

Progressive Planning

The Magazine of Planners Network

Planning for Diversity in Canada



Participants in the 2008 Planners Network Conference workshop 'From the Reserve to the City' in Winnipeg's North End. Jackson Beardsley's mural "Peace and Harmony" is visible in the background.

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Women and Planning

Grand Plans

The Seventh Generation

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

-From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

Planning for Diversity in Canada: *From Rhetoric to Action*

by AMY SICILIANO and NORMA RANTISI

The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, and discourages ghettoization, hatred, discrimination and violence.

—Government of Canada, Department of Heritage, *What is Multiculturalism?*, 2004

In a small town in Québec, a municipal council adopts a "code of conduct" targeting an immigrant Muslim population that has yet to arrive. In Montréal North, riots break out in a predominately Haitian neighborhood after a young Latino man is fatally shot by police. In Ontario, the province's Human Rights Commission finds that "zero tolerance" legislation in Toronto's public schools has had discriminatory effects on students of color and those with disabilities. Such events shatter Canadians' cherished self-reflections of tolerance and inclusion and fuel domestic anxieties over growing tensions around issues of diversity abroad. On the one hand, public institutions and private businesses alike adopt the language and image of Canadian diversity and multiculturalism to gain competitive edge in the global market. On the other hand, symptoms of everyday and institutional practices of racism and discrimination manifest across cities and towns, both large and small.

If the oppressed once harnessed the language of diversity to demand their right to equal access, we should ask again today, as sociologist Himani Bannerji implores us to, whose interests does the language of diversity presently serve? How can planners and activists advance progressive dialogue and action around issues of diversity and social inclusion? In this special issue, we have assembled a group of activists,

planners and academics to present some of the pressing challenges facing those planning for diversity in Canada.

Tensions between the rhetoric and practice of diversity are perhaps more startling given the legacy of multicultural policy in Canada. At the national level, efforts to legislate the promotion of diversity date back to the late 1960s, when the federal government passed a bicultural and bilingual law to address English-French tensions. At the same time the "de-racialization" of Canada's immigration policy to meet projected labor shortages dramatically expanded the country's ethnic diversity, especially in cities. In response to concerns expressed by the swelling ranks of marginalized groups, the federal government, in a path-breaking move, instituted a multicultural policy. In contrast to the melting pot model of the United States, this policy integrated the notion of a "cultural mosaic" in which unique parts would fit together to project a diverse, yet unified whole.

By 1982, multicultural policy became law and in 1988, Bill C-93 was passed as the Multicultural Act. Among other things, this act called for the need to "promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to such participation." Ostensibly, the act aims to recognize and respect—rather than assimilate—difference. While it has potential to serve as a policy for integration, actually existing multiculturalism predominantly encourages celebrations of differences while leaving undisturbed the existing **[Cont. on page 13]**

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An Alternative Tale of the City: *Toronto and the Alternative Planning Group*

by UZMA SHAKIR

A trip on Toronto Transit (known locally as the T.T.C.) draws a pretty picture of the city of Toronto and the image of diversity we wish to communicate to the world. Hijab-clad young women going with their Sikh and Chinese friends to Danforth Station for the Greek food festival and then perhaps catching a performance of *Bollywood Dreams* at the Hummingbird Center is the reality of living global locally. But appearances can be deceptive! Since 1999, the Alternative Planning Group (APG) has been grappling with the difficult challenges of creating a more equitable and just form of diversity.

A closer look at the communities of the wealthiest city in Canada paints a disturbing picture. Multiple reports show that the middle class is increasingly disappearing and income polarization is growing. A small group of rich people is getting richer while the larger proportion of the population is getting poorer. Even more alarming is that this income disparity is manifested in two critical ways in the city: the spatial and ethno-racial divides. Wealthier white people live in the center of the city surrounded by a sea of poorer ethno-racial communities. Between 1980 and 2000, while the poverty rate for the non-racialized population (i.e., those of white, European or Caucasian heritage)

fell by 28 percent, *poverty among racialized families rose by 361 percent*. This is happening at a time when, on average, immigrant skills and education are higher than the Canadian average.

