the features that are worthy of consideration in treating the subject matter at hand. Section 1 examines the growing poverty in large Canadian urban centres and its spatial concentration. We then deal with the issue of the potential neighbourhood effects of this concentration on residents of poor neighbourhoods. Stated differently, does living in a neighbourhood with a high concentration of poverty hamper the life chances of children and adults? Finally, we examine certain factors that potentially accentuate the poverty and

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disadvantage associated with living in certain neighbourhoods, factors that are not raised explicitly in the classical literature on neighbourhood effects.

The increase in poverty and its concentration call for sustained governmental action to halt the process of impoverishment and reduce the negative impacts of concentrated poverty in large Canadian cities. If we wish to create socially sustainable neighbourhoods – no matter how wealthy their residents – what forms should that action take, especially when responsibilities are shared by different levels (governments, municipalities and community groups), and what should be the priority sectors? Section 2 addresses these issues more broadly. It also provides several concrete examples of institutional forms, programs and interventions.

To conclude, we draw certain lessons from an analysis of initiatives in Montreal and, more generally, from the literature on deprived neighbourhoods, by looking specifically at the role of various public agents in the creation and preservation of socially sustainable communities.

This paper intentionally does not discuss housing issues, even though they play a central role in the spatial distribution of poverty, since David Hulchanski (2002) covers these issues in a separate paper.

II. Poverty in Large Canadian Urban Centres: The Current Situation

Current economic changes are having repercussions on metropolises that go beyond economic factors (Van den Berg *et al.*, 2001: 1). According to Morrison (2000: 277), while the impact of globalization varies by country, current restructuring seems especially to affect society's most vulnerable groups. This has spatial impacts in large cities. For example, in many developed countries, a growing proportion of the population lives in poor neighbourhoods characterized by multiple deprivation. The multiple deprivation of poor areas leads us to believe that the poor are subject to a combination of economic and social problems that accumulate and reinforce each other, especially as a result of neighbourhood effects. Are the phenomena of concentrated poverty and multiple deprivation in poor areas present in Canada?

The Increase and Spatial Concentration of Poverty in Canadian Metropolises

In recent years, the measurement of poverty has been the subject of important public debate in Canada (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001; deGroot-Maggetti, 2002; Goldberg and Pulkingham, 2000). Estimates of the number of poor people vary considerably according to the type of measurement used. In this paper, we use the Low Income Cut-offs (LICOs) as calculated by Statistics Canada. In any case, most authors interested in data on the spatialization of poverty in Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) have no choice; the only sufficiently spatially detailed data available are those on low income produced by Statistics Canada.³

³ The unit employed is the census tract. This statistical unit corresponds to a small urban space containing, on average, a population of 4,000 to 5,000 residents. We do not class census tracts as neighbourhoods; this is an error committed by many researchers (Small and Newman, 2001). A neighbourhood usually includes several census tracts. In addition, while neighbourhoods represent points of reference for their residents – not to mention the areas to which they belong and with which they identify (though they do not necessarily agree on

All recent studies on poverty draw the same conclusion: since 1980 – indeed, even since 1970 – not only has poverty increased in Canadian cities, but its concentration has increased as well (Broadway, 1992; Chekki, 1999; Hajnal, 1995; Hatfield, 1997; Kazemipur, 2000; Kazemipur and Halli, 2000; Lee, 2000). These two connected phenomena are cause for serious concern, as they are in the United States and Great Britain. In recent years, the growth of the poor population in Canada has been greater in CMAs than elsewhere. According to a study by Lee (2000), between 1990 and 1995 the poor population in CMAs grew by 33.8 percent, whereas in non-CMA areas it grew by only 18.2 percent. The situation is especially severe in Quebec’s large cities, where poverty levels are the highest; the cities of Southern Ontario have the lowest levels.⁴ The Lee study also shows that levels vary considerably within the same CMA. Thus, in 1995, levels (calculated at the municipal level) in the Toronto CMA varied from 27.6 percent for the City of Toronto to 9.9 percent for Oakville. Certain social groups are especially vulnerable to poverty: single-parent families, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, visible minorities, elderly women and the disabled (Lee, 2000).

In his 1986 study of the 25 largest Canadian CMAs, Hajnal (1995) determined that 689,175 persons were living in 225 census tracts with concentrations of poverty in excess of 40 percent; 313,560 of the residents were considered poor. The poor population living in poor census tracts accounted for 1.2 percent of the national population. It is noteworthy that, of the 225 chronic poverty census tracts, 115 were located in Montreal! There was also serious poverty in other Quebec CMAs, as there was in Winnipeg. Ontario’s CMAs had lower levels of concentrated urban poverty.

Myles *et al.* (2000) analyze changes that occurred from 1980 to 1995 in Canada’s eight largest metropolitan areas; they examine the evolution of, on the one hand, income inequality among families and, on the other hand, residential segregation that is economic in origin. Their study sought to identify the principal factor accentuating disparities among census tracts: is it the overall increase in income inequality among families, or the increased spatial division (or separation) between families of higher and lower incomes? In four of the eight CMAs studied (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Ottawa-Hull), the widening of income inequality among all families was the leading factor in the increase in income inequality among census tracts. However, the study also notes that economic segregation (greater intra-urban separation based on income) is increasing in five of the eight cities, and in four communities played a decisive role in widening disparities between census tracts (Edmonton, Calgary, Quebec and Winnipeg). What is observed is a decrease in average income in low-income neighbourhoods (except in Vancouver), and an increase in average income in high-income neighbourhoods.⁵ The study also

common boundaries) – census tracts exist only for researchers, and for the purposes of professionals working with statistics.

⁴ However, the Low Income Cut-offs (LICO) do not take into account cost-of-living differences between census metropolitan areas (CMAs) in the same size category, and especially differences in the cost of housing. As a result, this measure probably tends to overcount poor populations and households in Montreal, and undercount their counterparts in Toronto and Vancouver.

⁵ The results of the MacLachlan and Sawada study (1997: 393), which pertains to the 22 largest Canadian CMAs, point in the same direction. The study shows that from 1970 to 1990, at the level of census areas, there was a trend toward increased inequalities, and toward polarization of household revenues. Indeed, the percentage of households that reside in sectors that one could class as having average income is in decline, even though according to these authors no Canadian CMA can be characterized as polarized.

notes that employment is increasingly concentrated in higher-income census tracts, while unemployment is concentrated in lower-income census tracts.⁶

Lastly, how are chronic poverty census tracts distributed within CMAs? Broadway (1992) notes, on the basis of his study of seven large CMAs,⁷ that districts forming part of the inner city⁸ had disproportionately high concentrations of poor households.

The Complex Geography of Poverty

We need to nuance this rather bleak picture of neighbourhoods that have a high concentration of poverty. The study by Ley and Smith (2000) of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver shows that it is unusual for poor census tracts to experience simultaneously all aspects of deprivation generally associated with chronic poverty. Thus, even within areas with high concentrations of poverty there is still a certain social mix. For each census tract in each of the three metropolitan districts, the authors calculated:

- the percentage of the population 15 years and older that did not have a high school diploma;
- the unemployment rate for males;
- the percentage of income derived from government transfer payments; and
- the percentage of female single-parent families.

They then identified the census tracts in which the percentage (for each of the four categories listed above) was two times greater than the median value calculated for each variable and for each CMA; then they classified each census tract according to the number of times it was listed among sectors with abnormally high percentages of characteristics attributed to deprivation. They observed the following results, which allow us to nuance certain extreme views on the deprivation of poor populations living in the “poor areas” of the three largest Canadian cities. They found that there was only a single census tract in each of Montreal and Toronto (and none in Vancouver) that had a “problem” on all four of the indicators selected. It is also interesting to note that these two problem areas (those with all four characteristics) had significant social housing developments. In part, therefore, concentration is the upshot of decisions stemming from government action or from agencies financed by government! A slightly higher number of areas displayed three of the four characteristics associated with poor areas; of these, six are in Toronto, five in Montreal and none in Vancouver. As to census tracts with two deprivation characteristics, there are 10 in Vancouver, 28 in Toronto and 20 in Montreal.

In a similar vein, Séguin (1999) shows that in the case of the Montreal CMA alone, census tracts with significant levels (>40%) of low-income individuals do not differ completely from the CMA population as a whole. Of course, in neighbourhoods where 40 percent or more of the

⁶ We have decided to avoid any reference to the Hatfield study (1997), which raises several questions of a methodological order.

⁷ Broadway studied Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Halifax, Regina, Saint John and Winnipeg.

⁸ The inner city is generally defined as the area of the central city (the city corresponding to the initial inner district) that was urbanized before 1946; it is therefore made up of the old neighbourhoods of the central city.

population lives below the LICOs, there are more single parents, unemployed and economically inactive individuals, adults with low levels of schooling, and 15-to-24 year-olds who no longer attend school. However, these are not totally homogeneous milieu where no one is employed, where there are no two-parent families or highly educated people, etc. Overall, very poor neighbourhoods in Montreal are still fairly heterogeneous, yet consist of a relatively large number of households that can be characterized as deprived.

