



Sustainable Cities

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Halifax, July 7, 2003



A New Context For Cities

- Cities and communities are struggling to adapt to pressures from many directions:
 1. Globalization, industrial restructuring
 2. They are at the bottom of the constitutional ladder and
 3. Have inherited responsibility for “soft” policy
- Early reaction is to focus on taxing power and infrastructure funding



Two Themes

- Social sustainability
 - Spatial segregation – forming rich and poor neighbourhoods
 - New wage structure
 - New policy structure from the 1990s
- How cities mobilize to meet economic, environmental and social challenges
- Both are intimately related to the themes of this conference



Social Sustainability

- An expression adapted from the Brundtland report. It means
- Harmony in the development of
 - Civil society
 - Economy
 - Environment
 - Culture/diversity
 - Political
- To create a sense of connectedness across the community -- "wovenness"



Wovenness

- Wovenness is the opposite of exclusion
- The opposite of
 - Gated communities and distressed neighbourhoods
 - Industrial commissions competing for investment
 - Empty downtowns
 - Long commutes to homes paying taxes to another township
 - Political downloading
- It creates a sense of shared responsibility



The Productivity Connection

- This is where the social and economic meet
- A high quality of life attracts and retains highly skilled work force
- Social dynamics support the innovative process – informal networks among business, research, education, and other communities
- People and goods can move around the city efficiently (density, transit)
- Everyone has access to learning opportunities – especially adults and young children



Spatial Segregation

- Canadian cities have not been marked by ghettos or distressed inner cities
- But since 1980, poverty has become more concentrated in discrete neighbourhoods
- Greater polarization of income by neighbourhoods than the national data
- Evidence of highly distressed quarters has been growing
- Visible minorities, Aboriginals, lone parent families, disabled people most affected



The New Wage Structure

- Since 1975, wages have polarized – wide differentials in pay
 - More millionaires
 - But 1 in 6 Canadians works for less than \$10 / hour (about \$21,000 / year, full-time)
 - 1/3 have high school; 1/3 have post-secondary
- Low-paid workers face huge challenges in finding a steady job, affordable housing and reliable transportation to work
- Real minimum wage has fallen 20% since 1975



New Policy Principles

- Little or no increase in supply of social housing since early 1990s
- Most social programs now highly targeted
 - Eligibility based on income or family structure
 - Effective tax rates on extra \$100 income - 80-90%
- Supports for adult training are harder to find
- All this was done in the name of efficiency (less public spending) but
- It creates a poverty trap for the working poor



Liveable Cities Make A Difference

- In the current context, a low-paid job will not support a family
- In a liveable city, workers would have access to
 - Good local schools and health clinics
 - Efficient public transit
 - Affordable housing (rent subsidies, as needed)
 - High quality, affordable day care
 - Recreation and sports with no/low user fees
 - Training for those who need to upgrade



Not Just The Working Poor

- While a low-paid worker would be much better off in a liveable city,
- The middle class would thrive and
- Employers would be served by a highly flexible labour market
- Liveable cities are for everybody
- They create a shared citizenship and a shared ownership of that community



How do we make our cities
sustainable – socially and
economically?



Governance Challenges

- Senior governments have trouble with the “specificity” of city issues
 - The mandate is to treat all citizens equally; they are not comfortable with place-specific choices
- Local actors have trouble because of lack of “problem-solving capacity”
- The first priority then is to bridge the gaps -- to involve business and labour, city and suburb, social and environmental in creating solutions



Planners --

- As planners, you touch all these domains
 - Land and built environment
 - Liveability of cities
- Market forces seem to win the game – sprawl
- But you have the opportunity to sow the seeds with new ideas and help bridge the gaps
- Helping communities to mobilize energy and solve problems together



Perspectives – Governments

- Senior governments are preoccupied by
 - Equitable allocation of resources, not serving local needs
 - There is a strong pull from their rural base
 - They cannot provide the local leadership
- Municipal governments are often fragmented
 - Multiple agencies, boundary lines
 - With weak policy capacity and expanding mandates
 - Cannot do it alone



Perspectives – Business, Education

- Businesses are seeking
 - Low taxes
 - Cheap land
 - Efficient local and international transport
 - Skilled workers
 - Amenities for workers and management
- Education institutions
 - Under-resourced
 - Inward focused



Perspectives – Civil Society

- Civil society can be weak or strong, depending on past history of involvement. Focus is on
 - Social equity, social inclusion, managing diversity
 - Public spaces, recreation, festivals
 - Liveable cities
- These sectors are not completely isolated
 - Business leaders are also civil society leaders
 - Civil society leaders run for office, etc
- But the sectors do not naturally collaborate – they need help to create collective projects



The Learning Community

- Learning communities know how to engage diverse actors to meet common goals
- All these actors must think in three dimensions:
 - Regionally – economy, environment, infrastructure
 - Inclusively – with everyone on the same network, looking at the same map
 - Bottom up – ensuring that needs are defined locally, based on neighbourhood and family needs
- The common goal is social sustainability



The Common Goal

- Whatever your starting point -- to reverse economic decline, improve competitiveness, or create a new pole of activity
- The higher order goal is to make your community a better place for the people who will live there tomorrow
- The common goal is social sustainability



Getting Started

- Across industrialized countries, this challenge is being met. Here's what it takes (Bradford, 2003)
 - Local champions
 - Institutional intermediaries (often senior governments)
 - Equitable participation
 - A culture of creativity
 - Adequate financial and technical resources
 - Strong accountability mechanisms
 - Indicators to track progress



Blending The Ingredients

- Many communities, large and small, are started on this voyage – Kelowna, Halifax, Saskatoon, the Beauce, even Toronto with its second City Summit
- But they cannot do it alone. So far, they lack a coherent response from provincial and federal governments
- Yet, all our research shows the importance of the contribution from senior governments – people policies and place policies



Senior Governments Can

- Help to “scale up” community demonstration projects, extract best practices
- Provide money, land and regulations to support local actors in their mission
- Ensure social services and social transfers meet local needs
- Insist on local autonomy and robust accountability mechanisms
- Create a “single window” for cities



First Things First

- But the senior governments need to be invited to be part of a train that is already moving
- Moving because local actors from all walks of life have defined their common goals, set priorities, and agreed on how to get there
- The evidence shows that success brings success all the local actors gain confidence
- This is the beginning of “wovenness,” and the pathway to sustainable cities.



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