Indeed, Torontonians today are virtually all bilingual (if not trilingual or “quadlingual,” as my son calls himself), but they don’t always just speak English and/or French. For many Torontonians, the shores of Africa or fields of Asia shape their history and nostalgia and language more than the landscape of Europe. They are highly educated, skilled and mobile, and internationally experienced, just not in Canada. By 2011, according to the 1999 report *Immigration, Labor Force & Age Structure of the Population* by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, an incredible 100 percent of net labor market growth is expected to be through immigration, yet today, the systemic non-utilization of this immigrant labor costs the Canadian economy approximately CAN\$4.97 billion.

What kind of future are we hoping to build, and what is the role of planning in Canada’s global cities in making that future real? Are we trying to build a future that takes the diverse resources of the globe and hammers them into a mythical Canadian bilingual/bicultural shape? This mythical Canada

never really existed except as a colonial construct. The fantasy of bilingual, bicultural Canada never acknowledged Aboriginal peoples’ multiple identities as part of the national lore. Or are we trying to build a future that deconstructs and then reconstructs Canada in the interest of equity? Canada is worth investing in, but we must remember that Canada is not a final product but rather an experiment unfolding where we must all have an equal opportunity to write the national story or else we will perpetuate historical absences while creating new voids well into the future.

Organizing Alternative Planning

These questions have never been more pertinent for Toronto than today. They are what a group of executive directors of four ethno-racial councils in Toronto posed as challenges to themselves in 1999, leading to the creation of the APG. The APG is a community-based initiative that grew out of the experiences of the African Canadian Social Development Council (ACSDC), Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO), Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and Hispanic Development Council (HDC).

The starting premise of the APG was to recognize that our collective heritage was not a commonality of history, culture, race or language,

but rather our collective experience of marginality and adherence to principles of equity, plurality, difference, justice and solidarity. We vowed to acknowledge our “difference” as the starting point of equitable negotiation for designing a shared “common good” and not as a marker of power and privilege. Since none of us had the power in society to define the “other” as being “different,” our partnership was based on equitable footing. But most importantly, we grew organically. Furthermore, our action was determined by community needs and it defined our theory, not the other way around. Armed with these ideas, we set out to change the rules of the game.

We initiated several new practices which formed the basis of our alternative planning paradigm. First, we began to conduct joint research. We developed common research questions while keeping in mind our differences, including community profiles, characteristics and histories. We hired four researchers who conducted community-specific research and generated individual reports, and then we collectively produced a report to synthesize all four individual ones. We canvassed the settlement needs of our communities, identified broad determinants of health facing community members, produced a collective critique and vision of social inclusion and initiated campaigns—topics of which included income security issues among immigrant senior citizens and civic engagement educational strategies for ethno-racial communities. This inquiry allowed us to develop both community-

specific and inter-community strategies and plans of action. We also used the process to host joint community events where members of all four communities were invited to hold dialogues with each other and create a shared plan of action.

Second, we relied on each individual council’s historical experience and expertise to benefit all. For example, CASSA advocated for employment equity and access to professions and trades by internationally-trained professionals; Hispanic Council produced research and data on all four communities; the Chinese Council focused on media advocacy and organizing strategies around various issues; and the African Council developed new strategies of community economic development that could be utilized by all four communities. We also began to integrate our work organizationally. For example, Hispanic Council’s youth program became the basis for the other three councils to develop their own youth programs, but once again with different areas of focus. Accordingly, APG multiplied its capacity, outreach and expertise.

Third, having created a process of equitable collaboration, we initiated an informal merger of our administrative, governance and policy structures. The executive directors began to meet monthly to develop collective workplans and jointly apply for grants as APG. More significantly, we held annual board meetings of all four boards of directors. Though rather large and raucous, these meetings forged closer relations between

board members, allowed the four executive directors to present their reports to all members and allowed the four boards to collectively set policy directions for the partnership.

Thus, the APG, which started as a partnership between four ethno-racial councils, began to morph through these new methodologies of organizational change, collaboration, research, advocacy, community engagement and mobilization. One outcome of this process was growing solidarity among the four largest ethno-racial communities in Toronto through a process that was quite unique. APG’s success generated interest among other ethno-racial community groups, academics and community activists, and city staff began to take notice.