To develop an action strategy, especially one focusing territorially on the local level, we need more precise research on poor areas – especially the profiles of poor households. There are different categories of poverty and not all poor people have the same needs or necessarily use the same programs. For example, Finnie’s study (1997) demonstrates that different types of families (male single-parent families; female single-parent families; two-parent families) may take different paths, depending on whether their poverty is temporary or chronic. The type of action selected must take into account the various types of circumstances associated with poverty.

In the American literature especially, there is often an underlying assumption that areas of significant deprivation remain stable over time; it is assumed that this stability allows a local sub-culture (a culture of poverty) to develop, thereby perpetuating poverty among its residents. However, Ley and Smith (2000) demonstrate that in fact the opposite is true, since several of the census areas listed as “poorest” in 1971 were no longer in this category in 1991. In the case of Vancouver and Toronto,⁹ they found a greater dispersion of multiple deprivation in 1991. Also, certain areas classified as areas experiencing multiple deprivation in 1971 no longer suffered from this type of deprivation in 1991. They identify the factors that have contributed to these changes: gentrification and urban redevelopment in the inner cities of these two main cities, and a wider dispersion of social housing developments in metropolitan spaces. The changing character of urban areas, especially the dynamic of residential markets in these areas, is an important factor, and one that government action should take into account. Finally, the “geography of urban poverty” clearly reveals that the situation in Canada is in no way comparable to the phenomenon of ghettoization that characterizes a number of American cities.

In a similar vein, Mercer and England (2000) compare the American and Canadian situations. They point out that, in spite of economic restructuring and efforts to achieve fiscal balance, income inequalities are less pronounced in Canada than in the United States. Also, they note that income disparities between households of the central city and those of the suburbs are less pronounced in Canadian metropolitan areas than in their American counterparts. Reitz and Lum (2001), referring to major Canadian cities that have less poverty and criminality than the United States, ask if the major changes in recent years to the social safety net and social programs might not ultimately result in increased convergence between major Canadian and American metropolitan areas.

In sum, an increasing proportion of the population living in major Canadian metropolitan areas is poor, or, more precisely, lives below the low-income line. This trend is accompanied by a greater concentration of the disadvantaged population in areas that are not all characterized by multiple or advanced deprivation. The growth in poverty and its concentration are nonetheless disquieting. This is why we need to ensure that conditions do not deteriorate too far, for if they

⁹ This comparison over time was not carried out for Montreal.

did it would be much more difficult to bring about change. After all, cities are extremely complex systems (and unintended consequences can often result).

Poverty and Neighbourhoods: Effects on Children

Few Canadian empirical studies explore the effects of poverty on children. Basing their analysis on two Canadian longitudinal studies, the *National Population Health Survey* (NPHS) and the *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (NLSCY), Ross and Roberts (1999) examine the links between the income groups of families and certain characteristics of the family and residential environment. Their study shows clearly that there is a relationship between level of family income and family characteristics. The same study also analyzes the link between level of family income and certain characteristics of the community in which the family lives. The authors note the following: as family income level decreases, the frequency of community-related problems increases. Thus, the lower the level of family income, the greater the likelihood the family will reside in a problem neighbourhood – and the more parents will feel that the streets and parks are unsafe, or that there are few people in their neighbourhood who are friendly or helpful.

Here too, however, we should be wary about concluding that there are completely different worlds where every single poor family experiences the problems we have been discussing here, while none of the wealthiest families experience them at all. Even so, for most of the dimensions under consideration, the lowest income earners are more likely to live in families and neighbourhoods with problems. We may therefore conclude that, by virtue of belonging to a relatively poor family, there is a greater risk that they will experience these problems. Delinquent behaviour, for example, is characteristic of eight percent of children from families with the highest incomes (\$80,000 and over), whereas the figure is 16 percent among children from the poorest families (incomes of less than \$20,000). When it comes to problem neighbourhoods, the figure drops from 27 percent among the poorest families to about 13 percent among the richest families. In this study, for the majority of variables analyzed, the proportion of problems identified among the poorest families is about double that of their richest counterparts.

Neighbourhoods with Chronic Poverty: Neighbourhood Effects

In recent years, several studies and numerous debates have focused on neighbourhood effects (Buck, 2001; Connor and Brink, 1999; Dansereau, 2002; Dietz, 2001; Ellen and Turner, 1997; Overman, 2002; Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001; Small and Newman, 2001). Atkinson and Kintrea (2001) define neighbourhood effects as the net change in life chances associated with living in one neighbourhood (or area) rather than another. Neighbourhood effects can therefore be either positive or negative.

With the exception of two recent studies, there is, to our knowledge, very little Canadian research that has attempted to test empirically the role of neighbourhood effects¹⁰ (Oreopoulos, 2002; Willms, 2001a and 2001b). Oreopoulos compares the levels of success in long-term

¹⁰ Connor and Brink (1999) provide a detailed feasibility study (that includes a well researched and very interesting theoretical section) for research on the influence of the community on child development.

attachment to the labour force of adults who grew up in Toronto public housing projects of different sizes in neighbourhoods with different household incomes. The author (Oreopoulos, 2002: 21) observes that: “Taken overall, the results strongly suggest that policies aimed at improving outcomes among children from low-income backgrounds are more likely to benefit by addressing cases of household distress and family circumstance than by improving residential environment conditions.” He concludes by asking if the differences between the various Toronto neighbourhoods are in fact too weak to give rise to neighbourhood effects.

Willms (2001a, 2001b) tests a few hypotheses on community effects. However, he starts with a flexible definition of “community” sometimes comparing countries or provinces, while at other times comparing school districts, schools or even individual classes. The geographical context of his analyses also vary (Canada, United States, international comparisons). For example, Willms tests the hypothesis of the double obstacle, which postulates that individuals from underprivileged families are vulnerable, and that this vulnerability is intensified if they also happen to live in disadvantaged communities. Willms (2001a: 271), referring to his research on the United States and to other studies undertaken in various countries, concludes: “There is unequivocal evidence that the average socio-economic status of a child’s class or school has an effect on his or her outcomes, even taking account of (individual-level) ability and socio-economic status.” He reports that sociologists have explained these outcomes by the contextual effect of interactions among young people (peers). He adds that social capital can also play an important role.

The work of Hertzman (Hertzman, 2002; Hertzman *et al.*, 2002) also merits attention here. He and his team studied the developmental level of children in Vancouver. Their (Hertzman *et al.*, 2002) research involves the children of families with certain socio-economic profiles (low income, single parenthood, low level of schooling) that put their children at greater risk. They demonstrate that if these children live in mixed neighbourhoods (in terms of income) or even in affluent neighbourhoods, they appear less likely to have deficient developmental levels than do children who come from the same type of family environment but who live in neighbourhoods with low socio-economic levels. This observation seems to suggest the presence of neighbourhood effects, though strictly speaking the author does not actually refer to the concept. However, based on this research, it is impossible to evaluate the respective importance of family environment and of neighbourhood in explaining the differentiated developmental levels displayed by these children. In addition, Hertzman (2002) notes that certain services that may offset deficiencies associated with the socio-economic status of the family are not spatially distributed so as to reduce the gaps in development between rich and poor neighbourhoods.

In the debate about neighbourhood effects, the difficulty lies precisely in the distinction between and quantification of effects attributable to (1) neighbourhood conditions, and (2) the characteristics of the individuals who live in these neighbourhoods and their family environment. Some empirical studies conclude that neighbourhood effects have an impact, especially in very disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In their relatively exhaustive summary of the research on neighbourhood effects, Ellen and Turner (1997) conclude that neighbourhood effects have an impact on individual lifelines, but one that is ultimately less important than family or individual characteristics.

When it comes to the spread of extreme poverty in the central neighbourhoods of America's larger cities, studies on neighbourhood effects are indissociable from works on the American urban underclass: living in particular neighbourhoods plays a significant role. A quotation from Wilson (1991: 463, cited in Hatfield 1997: 11) provides a good summary of the author's thinking about neighbourhood effects and, more generally, about studies of the neighbourhoods of the American urban underclass:

Social isolation deprives residents of inner-city neighbourhoods not only of resources and conventional role models, whose former presence buffered the effects of neighborhood joblessness, but also of cultural learning from mainstream social networks that facilitates social and economic advancement in modern industrial society. The lack of neighborhood material resources, the relative absence of conventional role models, and the circumscribed cultural learning produce [...] concentration effects, that restrict social mobility. Some of these outcomes are structural (lack of labor force attachment and access to informal job networks), and some are social-psychological (negative social dispositions, limited aspirations and casual work habits).

