Liveable Cities: Good for the Community, Good for the Economy

October 10, 2003 – Canada is the second most urbanized country in the world. More than 80 percent of us now live in cities.

Given the role cities play in the New Economy, this should be a very good thing. But without attention to the quality of life in our major urban centres, the benefits of urbanization are anything but assured.

Economic advantage today is closely related to the performance of cities, not simply in economic terms, but in terms of their social, cultural and environmental characteristics as well. In fact, economists are only beginning to realize what many others have known intuitively for ages, strong social networks and success at including all our citizens in productive activity have an important economic pay-off. Economically successful cities are those that put a premium on inclusiveness and what has come to be called "social sustainability".

In ***Sustainable Cities***, a presentation she made to the Canadian Institute of Planners last July in Halifax, CPRN's President, Judith Maxwell, examines what makes cities socially sustainable, and the strategies to achieve that end.

The socially sustainable city, Maxwell argues, displays what she calls "wovenness". A city characterized by wovenness is one where all communities feel a sense of shared responsibility and connectedness. There is a strong link between sustainable cities and economic productivity and innovation.

But Maxwell identifies worrying trends in Canadian cities today – towards spatial concentration of poverty, segregation of communities and polarized wages. Sustainable cities, she argues, require policies that tackle these impediments to wovenness, policies that demand collaboration between all levels of government and civil society.

You can access or download her presentation by clicking here.

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