Alternative Planning Paradigm

In 2004, the City of Toronto acknowledged that there were multiple bodies doing social planning with very little resources, support and recognition, particularly over the last few decades. It commissioned five reports: one from the APG and its partners; another from the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, a mainstream planning body; a third from the Toronto Neighborhood Centers, a collaboration of citywide neighborhood centers; a fourth from the Aboriginal People’s Council of Toronto; and a fifth from the Toronto Women’s Network, a women’s group seeking to ensure that gender becomes an organizing lens for planning. ⇒

The APG's report, *Alternative Social Planning: A Paradigm Shift Developing an Inclusive, Healthy Toronto*, produced in partnership with the Portuguese Interagency Network (PIN) and Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), a provincial organization of over 200 agencies that serve immigrants and refugees, documents the enormous gap between the status quo and what an effective planning process should look in a city like Toronto. The report argues that communities must define and plan for themselves and be supported in these activities. It outlines minimum conditions for successful social planning rooted in the meaningful functioning of diversity; equitable sharing of “existing” power and resources amongst partners involved in the planning sector; a vision that governance and community planning is a shared responsibility; and a recognition that planning must try to anticipate and address social issues arising in the future. Most importantly, the report identifies the goals, principles and tools needed to guide alternative social planning.

Goals:

To build meaningful, inclusive and equitable social relations among diverse communities in order to create a cohesive society. This means building the capacity of vulnerable communities to work individually and collectively by investing in their capacity to conduct planning.

To support social development of communities to negotiate power differentials in society by re-

distributing resources (e.g., money, infrastructure, expertise) in order to foster and sustain equity.

To make social development a tool for change, recognizing that in an inequitable society, planning is a political activity that involves a process of engagement and empowerment of those most marginalized to redress inequities.

Principles:

Communities are self-defined and come together organically on points of commonality so there is no need for benevolent “conveners.” Individuals can be a part of multiple communities, so participation is not limited by race, geography, issue or any other predetermined parameter.

Communities work in partnership with the City of Toronto, with government acting as distributor of resources for the purpose of addressing inequities and thus making the city accountable for diversity.

Resources are distributed to communities that have the greatest and most immediate needs. The city and communities as planning partners identify and prioritize groups, communities and issues that need to be addressed through planning.

Tools:

Support for organic planning networks.

Community-based knowledge production, disaggregated longitudinal data collection

and priority-setting to produce community knowledge but also knowledgeable communities.

Advocacy to mobilize communities and individuals to organize and take action to address social inequities and foster civic engagement.

Such strategies can produce both short- and long-term outcomes, outcomes that emerge from the creation of effective partnerships, reliable critical forecasting, new epistemologies, meaningful policy interventions and active citizenship.

Engaging the City: An Exercise in Futility

The City of Toronto’s review led to the establishment of the Toronto Social Development Network (TSDN) in the summer of 2005, made up of the players from the review process. We delivered a set of recommendations to the council for a city plan to fund and conduct social planning. This report, however, failed to deliver results. In fact, the very premises of alternative planning (to shift the paradigm) were undermined in the creation of TSDN. It was a top-down structure, forcing players who had inherent inequality of resources and power and divergent political agendas and understandings of planning to sit at a table designed by the funder (in this case the city). The Aboriginal People’s Council of Toronto, for instance, withdrew from the process, citing lack of capacity to sit at the table. In hindsight, it appeared to be the wisest decision.

APG and its partners could ill afford to divert their limited resources to such an inherently inequitable and flawed process. Nevertheless—seduced by the possibility of change—we sat around the table trying to square a circle. APG, which had actually dared to imagine a planning landscape that could begin to address issues of plurality, difference, power differential, anti-racism, equity and democratic participation as inherent to both process and outcome, lost precious ground and energy while legitimizing the paternalistic TSDN process.

Today APG is rebuilding its partnership and refocusing its activities according to its own principles of alternative planning within its own communities. The city has since abandoned any façade of reviewing its planning or decision-making process as to who gets funding and for what purpose. Some minor changes have been made by cherry-picking recommendations from TSDN, but the possibility of a structural policy shift has been lost.