Small and Newman (2001) have identified two major types of explanatory models¹¹ for neighbourhood effects: 1) models associated with analyses of socialization mechanisms, and 2) models associated with analyses of instrumental mechanisms.¹² According to the authors, models of the first type concentrate on neighbourhood effects likely to influence children and adolescents. The first model is likened to "contagion" or "epidemic," and postulates that if several children in a neighbourhood engage in a certain type of behaviour, the children in the same neighbourhood will tend to imitate them. The second model, that of collective socialization, maintains that adults serve as role models (or as agents of socialization) who influence the aspirations of young people concerning the importance of work, education and the norms of living together. In neighbourhoods with chronic poverty, given the rarity of certain positive role models, such as that of the worker, children are less likely to follow patterns of "success." The institutional model: adult non-residents associated with neighbourhood institutions, such as teachers and police officers, will tend to treat people with less respect if the neighbourhood is poor or involve themselves less in their work. The linguistic isolation model: poor people in certain minority groups will tend to retain a more vernacular language; this will impair their performance in school and in employment interviews. The relative deprivation model maintains that poor children living in affluent neighbourhoods become fully cognizant of the shortfall in resources to which they have access; these children later develop a negative image of themselves and of their family. Problem behaviour and maladjustment follow.

Instrumental models examine how neighbourhood environments limit individual agency. They focus on adults, rather than children. The first model is that of isolation from networks: for example, it is difficult for residents of a poor neighbourhood to obtain information on employment opportunities when most adults in the neighbourhood are unemployed. The resource model assumes that poor neighbourhoods are deprived of institutional resources (or that

¹¹ They use the term "models"; we would prefer the term "explanatory factors."

¹² Readers interested in these issues may refer to Ellen and Turner (1997), Connor and Brink (1999), and Séguin and Divay (forthcoming).

their resources are of inferior quality); these resources include schools, churches, recreational areas and day care centres.¹³ The final model is that of political alliances; in this model, Blacks, as a result of racial segregation, have trouble forming alliances with other groups. As a result, they have difficulty attracting public or private resources such as good schools, playgrounds and business investments.

Ellen and Turner (1997) add two other neighbourhood effects that are of particular interest to geographers: exposure to crime and violence, and poor access to places of employment. Neighbourhoods with chronic poverty have higher crime rates, and living in an environment with a relatively high crime rate is particularly traumatizing for young children. It can also induce both children and adults to adopt a strategy of withdrawal into the home. In addition, the neighbourhood in which one lives has an impact on access to economic opportunity, especially employment. The shift in employment towards the suburbs, particularly employment requiring low levels of skill, combined with poor public transport service, somewhat lessens decent job opportunities for low-skilled individuals who live in the central parts of cities and have no automobile. This situation, called “spatial mismatch,” often prevails in larger American cities.

At present, all these models are based more on hypotheses than on solid empirical validation (Small and Newman, 2001; Connor and Brink, 1999). They also are the subject of debates¹⁴ of a more theoretical nature. Although several studies maintain that neighbourhood effects play an important role, Ellen and Turner (1997: 848) conclude that these effects are significantly weaker than the impact of personal or family characteristics. In other words, the income of parents, education and employment play a more important role than all other neighbourhood characteristics when it comes to the behaviour and well-being of children. In addition, Ellen and Turner point out that neighbourhood effects vary according to major life stages: the pre-school years, the first years of school attendance, adolescence and adulthood.

The neighbourhood environment seems to play a rather marginal role in the development of pre-school age children. Indeed, few empirical studies have confirmed the existence of potential links. It nevertheless remains that parents obtain differentiated access to support systems and institutions; the result is that neighbourhood conditions may have an indirect effect. The quality of day care services available may have a more direct effect. For children who attend primary school, the family remains the principal point of reference; however, the neighbourhood could play a greater role, since the children, now more aware of their environment, begin to form an idea of what is acceptable and appropriate behaviour. That said, very little research has addressed this subject.

Among adolescents, the potential impact of the neighbourhood could prove to be greater because time spent with the family declines considerably at that age, whereas time spent with other young people (their peers) gradually increases to become the most important factor. Most studies on neighbourhood effects have focused on adolescents and young adults (Ellen and Turner, 1997;

¹³ This is consistent with certain observations made by Hertzman (2002) about Vancouver.

¹⁴ For example, Small and Newman (2001) are critical of the definition of culture as values or norms (conservative definition). Instead, they suggest defining culture as a set of tools, skills and lifestyles on which individuals build “action strategies.” They also question the soundness of viewing inner-city neighbourhood culture as a single, homogeneous culture.

Connor and Brink, 1999). Among adults, the neighbourhood plays a minor role in defining values and behaviour. The neighbourhood is thought to play a greater role when it comes to access to services, information and employment opportunities. According to Ellen and Turner, the majority of studies seem to confirm the spatial mismatch hypothesis.

To conclude, if we take into account the results of the study on social housing residents in Toronto and other considerations identified earlier in this section, we must be prudent when claiming that neighbourhood effects alone have a major impact on the lifelines and welfare of individuals, particularly children. We must consider other factors that have just as great or even a greater impact, especially personal and family characteristics. In addition, the extent to which the neighbourhood effects observed in the United States apply to the Canadian situation is questionable. Circumstances in the two countries differ considerably in terms of municipal fragmentation, social safety nets and methods of financing public services and facilities. More generally, there are differences in their methods for redistributing social wealth. Lastly, they differ as to the characteristics of older neighbourhoods located in their inner cities.

Differing Capacities in Community Management

If neighbourhood effects exist, can poor communities¹⁵ play a role in organizing the struggle against poverty and social exclusion? Kearns and Forrest (2000: 1010) cite the work of Putnam (1996) who has developed the idea that, since poor neighbourhoods in the United States have insufficient social capital, they are unable to take full advantage of renewal policies. In these neighbourhoods, such policies are not sustainable. Neighbourhoods where relationships of trust and reciprocity are too weak would not have the capacity to create and sustain voluntary associations and community partnerships. Based on their study of community organizations in Montreal neighbourhoods, Cloutier and Hamel (1991) suggest that the density of the “community fabric” (the number of organizations) could be differentiated by neighbourhood.¹⁶

What happens in communities that have few neighbourhood organizations? While government intervention is governed by the principle of the equality of individuals eligible for services, it could be argued that the “welfare mix” introduces certain inequalities. On the one hand, many support philosophies are based on grassroots involvement and communities taking responsibility for their environments. On the other hand, to the extent that individual aptitudes vary, how should we respond to the fact that the ability to organize collectively and confront problems varies from one community to another (Séguin, 1993)? Thus, in the battle against social exclusion, there is danger in giving too large a role to the community. With this type of decentralization, as with all forms of decentralization, we would do well to recall the comment made by Lemieux (1996), who notes that because decentralization promotes capacity, efficiency and participation in some decentralized situations more than others, it also raises issues of equity.

¹⁵ The term “community” is understood here in a broad sense. It refers to community groups, the community fabric, charitable organizations, religious institutions, etc. In reality, it is often difficult to clearly ascertain in which category a local organization belongs.

¹⁶ However, their study was limited to organizations that work with youth and women. It nevertheless remains that they have raised an important question, that of inequality in “the supply of community services.”

In addition, within the urban social movement – the very movement that played an important role in improving Montreal’s poor neighbourhoods (Hamel *et al.*, 1982) – there is a fragmentation of vested interests; however, this fragmentation does not play out in favour of the poorest individuals (Mayer, 2000). Due to this fragmentation, community social capital (in the sense of resources) in certain poor neighbourhoods has declined (at least from the standpoint of the poor).

Unequal Access to Private and Public Urban Resources?

We saw above that the neighbourhood effects model dealing with resources postulates that the residents of poor neighbourhoods are disadvantaged with regard to their access to public services and, more generally, their access to institutions. More recently, attention has turned to the question of access to nearby commercial services, though this area remains poorly explored, at least in the Canadian context. The few studies that have been conducted show that certain businesses, such as hypermarkets, are especially rare in very poor neighbourhoods. Eisenhower (2001) has shown that in the United States there exists a sort of redlining¹⁷ of food supermarkets. The same phenomenon has been observed in certain Montreal neighbourhoods (Bertrand, 2002). As a result, poor people (depending on the area in which they live) have limited options when it comes to the cost of food, its availability and freshness, and the proximity of stores where they can shop. Indeed, inequalities between areas in Montreal are strongly linked to the income levels of their residents. Banking institutions, too, seem to practise redlining. For example, there are fewer bank branches in certain Montreal neighbourhoods experiencing chronic poverty (Apparicio, 2002). By contrast, financial services, such as cheque-cashing agents, pawnbrokers and consumer loan companies are concentrated in the poor neighbourhoods of metropolitan Montreal (Thérien, 2002). Thus, market logic leads to the creation of inequality of access to basic business services.

Do poor neighbourhoods in Canadian cities have poorer environmental quality, fewer and poorer quality private and public services, and inferior educational and health services? In communities with high concentrations of poverty, is there inadequate access to work places by public transport? In spite of anecdotal information, it is difficult to draw a well-documented and precise overall portrait of situations that, at first glance, vary a great deal. However, a portrait of this kind is essential in evaluating certain neighbourhood effects and in developing policies for underprivileged neighbourhoods, especially if these policies involve public services. What is the current level of these services? (The level needs to be measured not only quantitatively, according to the resources allocated, but also qualitatively, by the nature of the relationship with the clientele and by the suitability of approaches based on client characteristics.) What should be the appropriate level of service provided to ensure that the results in these neighbourhoods are comparable to those observed in the entire metropolitan area? Answers to these questions would be useful in maximizing the use of public resources to improve the resources of poor neighbourhoods.

¹⁷ Initially, the term “redlining” was used in urban studies to designate the unavailability of mortgage loans to residents of poor neighbourhoods. Here, it is used to refer to the unavailability in poor neighbourhoods of certain types of businesses, such as hypermarkets. The term “redlining” originates in the bank practice of outlining in red the boundaries of areas in which the residents were not eligible for certain types of credit (Van Vliet, 1998: 462-463).

Research has shown that access (calculated in terms of proximity) to certain urban public services is uneven within the Paris region (Pinçon-Charlot *et al.*, 1986), with rich neighbourhoods having better facilities and services. This phenomenon has been characterized as spatial segregation. Canadian analyses of the role of the state in combating poverty often overlook approaches to redistributing social wealth that are based on providing very good quality local public services, such as municipal libraries, cultural centres, community centres and major sports facilities; it is the municipality, frequently with the support of higher levels of government, that can provide these services in poor neighbourhoods. These facilities and local public services, which are community resources if they are provided free of charge or at very low cost in poor neighbourhoods, can compensate, at least partially, for deficient family resources. These considerations bring us to the question of the government policies and actions required to foster socially sustainable neighbourhoods to combat social exclusion.

III. Fostering Socially Sustainable Neighbourhoods: The Role of Government Policies and Actions

The increase in social polarization in cities has given rise to many social problems. According to a number of authors, these problems call for inter-sectoral and intergovernmental intervention. Van den Berg *et al.* (2001: 1) identify education, housing construction, urban planning and economic development as urban sectors that require special attention. For Morrison (2000), it is difficult to generalize about strategies, because they depend on the specific institutional contexts in which they are formulated and implemented. This observation is especially relevant to Canada because of the sharing of jurisdictions between the federal and provincial governments. The latter are responsible for key sectors of social intervention such as education, health, cities, etc. In the rest of this paper, we focus our analysis on a single metropolis, Montreal, instead of presenting an overview of initiatives and programs in all major Canadian cities. This will allow us to better define the range of actions that help make Montreal a socially sustainable city. Nevertheless, in this section we also refer to other contexts; we believe that solutions developed elsewhere, though context-specific, can still be instructive.

What roles can be played by the different levels of government and associations in reducing poverty and the effects of concentration? What aspects should be emphasized? What levels of government should be mobilized? What welfare mix is most likely to have a real impact on the quality of life in communities and, specifically, on communities that are home to large numbers of poor people? Should actions be universal or territorially targeted? Are inter-sectoral actions preferable, and at what level? This section of the paper starts by considering these questions in a general way, and then examines experiences in Montreal with different intervention models. There may be questions that we cannot answer; we nonetheless raise them to foster the debate on these issues that is needed to maximize the benefits of government action.

Sustainable Methods of Intervention

Intervention strategies in poor neighbourhoods differ from country to country, and on several dimensions (Figure 1). They are the outcome of strategic choices with varying major parameters (division of political, financial and operational responsibilities; territories covered; and

approaches, methods, duration). Their implementation relies on a variety of organizational methods. The focus of the intervention can also vary. Based on the discussion in Section 1 of this paper, we can distinguish two main targets to reduce exclusion in poor areas. The first involves people, as individuals and in their family context. The second centres on the neighbourhood as a community with a number of major components: housing and the physical environment, access to services and jobs, social networks and associative life. Of course, all aspects of these strategies are interrelated. By examining various initiatives developed in Montreal, we will show that they reflect several of the parameters listed in Figure 1. However, certain types of intervention seem to be more relevant to the preservation of Montreal's social sustainability. We will return to this question later.

Figure 1
Creating Supportive and Socially Sustainable Neighbourhoods:
Strategic Options for Poverty Reduction

Major Parameters	Options
Division of political, financial and operational responsibilities	Government bodies: central, local or mixed; community or combined
Means	Subsidies, physical input (including community facilities), tax incentives, personal or technical assistance, etc.
Territory	Spatial concentration or territorial universality
Object	Individuals or communities
Approach	Sectoral or multi-sectoral; customized or uniform
Duration	Intensive short-term action or lesser action over a long period
Fields of intervention involving individuals and families	Employment, disposable income, education and training, health and welfare
Fields of intervention involving communities (neighbourhoods or cities)	Housing and quality of the urban environment, physical and financial access to high quality services, intensity of economic activities, density and richness of the social environment (social networks, associative life)

Strategic Options in the Division of Responsibilities

The responsibilities associated with strategies to reduce poverty and alleviate the effects of spatial concentration of poverty may be divided along political, financial and operational lines. They are political with regard to the determination of the responsible actors, the targets and the results to be achieved. They are financial with regard to raising and allocating funds, and operational when it comes to program implementation. Western countries display the following general trends: in terms of political responsibility, they prefer central government actors; at the operational level, they prefer local actors, municipalities, and especially associations and private stakeholders working at the local community level; lastly, on the financial level, if the commitment of the central authorities remains strong, they also solicit local contributions (Divay, forthcoming).

A Centralized or Decentralized Model to Combat Poverty?

According to Prud'homme (1995: 201), decentralization in its pure form corresponds to a system in which a "purely" local government levies "purely" local taxes and undertakes "purely" local spending without the support of central government transfer payments. He notes that this definition, while not very realistic, is useful for analytical purposes. Prud'homme also maintains that local governments may be frustrated in their attempts to be equitable when they try to correct income differences or redistribute social wealth. In a pure decentralization scenario (where the local authority is responsible for raising the necessary funds for the services it wants to offer), poor people in a rich region will be "better off" than poor people in a poor region. This means that when decentralization is carried out in areas experiencing growing concentrations of poverty, the poor people living in poor cities will end up with fewer local resources, as well as receiving fewer resources through the local distribution of purely local social wealth.

In fact, true redistribution of societal wealth (the wealth produced by society as a whole) cannot be achieved at the local level. In a decentralized system that is highly fragmented at the local level, as in the United States, the following scenario is typical. If a jurisdiction adopts income redistribution policies, by imposing high taxes on all residents and by giving substantial benefits to the poor, the rich will tend to leave for places with a lower tax burden. Jurisdictions that are generous to their poor will soon be unable to maintain their generous redistribution policy (due to the lack of an affluent population contributing to the local tax base). Decentralization thus hinders the pursuit of redistribution policies. Prud'homme concludes that decentralization leads to segregation.

If we accept the accuracy of these observations, we can then advance the following position: the higher levels of government (in Canada, the federal and provincial governments) must have *political and financial responsibility* for social wealth redistribution programs. They must therefore control a substantial share of taxes and public expenditures.

That said, government action in poor communities, as in society as a whole, often takes hybrid forms (with different degrees of centralization or decentralization). For example, favouring some degree of decentralization does not necessarily pose a challenge to the taxation and financial benefits of centralization. Decentralization is fuelled, in particular, by considerations of operational efficiency. Local decisions about methods of implementing national programs are more likely to improve the effectiveness of these programs; their actual results in the field would then depend on local conditions. Only local decision-makers, who are very familiar with the subtleties of power relationships, mobilizing forces and the attitudes and values of local citizens and groups, can effectively combine, at the local level, the resources the central government makes available to certain sectors. To borrow an expression from current political discourse, an "across the board" approach is not always compatible with effectiveness. Consequently, in many sectors there is an "impure" decentralization system. In such a system, tax-derived financial resources are primarily central (thus ensuring a redistribution of social wealth). Objectives are also defined centrally (ensuring a minimum of control over the delivery of equivalent services). However, implementation is local, resulting in a greater or lesser degree of flexibility. At the institutional and organizational level, local government action takes different hybrid forms. Quebec, for example, has decentralized institutions (municipalities and school boards) that are

more or less closely supervised by the provincial government; decentralized bodies with local political representation (regional health boards, local employment centres [*Centres locaux d'emploi* – CLE]); and government-funded non-profit organizations.

In addition, redistribution may occur at the municipal level, particularly in local public services. Thus, any decision to implement (or improve) facilities (libraries, parks, playing fields, etc.) will have a redistributive or non-redistributive effect on local social wealth,¹⁸ depending on the location chosen. Redistribution is undoubtedly a key ingredient in developing local solidarity and maintaining social cohesion.

Recognizing the value of local input in delivering services – even in adjusting national policies to make them more effective – helps legitimize the important role currently played by local stakeholders in poverty reduction strategies, especially community-based strategies.