Implications for Alternative Planning

Can we, as planners, continue to do business as usual when the world around us has changed so dramatically? We *must* re-imagine ourselves in the context of both the city and the planning profession by addressing the existing racial/cultural/linguistic/ethnic/religious diversity of the population and the production of racialized inequities. We must remember that business as usual only perpetuates the reality described above.

The racialization of poverty and its spatial containment have a long history in Canada as reflected in the experiences of Aboriginal peoples and those of indigenous black populations and early ethno-racial immigrants. Furthermore, since 1980 there has been a shift in immigration patterns as people on the move now come from “non-traditional” countries—a euphemism for race—which means that the race and space reality of Canada has now acquired a more concentrated dimension.

Diversity is no longer a comfortable term to throw around when talking about restaurants and festivals and costumes, but rather a challenge (not a threat!) to the very notion of Canadian-ness. Planning can no longer be apolitical, accommodating “competing and diverse” needs, aspirations and preferences. As my friend Duberlis Ramos, executive director of the Hispanic Development Council, often says: “If you build democracy, they will come!” Planning today is essentially about building the future of democracy!

Planners cannot be isolated from communities and communities cannot be isolated from their environment—assuming that planners plan and communities benefit, thus avoiding the uncomfortable possibility that planners and planning are part of the problem. In a racially, culturally and linguistically diverse city, specialized planning knowledge should by definition be diverse (in terms of number of players, type of players, nature of planning agendas, types of planning designs).

If “planning” is essentially the development of land, resources, facilities and services consistent with existing and projected needs of the community or city, then planning is critical if we are to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. But we must acknowledge that “space,” both in terms of how it is organized and how it is used, cannot hide behind a façade of neutrality. Canadian history and identity are defined by a mythology of space—from the founding myth of *terra nullius* wiping Aboriginal peoples’ claims and existence from the land, to the present day defense of the “true North strong and free...” from the teeming immigrants and refugees deemed not to share those values. (Today it is Muslims, yesterday it was Japanese, who will it be tomorrow?!) I guess we never dreamt that so many racialized people would show up on our doorstep to service the nation but never leave!

A “new” city requires new ideas, and innovators such as the APG articulate new ideas and help make the City of Toronto an incubator of change and a potential leader in social innovation. The question is, Does anybody care?

Uzma Shakir is a community-based researcher, advocate and activist. She is the past executive director of Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO). She has worked as a teacher, journalist and researcher. She is presently an Atkinson Economic Justice Fellow, and a past recipient of the Jane Jacobs Award (2003).

Indigeneity: A Cornerstone of Diversity Planning in Canadian Cities

by RYAN WALKER

Understanding and realizing the urban aspirations of Canada's Aboriginal (Indigenous) peoples (i.e., First Nations, Métis and Inuit) is a fundamental part of planning for diversity. Aboriginal peoples constitute a significant proportion of the population in a number of cities—between 9 and 10 percent, respectively, in Saskatoon and Winnipeg, for example. They are also an integral part of the history and the civic community of Canada, more generally. Progressive planners should see Aboriginal communities as partners in building more diverse and just cities.

Urban planning with Aboriginal communities is an exciting and underdeveloped area of the discipline, presenting opportunities to establish new areas of research and practice and new initiatives to increase the depth of civic identity beyond the most common narratives of the settler and new immigrant. This article offers a brief conceptualization of planning with Aboriginal communities and presents five priority areas for further work in planning practice and research. The priority areas were determined through consultation with colleagues at the University of Saskatchewan and Aboriginal community stakeholders and

municipal officials in Saskatoon, Vancouver, Edmonton, Prince Albert, Yellowknife, Winnipeg and Toronto. In particular, the managers of city planning, urban design and community development at the City of Saskatoon and several of my academic colleagues in the URRBIN Group (an urban Aboriginal affairs research group at the University of Saskatchewan) played a central role in the project from start to finish. The goal of identifying priority areas is meant to challenge planners to work more earnestly in partnership with Aboriginal peoples and to articulate the aspirations of the Aboriginal community in placemaking initiatives, services and governance relationships.