Community-Based Management of Social Intervention: Advantages and Disadvantages

As to the role of community groups, there is some agreement that the community sector has a significant role to play in social regulation at the neighbourhood level. In Quebec, community action received a major government endorsement with the creation, in 1995, of a secretariat for independent community action, the *Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome*. Government financial assistance to community organizations as a whole is one of the rare government programs that has grown substantially over the last decade, almost doubling to \$500 million; however, it is impossible to determine how these funds have been divided between needy and less needy communities.¹⁹

We will not focus here on the debates surrounding forms of partnership and the occasional conflicts between government and the community sector. Instead we will identify how community intervention can help make communities more socially sustainable. What qualities specific to the community sector give it an advantage over government interventions (including municipal intervention)?

First, there is a proximity between the community players and their “clientele” that allows them to respond more effectively to local needs. According to Caillouette (1994), users are more likely to have their demands heard than under a government service delivery model; also, any intervention is more likely to be adjusted to their needs. This also eliminates the absolute division between experts and recipients. Moreover, community intervention fosters social inclusion and empowerment, and thus contrasts with processes of disempowerment and social exclusion. The community approach restores feelings of local and collective belonging at a time when, for many individuals, any rooted identity is being erased. Lastly, community actors, at least historically (in the 1970s and 1980s), have played – and still play – a central role in Quebec in demanding improvements to the physical environment of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (in terms of physical amenities, the location of neighbourhood community facilities and social

¹⁸ For example, it would be relevant to question the location of cultural centres, libraries and major sports facilities within Montreal’s territory. Do the city’s poorest sectors obtain their fair share, more than their fair share or less than their fair share?

¹⁹ Source: <http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/français/saca/publications/sommaire.pdf>.

housing) and in fighting against actions that harm these neighbourhoods (such as highway construction, etc.) (Séguin, 1993).

While, for some, relying on the community is a key factor in reducing exclusion, for others it means cut-rate services that governments should normally provide. In the latter view, it represents a reorganization of the welfare state into a new, cost-cutting model; here, delivery of services by community organizations rather than by government institutions is synonymous with privatization, even if it occurs at the community level (Caillouette, 1994). Furthermore, community management of certain social services may allow the introduction of a kind of flexibility in social intervention that can seriously weaken the quality of the services provided. The welfare state made it possible to meet a “social demand for institutionalization of precarious and limited mutual support arrangements” (Lesemann, 1988: 128). However, community-based forms of social solidarity may very well reintroduce this precariousness and the inequalities to which it gives rise. Moreover, governments can withdraw from certain fields by abolishing funding programs intended for community organizations or by changing their conditions. Here, government disengagement is less visible and easier to carry out than in fields such as health care and education, where government control is more direct (Séguin, 1993).

Community management of social intervention can invite other potential dangers. Conflicts of values may emerge between individuals who control service organizations and their users because the former sometimes try to impose their own values and social standards. Within the organization, there may also be mechanisms for exclusion that are more or less apparent. In addition, there is the problem of an organization’s ability to solicit government funding. If community organizations are called upon to become major players in local social intervention, how can the government ensure that the poorest neighbourhoods – those suffering from multiple deprivation – will receive adequate, good quality, community resources? How can the government ensure that organizations serve all residents without distinction as to political, ethnic, religious or other affiliation, and that their actions give priority to the most vulnerable groups?

Could the dangers of inequity in community action be reduced if the organizations involved operated under the supervision of a local democratic body – in this case, the municipality – whose elected representatives are supposed to take care of the population as a whole? While municipal democracy offers channels to vent frustrations and denounce overly flagrant bias in sharing the benefits of intervention, the effectiveness of these channels depends on local politics and the strengths and weaknesses of local groups or coalitions. Past experience (the 1970s and 1980s) shows that the community movement’s independence was a crucial factor in opposing municipal administrations anxious to re-shape portions of their inner-city neighbourhoods at all costs, to attract tertiary functions, without taking into account the disastrous effects on the communities in these neighbourhoods, which had poor populations (Andrew *et al.*, 1981; Ézop-Québec, 1981; Séguin, 1993). Their independence should therefore be preserved, but it is not incompatible with the creation of partnerships for particular projects. Mechanisms have yet to be invented to ensure unbiased community intervention and to foster partnerships while preserving the autonomy of community organizations.

These considerations about community intervention (greater precariousness, inequality of community resources in different communities, etc.) lead us to conclude that community intervention is not a substitute for government action in the most crucial sectors; rather, it has an indispensable complementary function at the operational level and in specific areas of intervention.

Choosing Between Universality and Spatially-Targeted Interventions

Interventions that target neighbourhoods or zones (and that complement general policies) should be applied cautiously for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, it seems that when it comes to the problems of poor populations, neighbourhood effects (in the United States) are less important than individual or family characteristics (Ellen and Turner, 1997). It is therefore more important to intervene at the individual and family levels than at the neighbourhood level, though the latter aspect should not be ignored. In addition, the work of Ley and Smith (2000) on Toronto and Vancouver shows that poor areas do not always stay that way, even though the proportion of poor people has increased in these two CMAs. Interventions that are too spatially targeted can prove less “effective” in the medium- or long-term if the distribution of poverty shifts within the metropolitan area.

In addition, spatially targeted interventions can produce various unintended consequences. First, they can lead to sharper stigmatization of areas of intervention (Andersson, 1998) (when interventions target distressed neighbourhoods, the stigmatized reputation of these neighbourhoods is reinforced). Increased neighbourhood stigmatization inevitably encourages middle-class households to leave or avoid settling there, thus leading to increased concentration of poverty. Second, when neighbourhoods are provided with facilities and services targeting the poorest populations, they gain drawing power. Poor people, sometimes from outside the urban agglomeration,²⁰ may move there, turning the neighbourhood into an area of even greater poverty. Finally, targeted interventions do not reach poor households that reside elsewhere in the metropolitan area; this creates two classes of poor – those who live in areas of concentrated poverty and benefit from targeted interventions, and those who reside elsewhere and do not benefit from them.

That said, for the most severely deprived areas, we are not opposed to targeted strategies that may have elements of “affirmative action.” For example, targeted interventions, especially if they are concrete, can help make poor neighbourhoods more attractive to middle-class households, and thus contribute to the social mix in these areas. Nevertheless, we believe that government actions should focus essentially on more generalized intervention, intended for individuals and families, if they wish to convert neighbourhoods with concentrations of poverty into socially sustainable communities.

²⁰ This observation is based on the observations of a number of City of Montreal municipal stakeholders and professionals.

Strategic Choices: Beneficial Local Effects of National Policies

The neighbourhood effects debate summarized in Section 1 showed that, while these effects are significant, they do not supplant individual and family characteristics in explaining the individual paths of poor people. The policies applied by higher levels of government, both through minimum income support and access to quality public services, have the predominant influence on the development of individual and family capabilities.

In Quebec, a true social safety net emerged only in the 1960s and 1970s, with the introduction of major financial support measures for the most economically deprived households. Once it came under provincial and federal government responsibility, the social safety net protected all disadvantaged social classes. Federal or provincial centralization of the safety net's management²¹ and funding gave low-income people access to the same level of support, regardless of where they lived. Due to centralized funding, the concentration of poor populations in certain municipalities had no major impact on municipal budgets or on the residential tax burden.

National policies are not limited to providing financial support to economically deprived individuals. The essential fields of health and education are funded mostly by the higher levels of government. Poor households, like the rest of society, have free access to a universal health care system. Even though, in the past few years, services previously covered by public health insurance have been abandoned and reliance on private health care services has increased, major social disparities have not yet emerged in the health care system. Nonetheless, to ensure the social sustainability of neighbourhoods experiencing chronic poverty, senior governments must make sure that the availability and quality of health services provided are as equitable as possible over their entire territory, and especially in poor neighbourhoods.

The proportion of local funding allocated to education has increased over the past few years, even though most of this sector is still provincially funded. In Quebec, 4.3 percent of school board revenue came from real estate taxes in 1982-1983, but this rose to 14.8 percent by 1997-1998 (Commission nationale sur les finances et la fiscalité locales, 1999: 48).²² This trend is contrary to the one observed in Canada as a whole (with variations among provinces), where the proportion of local funding has shrunk. In 1988, real estate taxes accounted for 26.8 percent of school board revenues in Canada, but by 1998 this share had dropped to 21.3 percent (Kitchen, 2000: 305-06). In Quebec, the rising share of local taxes going to school funding has raised concerns about growing inequalities in the quality of education (this is consistent with Prud'homme's analyses). However, two factors mitigate the non-egalitarian effects. First, the real estate tax for school purposes is capped. Second, school board mergers have been much more systematic than in the municipal field; each school board therefore has a large territory, which allows for redistribution within each territory and reduces the risks of social and fiscal

²¹ One minor exception must be noted here. The City of Montreal locally manages the distribution of Income Security allowances (now "employment assistance") to eligible households residing in its territory. However, the provincial government sets the standards, benefit scales and eligibility criteria.

²² On the Island of Montreal, this amounted to 22 percent in 1999-2000 (Source: Press release issued by the Montreal Island School Council (Conseil scolaire de l'île de Montréal), April 26, 2001, « Le Conseil scolaire de l'île de Montréal demande 29,1 millions \$ au gouvernement du Québec à titre de mesure provisoire » ("The Montreal Island School Council asks the Quebec Government for \$29.1 million as an interim measure").

fragmentation. This redistribution is very clear-cut, though not necessarily far-reaching, on the Island of Montreal, due to the role of the Conseil scolaire de l'île de Montréal (discussed below).

Two other initiatives that the Government of Quebec introduced in 1991 deserve to be mentioned: early childhood centres (day care at \$5 a day – although the supply does not meet the demand) and the extension of kindergarten hours (which increased from a half day to a full day in the 1990s²³). These two measures should, at least in theory, provide children from very disadvantaged families with a socialization environment where they will have access to adequate resources.²⁴ This is likely to offset some of the problems encountered by certain families. These provincially funded initiatives, which are not territorially targeted, could (if they are properly allocated on the basis of need²⁵) provide children from poor families, irrespective of their place of residence, with better cultural capital (as defined by the French sociologist Bourdieu) before their “school career” begins, thereby promoting their future economic and social integration.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that we are emphasizing the role of universal social policies in strategies intended for specific clientele (the poor) and specific territories (the zones where they are concentrated). However, the spatial implications of these policies justify this emphasis. The centralized form of important community services and facilities, and the centralized financial support to the most disadvantaged populations, in addition to providing everyone with resources and services of the same quality (at least in principle), have also had a significant impact on the residential geography of the middle class in Montreal and in other urban areas in Quebec.

In certain countries, provinces and states, health care and education, as well as financial support to the poorest populations, depend on local or regional funding (from the municipality or county, for example). In these areas, middle- and upper-class households try to reduce their tax burden (real estate tax or income tax) by fleeing the jurisdictions where the poorest people live. The poor account for social spending, though they make little contribution to tax revenues, through real estate or income taxes (Ashton, 1978). However, in Montreal, and in Quebec generally, the higher levels of government fund social security, health care and education – extremely costly budget items for modern governments. Moving to another municipality does not allow households to alleviate substantially their tax payments. No doubt this has contributed to the preservation of a social mix in the inner city. Conversely, it has undoubtedly encouraged suburban municipalities to allow some kind of social mix. For example, some suburbs have allowed construction of rental housing to accommodate households with fairly modest incomes. While “aspatial” in spirit, these central policies have had spatial consequences. They have alleviated the social division of metropolitan space (even though this division still exists) and ensured that the same services are offered throughout Quebec, regardless of local wealth.

²³ It is important to note that the change in kindergarten hours from half a day to a full day was initially implemented in disadvantaged neighbourhoods before being extended to the province as a whole.

²⁴ The program provides special financial aid for early childhood centres to help develop \$5-per-day day care in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

²⁵ In a given territory, there may be significant differences, from one location to the next, in the childhood services provided. Hertzman (2002: 6) noted large differences among licensed day care centres and pre-school services available in Vancouver. It is in meeting the needs of working-class neighbourhoods that subsidization programs seem to be the most deficient.

“Aspatial” provincial and federal policies have resulted in a degree of redistribution of social wealth throughout the province.

There is every reason to believe the situation would be different if a “municipal welfare state”²⁶ existed. In spite of the fact that it has a large low-income population (Séguin, 1999), Montreal may be described as a socially sustainable city (Séguin and Germain, 2000). However, it is not only the higher levels of government that have played an important role here. The local level has also played a significant though lesser role – especially through policies affecting housing and, more generally, the living environment, and through the development of a mass transit system that is much more efficient than that found in many major American cities. The example of Montreal illustrates that the remedy for problems with a localized impact does not necessarily come under the exclusive *or even principal* jurisdiction of the level at which the problem manifests itself. However, in order for general or universal policies to play a full role in combating poverty, especially in neighbourhoods where poverty is concentrated, the authorities must make sure that services (for example, health and education services) and other kinds of assistance are adequately distributed throughout their territory (and especially in areas of poverty).

A centralized model for the delivery of basic public services for individuals, such as education and health, is essential if we wish to resist the creation of neighbourhoods with exclusion or multiple deprivation.²⁷ However, this does not exclude an “affirmative action” strategy that provides certain neighbourhoods with good-quality services or facilities, or that develops ad hoc initiatives to improve the most “negative” situations. Centralization of political and financial responsibility does not necessarily mean uniform and equal allocation of resources and means. On the contrary, if equality of results is sought on a nationwide scale, political and financial centralization means that resources must be adapted according to the ability of local communities to provide a measure of financial support.

To summarize, central policies do not have spatially neutral parameters. This principle applies both to programs providing individual financial support (given the concentration of poverty, the economic plight of some neighbourhoods is affected directly) and to programs that fund basic education or health care services (the policies condition the quality of the supply while influencing household decisions on where to locate). Central government intervention in basic areas such as the social safety net, health care and education seems to be an essential ingredient of urban social sustainability. Nonetheless, we believe that other types of interventions are worth examining because of the impact they have, or could have, on poor neighbourhoods.

Strategic Options: Targeted Initiatives and the Multi-Sectoral Approach

While strategies that specifically target poor neighbourhoods obviously restrict the area of intervention, it is hoped that these strategies will fit into broader approaches that apply to urban agglomerations. However, establishing a link between these two levels of territorial intervention is, more often than not, a fluid and problematic exercise. There is a trend in several countries

²⁶ Term borrowed from Mathieu (1993).

²⁷ In his study, Hertzman (2002) attributes the overall higher level of Swedish children’s development to the generosity of Swedish social policies (support for the needy, work-family balance, day care, etc.).

toward the targeting of interventions, which each country adjusts to local conditions. This is quite common in the United States, with its RC/EZ/EC programs (Renewal Communities, Empowerment Zones, Enterprise Communities). Other examples include England, with its Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, and France, with its “City Policy” (*Politique de la Ville*) for interventions in sensitive zones. Territorial targeting is most often accompanied by a multi-sectoral approach. Interestingly, the greater the attention paid to local issues, the more important inter-sectoral and intergovernmental concerns become. The local level drives integration because citizens act as individuals; they cannot simply be reduced to the aggregate of all the administrative categories of programs that concern them.

In this section, we examine Montreal’s experience with targeted interventions in several areas: (1) local economic development (through Community Economic Development Corporations (CDECs, *corporations de développement économique communautaire*); (2) distressed neighbourhoods; and (3) education. As we shall see, these interventions often involve several levels of government, are multi-sectoral and often call upon the community sector, which may serve as overall manager or partner. Even though these interventions cover clearly defined territories, they are multi-level, for two reasons. First, local actors are often better qualified than actors at other levels in identifying crises and measuring the adverse effects of these crises on individuals and the community. But the local level does not have the financial resources required for action that is “energetic” enough to reverse the adverse effects; it must rely on higher levels of government for its resources. Local action also offers the opportunity to link sectoral interventions; this is important in combating exclusion, which is multidimensional and therefore requires multiple solutions. Mathieu (1997), who follows the situation in France, points out that one of the specific advantages of mobilizing the local level to reduce exclusion is that “horizontal” interventions facilitate the linking of sectoral policies.

Community Economic Development Corporations

Community Economic Development Corporations (CDECs) are an example of initiatives to revitalize distressed urban territories (Morin *et al.*, 1994). These corporations were inspired by the community economic development corporations established in the United States since the 1960s for urban neighbourhoods suffering from chronic poverty. In the mid-1980s, Montreal’s old industrial neighbourhoods faced the broad trend toward extremely high unemployment and deindustrialization. Neighbourhood community organizations mobilized to bring solutions to unemployment and company departures or closings. The first three CDECs were able to begin operations with financial assistance from the Quebec government. Three other CDECs subsequently emerged, but initially did not benefit from the same level of financial support as the first three (Morin *et al.*, 1994).

In 1990, in an action plan titled “*Partenaires dans le développement économique des quartiers*” (partners in neighbourhood economic development), the City of Montreal officially recognized the CDECs as centres of concerted action²⁸ by leading stakeholders. Such action was seen as

²⁸ The composition of the CDEC boards of directors is eloquent evidence of the joint action effort. Morin (1995: 30) notes that they include between 13 and 22 members from the following backgrounds: community organizations, business people, union organizations, public and parapublic institutions, etc. (including ethnic communities, ordinary citizens and CDEC employees).

likely to reinvigorate the socioeconomic development of Montreal boroughs. In its action plan, the city undertook to support them financially and called on the provincial and federal governments to join in the effort. From 1990 on, the higher levels of government responded favourably to this call. The Quebec government provided the greatest financial support, followed by the federal government and the city, in that order. The city's action plan recognized the CDECs as major players in the boroughs' socioeconomic development (Morin, 1995: 28-29), and the city and community organizations officially entered into a partnership. The new approach reflected a concern about unemployment and poverty, fields rarely addressed by municipalities. The CDECs, which began as community initiatives in the poorest neighbourhoods or territories, expanded throughout Montreal once the city recognized them.²⁹

The three main purposes of CDECs are to support reintegration into the job market of people excluded from it; support companies' efforts to maintain or create jobs; and mobilize local actors around local development projects. They are also interested in planning living environments and in social development and local quality of life.³⁰ Finally, the CDECs are mandated by local development centres known as CLDs (*Centres locaux de développement*) under the Quebec government's local and regional development support policy (Morin *et al.*, 2000: 15). The CDECs offer an interesting example of local action that fosters a relatively comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach (Morin *et al.*, 2000: 65) and a multi-level partnership (municipal, provincial, federal and community).