Transformative Planning and Self-Determination

Two concepts are helpful in interpreting the five priority areas discussed below. The first is “transformative planning,” theorized by John Friedmann and adapted by Marcus Lane and Michael Hibbard for planning with Indigenous communities. Transformative planning is planning that includes a commitment by planners—mostly non-Aboriginal planners who wish to work in better ways with Aboriginal communities—to

transform the civic structures that inhibit Aboriginal communities' abilities to actualize their aspirations according to their own articulation of needs and feelings.

The second concept is self-determination, a principle that is fundamental to reworking relations with Aboriginal peoples and ensuring their constructive engagement in civic processes. Aboriginal societies were determining their own affairs prior to (re-)settlement by Europeans and never abrogated their right to continue doing so. Treaty relationships, of course, changed the nature of self-determination to a community process that would thereafter occur alongside the pursuits of European settler societies. Mutual respect, recognition and partnership between descendents of European settlers and those of Aboriginal peoples is essential to modern self-determination. As Roger Maaka and Augie Fleras have expressed, the overarching goal for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples living together in the same territory must be to find good ways of “living together differently without drifting apart.”

Within Canada, the right and aspiration to self-determination by Aboriginal communities within the settler state accords

them a different place in society than that held by immigrant ethnic minority groups. At the most basic level, immigrant communities ostensibly chose to relocate to a new country with an already established set of institutions and practices. Aboriginal peoples, on the other hand, did not, and they derive a different status by virtue of prior occupancy, treaties and constitutional recognition as peoples bearing distinctive group rights.

Accordingly, the challenge of finding different ways to live together differently without drifting apart exists for all levels of government and all scales of community. This challenge presents opportunities for a new generation of planning practitioners and academics to take a step closer to Leonie

Sandercock's vision of *cosmopolis* where there is “the possibility of working together on matters of common destiny, the possibility of a togetherness in difference.” In all the western settler states, the majority of Aboriginal peoples live in urban areas. The cultures that give meaning to their lives are dynamic and evolving in the urban sphere, yet no less authentic than in non-urban reserves or discrete rural/remote communities too often perceived by mainstream society as the only places where “authentic”

Indigenous cultures exist. This implies the need for flexible ways of implementing self-determination in partnership with non-Aboriginal society.

We know that planning practice and research is not value-neutral and that it privileges Western notions of what constitutes good physical and social planning, including processes for engaging community members. Patsy Healey has noted that in light of this systemic power imbalance, it is not surprising that



RIGHT: River Landing Tree Grate Tobacco Ceremony, Saskatoon

Photo courtesy of City of Saskatoon

Aboriginal communities resist incorporation into mainstream planning processes rather than “play along.” There is promise, however, in the contention by Barbara Rahder and Richard Milgrom that “[w]hen marginalized groups begin to see their contributions to the city represented in the city’s form, they may be more willing to participate in planning processes.” It stands to reason then that when planners plan with a full appreciation of Aboriginal community aspirations for self-determination and have a vision of creating *cosmopolis* through transformative practice in partnership with Aboriginal society we should all reap the rewards of more cohesive and resilient communities that provide a richer sense of civic identity. Work in the following five priority areas should help us to get a step closer to realizing the potential of a diverse city that is inclusive of Aboriginal peoples.

Five Priority Areas for Improving Planning Practice and Undertaking Research

1. Citizen Participation and Engagement

Better processes for engaging with Aboriginal citizens are necessary, from the level of the household to community to city council. The distance between individual citizens and city hall is large. While many cities have devised methods to deal with this, such as community or neighborhood associations, these methods are not effective in engaging Aboriginal community members. My research in different cities has shown that few residents with Aboriginal ancestry participate in neighborhood associations or ad hoc community forums, even in neighborhoods where one-third to one-half of the population have Aboriginal ancestry. There are likely several reasons for this, but one of them is that, on average,

Aboriginal households have higher residential mobility both between different neighborhoods in cities and between the city and rural or reserve communities.

A second reason is that many Aboriginal people choose to participate differently, focusing their involvement in Aboriginal organizations, such as the network of Indian and Métis friendship centers. Processes that are place-based, such as engagement at the level of the neighborhood, may be much less successful than those that are people-based, which engage with Aboriginal people through their organizations. That said, some place-based approaches have worked, for example where a specific Aboriginal coordinator or advisory group has been set up to solicit views of Aboriginal residents in the neighborhood (e.g., West Broadway Development Corporation in Winnipeg) in ways that are more meaningful and welcoming than the typical

open public forum where the set-up and tacit or explicit rules for participation may be uninviting.