The City of Montreal's Intervention in Areas "in Decline"

In the 1990s, the phenomena of increasing poverty, higher crime rates, abandonment by merchants of commercial streets in certain neighbourhoods, failure of landlords to maintain their buildings and the presence of vacant buildings (some of them boarded up) were observed in parts³¹ of certain Montreal neighbourhoods. The dynamics of these zones were reminiscent, to a lesser degree, of those observed in some American big city ghettos. In a determined initiative, the City of Montreal decided to commit itself, though conditionally, to making a contribution. The city wanted to intervene before conditions deteriorated too far.

To carry out this operation, in April 1999 the city negotiated a framework agreement with the Quebec government to support Montreal's economic conversion, and its cultural, tourist and financial recovery. This framework agreement focuses on poor areas and has resulted in two action plans: an "Action Plan for Sensitive Neighbourhoods" (Ville de Montréal, n.d.) and an "Intervention Plan for Targeted Neighbourhoods" (Ville de Montréal, n.d.). The first plan seeks to reduce poverty and promote social integration, while the second plan proposes actions to improve the physical environment and thereby improve the quality of life. The two plans, which will end in 2003, targeted almost the same 11 areas or parts of neighbourhoods.

²⁹ CDECs now exist in other regions of Quebec.

³⁰ For example, the CDEC Centre-Sud/Plateau Mont-Royal Web site shows the range of themes with which CDECs deal (<http://www.cdec-cspmr.org/Qui-som.html#Mission>).

³¹ That is, often only certain parts of neighbourhoods.

The Action Plan for Sensitive Neighbourhoods proposes a local multi-sectoral approach and draws on citizen groups and community organizations. One of its objectives is to pool the resources of various government and municipal services to foster the emergence of joint strategic initiatives. The Action Plan also seeks to provide more resources to community organizations active in these sectors so that they can intervene in certain aspects of social exclusion.

The objective of the Action Plan is essentially social development. The Montreal plan drew its main inspiration from the experience of the city of Lyon (France). The plan provides for a modest budget allocation of \$5.6 million by the end of 2003. Of this total, \$4 million comes from the Quebec government and \$1.6 million from the city. The plan aims at original, concrete initiatives to address poverty, social exclusion, crime, violence, the school drop-out phenomenon and difficulties in integrating newcomers. The activities take a variety of forms: street work, preventive organizing with youth (e.g., youth centres), mental health interventions, improving neighbourhood safety, support for parents (e.g., parent centres, programs for young mothers) and the integration of new immigrants. Each action is tailored to the needs of each “sensitive” area, and is implemented by an established community group. In this project, the city is attempting to collaborate with all government agencies, regional partners and local organizations, and has hired a project manager to serve as liaison between the various stakeholders.

In a parallel process, the city has implemented its Intervention Plan for Targeted Neighbourhoods; the objective of this plan is to improve the built environment. The total investment will be \$42 million (\$29 million from the *ministère des Affaires municipales et de la Métropole du Québec* and \$12.6 million from the City of Montreal). The Intervention Plan provides for the development of more than 100 new projects (in addition to regular housing programs); some of them are micro-interventions (such as refurbishing park equipment). They will focus on housing, community facilities, revitalization of commercial streets, community improvement and intervention on the built environment. This intervention is based on the implicit assumption that improving the physical environment can have a positive psycho-social effect on citizens by improving their sense of local affiliation or belonging. At the very least, it will ensure that poor people in the targeted neighbourhoods benefit from a living environment more closely resembling less disadvantaged areas. The objectives are to stimulate economic development, improve the quality of the urban environment, develop community life and restore the social balance, which means bringing middle-class households back to these neighbourhoods. Other objectives are to promote housing initiatives and invigorate the residential real estate market.

It is too soon to measure the impacts of the two components of this “affirmative action” for neighbourhoods. The initiative is interesting, less for the scope of the financial resources put in place than for the choice of strategic parameters and implementation methods. Funding is shared, with most coming from the Quebec government. Projects are submitted locally but approved centrally. The approach is very multi-sectoral. It is hoped that intensive, short-term action, especially if it is concrete and tangible, will produce positive long-term effects. In organizational terms, the action is framed by a formal agreement between the city and the Quebec government. At the local level, all stakeholders – including both public officials and community groups (some of which benefit from various types of government assistance) – have been urged to work together.

The aim of developing better links between the actions of stakeholders in Montreal neighbourhoods is not new. The City of Montreal already has a solid tradition of formal intergovernmental agreements with the government of Quebec. It has entered into agreements in various fields: culture and heritage, social assistance management, housing, and sensitive and targeted neighbourhoods. There is even a “city contract” currently under discussion. At the local level, there have been neighbourhood roundtables (*tables de concertation* or *tables de quartier*) in the City of Montreal since the mid-1980s; they bring together various community and government organizations working in the same neighbourhood. The objective of these bodies is to better integrate the interventions of various organizations and to exchange information. The roundtables include representatives of the municipality and public institutions such as the CLSCs (local community service centres), the OMH (municipal housing office, or *Office municipal d’habitation*, which is responsible for public low-rent housing) and the police department, as well as representatives of community groups. According to Morin *et al.* (2000), there were 20 neighbourhood roundtables in the City of Montreal in 2000.

Intervention in Deprived Communities by the Montreal Island School Council

In 1972, the Quebec Government, through the *ministère de l’Éducation*, created the *Conseil scolaire de l’île de Montréal*, or Montreal Island School Council, to share tax revenues among all school boards (of which there were 40 in 1972) on the Island of Montreal, and thereby ensure a more equitable distribution within this territory. This council was also mandated to set up various programs and tools throughout the Island of Montreal and to provide additional support to schools in disadvantaged communities.³² It was responsible for preventing “community” differences from compromising the quality of teaching and students’ academic success. In its most recent action plan, the council declared its intention to work more closely with the CLSCs, the *ministère de la Santé*, etc., thereby opening the door to an inter-sectoral approach (*Conseil scolaire de l’île de Montréal*, 2002)^{33,34}

³² Inclusion on the list of schools in disadvantaged communities is an important political issue that divides the local school authorities. The Montreal Island School Council (*Conseil scolaire de l’île de Montréal (CSÎM)*) draws up the map of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, based on which schools are designated for special assistance.

³³ This inter-sectoral approach, which is based on a “co-education” approach, is also on the agenda in France. The French government, employing the framework of the new generation of urban area contracts, is proposing a strategy that involves many players who will provide their support to the school per se. The school will be assisted in accomplishing its missions by the local educational contract, which involves extracurricular activities. “Co-education” thus gets schools, communes, associations and social workers to work together. See issue no. 429 of the magazine *Territoires*, entitled “Écoles, collectivités locales, associations, élèves, parents. Partenaires pour une co-éducation.”

³⁴ For various reasons, the abolition of the Montreal Island School Council is currently the focus of a debate. One reason is the fact that Montreal Island is now a single city with five school boards. Will the Quebec government maintain its supplementary assistance to schools located in Montreal Island’s underprivileged neighbourhoods and, if it does, through which mechanisms and institutions will it channel the funds?

Assessing Strategic Options

We have presented a brief overview of (a) factors likely to guide strategies for urban poverty reduction, and (b) a few Montreal initiatives: a community group initiative (the CDECs), a municipal initiative (the targeted neighbourhoods) and a government institution initiative (the Montreal Island School Council). Our overview has illustrated the range of possible strategies and the need for “mixed” options.

We need in-depth analyses to determine which combinations of parameters will be successful; the parameters selected will undoubtedly vary according to the type of community. The Montreal case illustrates several points. In choosing spheres of intervention, general or universal measures pertaining to individuals (in their family context) are paramount. Montreal has many features that make it particularly vulnerable (chronic poverty, relative concentration of poor populations); as such, the city is a clear example of the importance of central (federal and provincial) government intervention in education, health care and the social safety net, among other fields. We have also shown how “aspatial” policies have territorial effects, particularly in poor neighbourhoods. In particular, they guarantee good quality services to poor populations, regardless of their places of residence, and maintain a certain social mix in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The long-term spatial effects of universal social policies (which are aimed primarily at individuals) should not be underestimated when compared to the more visible short-term impacts (including political impacts) of spatially concentrated interventions.

The second lesson from our overview is that actions targeting poor neighbourhoods can also have positive impacts, whether these actions are sponsored by higher levels of government (sometimes in partnership with local organizations) or by other types of institutions, such as municipalities or associations (often with the financial support of higher levels of government). To offset the serious deterioration of the physical environment and social fabric in certain sections of Montreal neighbourhoods, targeted interventions have been introduced to support more general policies. It is also possible that the positive effects of general policies concerning individuals and families will be further reinforced if they are supported by targeted actions. This is even more likely if the actions fit into an integrated approach emphasizing the complementarity of actions throughout the urban community.