2. Governance Interface Between Municipal Government and Aboriginal Peoples

A growing proportion of people in many Canadian cities identify with Aboriginal ancestry, and there are clearly held aspirations for preserving and strengthening urban Aboriginal culture in order to realize some meaningful measure of self-determination. There are at least two different types of working relationships that need to be regularized between city councils and Aboriginal communities. One is with specific Aboriginal reserve and rural communities that have their own governments (e.g., band councils, Métis locals) and have proximity to the city or citizens and/or economic interests in the city. Specific protocols could be established with Aboriginal

governments, such as those initiated between the City of Powell River and the Sliammon First Nation in British Columbia (e.g., Protocol Agreement on Culture, Heritage and Economic Development, Protocol Agreement for Communication and Cooperation). Among other things, this can help address issues of common purpose where mobility between the city and rural/reserve communities is an important component of the urban experience. Joint planning for land use or economic, heritage or tourism development are examples of areas of common purpose.

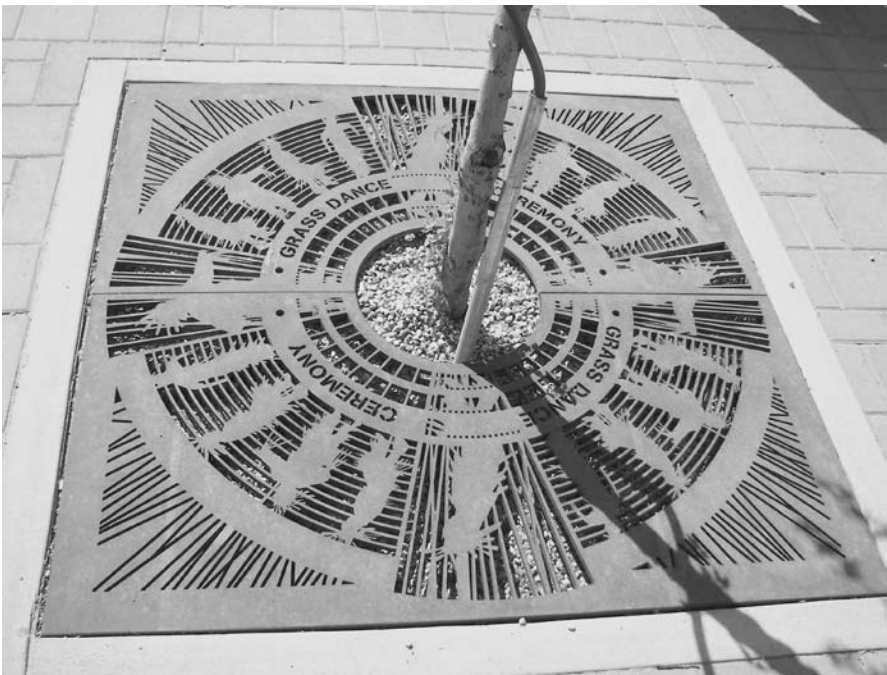
A second type of relationship is with a more multicultural urban Aboriginal population that includes people from different nations and territories that share some common interests in and history with local urban affairs. A municipal advisory body with members representing the various

Aboriginal communities and their leaders could coordinate Aboriginal consultation and decision-making on municipal matters and engage in ongoing consultation on municipal issues such as community services, planning and design. Careful consideration needs to be given to how such an advisory body is structured and who constitutes legitimate community leadership. The Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord is one example of a principles- and dialogue-based approach to creating a stronger governance interface with Aboriginal communities in the city. In Edmonton, the city council began using relationship-building tools like “discovery interviews,” teas, community meetings, visits to Aboriginal groups, open houses and talking circles. They created a strong foundation based on interpersonal relationships and agreement on a set of four community-identified guiding principles for subsequent working relationships on municipal affairs between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Edmonton. The principles are relationships, agreements, celebrations and renewal.