The methods used to structure overall action, especially the methods applied in inter-organizational relations, will vary according to the mix of major strategic options selected (see Figure 1). With regard to targeted interventions, merely juxtaposing sectoral actions proves to be less effective in avoiding the negative spatial effects of poverty. The right mix is necessary, and it can take several forms: basic collaboration on strategies, contractual agreements in which each party commits itself to making a contribution or in which all parties help each other obtain certain results, and even the pooling of resources under a single stakeholder. Delineating the most appropriate strategies for reducing urban poverty requires joint assessments of strategic options and operating methods.

IV. Conclusion

This paper contributes to the current debate on sustainable communities at a time of growing concentration of poverty in Canadian urban areas. The existence and spread of areas of poverty undermines the social sustainability of these cities. The interim report of the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, *Canada's Urban Strategy* (Sgro, 2002), acknowledges this trend as a major challenge for the future of Canadian cities, even if it pays only limited attention to the problem and makes only one direct recommendation. However, several of its other recommendations deal with it indirectly, such as those on housing, transportation, immigration and Aboriginal people, although the spatial dimension of these aspects is not considered.

To compartmentalize the various manifestations of urban poverty in the conventional way is to fail to understand the extent of the phenomenon and its causes; nor does it recognize that urban poverty issues are interdependent. Such an approach leads to recommendations for selective measures that probably have a rather limited impact over time because they are not integrated into government action as a whole.

From an action perspective – though at first sight this may seem paradoxical – every strategy concerned with the spatial manifestations of poverty is obliged to recognize the importance of and pay particular attention to universal social policies (those that are not targeted territorially). This holds when these policies address the entire population, as in the case of social services (health, education), or when they target particular social groups. On the one hand, research on the characteristics of poor populations and their paths to escape poverty demonstrates that personal and family variables play a more important role than neighbourhood effects. On the other hand – and this aspect is sometimes overlooked – general policies that are intended to be “aspatial” may have an appreciable spatial impact. For example, they have a direct impact on living conditions (by determining the supply and quality of services) in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of poor people. In addition, depending on how they are financed, general policies can lead to greater or lesser fiscal “polarization” of metropolitan space; this can affect the residency choices of various social strata and, consequently, the social division of space.

In effect, as we have shown, to the extent that the policies of higher levels of government redistribute financial wealth over all areas, they promote a social mix. To create socially sustainable communities and neighbourhoods, whatever the levels of wealth of their residents, the higher levels of government must join efforts to provide an adequate level of basic social services throughout their territory, as well as sufficient monetary resources to poor households. The Sgro report recommends that the Government of Canada ensure that federal income support systems meet the needs of Canada's most vulnerable population.

With respect to areas of concentrated poverty, the main question is two-fold. First it must be decided whether each general policy will eventually have to be adjusted locally, not as to its objectives for results but as to implementation. Second, it must be decided how different policies should be developed at the local level, taking into account the different types of poverty and the characteristics of the neighbourhood, in order to maximize their impact. The challenge is daunting given the number of programs and the diversity of neighbourhoods.

Social programs and the social safety net involve the two higher levels of government. Some major programs serve a very large number of clients (sometimes the entire population, as in the case of health care). These general programs require a considerable share of public funds. The two levels of government also sponsor other programs that allow community organizations and associations to intervene at the neighbourhood level; these interventions are often targeted and developed one by one. Such programs are part of more or less explicit strategies (in 2002, Quebec adopted a *Stratégie nationale de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale* to combat poverty and social exclusion). This second set of programs receives significant public funds, though the amounts are considerably less than for the first set. How can we ensure that within each region and urban area (as opposed to city) all government actions (based on either general or targeted programs) are harmonized and reinforce each other? How can we guarantee that they will result in a noticeable reduction in poverty and in greater access for the poor to residential areas with satisfactory levels of shared amenities?

In light of current trends, two areas merit further exploration: intergovernmental relations and the role of local actors. In the area of intergovernmental relations, entering into formal agreements has numerous advantages over merely juxtaposing sector-based initiatives. Such an approach can facilitate agreement on objectives, coherence and even adaptation to local conditions; it discourages unilateral initiatives, which are inappropriate when there is a high level of interdependence. In the field of training, the federal government and the provinces (except Ontario) have already concluded agreements that will put the funds available to the best possible use. There are also agreements on housing. Approaches based on agreements also facilitate adaptation of practices and can encourage experimentation and innovation. Sharing the results of experimentation can only benefit others, as Yves Vaillancourt (2002) has demonstrated in his analysis of “the Quebec model of social policy and its interface with the Canadian social union.” Recognizing the value of bilateral and multilateral agreements and initiatives is also in line with one of the recommendations of the Sgro report.

As for the role of various actors in the war on poverty, a major current trend is to support local groups and organizations through federal and provincial government programs and, to a lesser extent, to involve municipalities. The approach of supporting local organizations may be appropriate in dealing with certain neighbourhood effects noted in our analysis of the dynamics of poverty. However, it also has limits and risks, particularly since associations in certain poor neighbourhoods may not be sufficiently dynamic. Surprisingly, while local groups have received considerable attention, there has been little serious analysis of the role that municipalities can play in this field.

Perhaps the appropriate role for municipalities in reducing poverty and alleviating its spatial effects is operational. If it is not desirable that municipalities play an important financial role in redistributing revenue (to decrease the risks of socio-spatial segregation), they nevertheless play a role in the distribution of other benefits associated with urban affiliation. Their activities (especially in the areas of zoning, housing and facilities) influence the attractiveness of neighbourhoods and can lead to greater or lesser disparities in the living conditions of the poor relative to those from other social classes. In addition, through their numerous activities that encourage citizens to live together harmoniously, they have an impact on the social integration of poor residents and those from other social levels. Lastly, they have a newer role: they have

begun to coordinate the activities of various government, community and private stakeholders in poor neighbourhoods; this role is reflected in the policies of several countries vis-à-vis their poor neighbourhoods. The coordination function strives to make the intended plans of the parties consistent with one another (strategic plan) and to mobilize the resources of each stakeholder; sometimes, depending on the terms of the contract with higher levels of government, they seek to integrate efforts at the operational level. However, this involvement means that municipalities may have to acquire the resources (in particular, human competencies) they currently claim to lack.

Montreal's experience with CDECs, and with the two action plans of the City of Montreal that target "sensitive" neighbourhoods, clearly demonstrates the advantages of partnerships involving a variety of government and community actors, including municipalities. Through targeted interventions, these partnerships combat the deteriorating social and economic fabric and living environment in certain Montreal neighbourhoods.

The present analysis of the spatial manifestations of poverty, and of government intervention strategies to prevent or mitigate its effects, revisits several of the issues that Canadian society faces in the organization of government action. In dealing with poverty, as with other problems, the two senior governments utilize three channels of intervention simultaneously. First, in implementing their specific and general programs (such as education and health), they act directly through their own agencies or local bodies under their control; with the budget cuts that occurred in the last decade, such direct action has been reduced somewhat. Second, decentralized bodies, notably municipalities, are becoming more involved, and they are being provided with varying amounts of assistance. Third, use is being made of and support provided to community organizations or, more broadly speaking, associations. The Sgro report and various other government reports emphasize this third channel.

As a rule, these three channels have been employed separately (independently of each other), though usually at the same time; there has also been an element of competition (since the resources allocated to one channel will not be available to the others). In this regard, we make two observations based on our analysis. On the one hand, each of these channels can make a useful though sometimes limited contribution; however, the details need to be worked out carefully. On the other hand, as various discussions and practices show, there is clearly a growing trend toward collaboration. Whatever is done through one channel must be coordinated with initiatives undertaken through the other channels. Staying with the water metaphor suggested by "channels," the local level may be likened to a body of water that is fed by several channels but maintains its own character by preventing any single channel from overwhelming the body. The challenge is to find coordination mechanisms at the local level that will allow each organization to maintain its own sense of direction and methods, while ensuring that all initiatives directed at certain groups or neighbourhoods have a common focus so that the combined actions will be greater than the sum of the separate efforts.

In this context, we need to give further consideration to the roles of municipalities, which, after all, have recently received less attention than associations. This should include: 1) redefining the role that municipalities play as part of the locally-based public sector as a whole, including in mobilizing the local community; 2) experimenting with various forms of contractually-based

intergovernmental actions that take into account the differences and complementary aspects of their responsibilities; 3) ensuring that the impacts of various sectoral actions are congruous, notably through shared learning about government actions at the local level; 4) finding a new balance among the responsibilities and resources of the various parties (but without calling into question the principle of redistribution of social wealth); and 5) taking into account more systematically the spatial effects of policies. Bearing in mind that social cohesion must be lived at many levels, including between neighbours, in neighbourhoods and within cities, our understanding of socio-spatial dynamics resulting from the interaction of local factors and general trends remains very important, especially in the war on poverty.

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