3. Aboriginal Culture as a Municipal Asset

Aboriginal peoples in urban areas are often characterized in terms of social problems rather than in terms of the strong communities they comprise—communities with aspirations, traditions ⇨

Photo courtesy of City of Saskatoon



LEFT: River Landing Tree Grate Design, Saskatoon

RIGHT: Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Urban Reserve, Saskatoon

Photo courtesy of City of Saskatoon



and contributions that enhance the collective place identity. Aboriginal culture is a great municipal asset that can provide a rich entry point to meaningful change in Aboriginal affairs. Expanding the collective civic imagination and depth of identity to include Aboriginal culture (historic and contemporary) in planning and urban design, public art and monuments, street and park naming, civic history and consciousness-raising are all ways of strengthening interactions between Aboriginal communities and municipalities through an asset-based approach. The presence of Aboriginal culture and history in municipal heritage, tourism and place promotion may contribute to local economic and social development.

One award-winning example of urban design focused on accentuating Aboriginal culture and identity as a municipal asset occurred in Saskatoon at a hallmark public development downtown near the South Saskatchewan River called River Landing. Here, the City of Saskatoon’s Urban Design Section worked with an Aboriginal Elder Council to create a set of tree grate designs that tell stories of how First Peoples would have lived and used the site prior to re-settlement by Europeans. The tree grates (see photos) contain visual representations of the Elders’ stories and bring new depth to peoples’ understanding of the site and the spirit of the place.

4. Economic and Social Development

Municipalities should work closely with Aboriginal communities to ensure that culturally appropriate policing and community services are delivered. Where the size and institutional capacity of the Aboriginal population merit, services designed and delivered by Aboriginal organizations should be considered, as culturally-specific programs have been linked to better outcomes for Aboriginal people than mainstream universal programs. Sports, recreation and community arts programs that target Aboriginal youth are some of the most promising areas where municipalities can affect significant and meaningful change in community quality of life. Municipalities can also create new opportunities within communities by engaging the private sector to provide job skills and business development training for Aboriginal peoples.

In my 2008 report entitled *Social Housing and the Role of Aboriginal Organizations in Canadian Cities*, published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy, I outline the extraordinarily poor housing circumstances of Aboriginal peoples in cities, on average, in comparison with the non-Aboriginal population. Yet it is unfair to say that municipalities are responsible for creating culturally appropriate, adequate and affordable housing on their own. It is fundamentally a responsibility of the federal and provincial governments. Municipalities can, however, create Aboriginal housing programs to

set an example and seed initiatives that are then supported more fully by senior government policy frameworks. In other words, nothing is stopping municipalities from being leaders in this sector, even if they cannot and should not bear the cost of this type of this type of social redistribution. For example, the City of Winnipeg’s Aboriginal housing program has created an annual allocation of funding for Aboriginal social housing organizations in the city to improve their stock or leverage further funds for new construction or renovation. While the budget line is not large, it creates a space for Aboriginal housing providers to expand and improve their portfolios, with backing from the local government.

5. Urban Reserves, Service Agreements and Regional Relationships

It is becoming increasingly common for Aboriginal groups to acquire urban land and real estate and convert it to an urban reserve under the auspices of the federal government’s Additions to Reserves Policy (ATR) or, in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, under the provincial Treaty Land Entitlement Framework Agreements (TLE). There are over thirty urban reserves in Saskatchewan, the first established in Saskatoon in 1988 on thirty-five acres of land acquired by the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation (see photo). In Winnipeg, a new urban reserve is being established in a prominent location close to downtown that will include a

10-story commercial property and an assembly hall for Manitoba’s First Nations.

Across Canada, urban reserves can provide the opportunity to create a positive presence in the city that can foster cultural, economic and social development for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens. For example, land claim settlements in British Columbia may include lands for urban reserves, which can in turn expand the collective sense of what it means to have and appreciate indigeneity in the city. Foregone property tax revenues resulting from the conversion to reserve status are replaced with municipal

service agreements. Land use compatibility and adherence to municipal by-laws are also negotiated to the satisfaction of both parties. In Saskatoon, the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation urban reserve has had a positive impact on surrounding property values off reserve, having established a commercial complex for all citizens in the area to use, whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

Conclusion

By addressing these five priority areas through a commitment to transformative planning in partnership with Aboriginal communities, we may be able

to achieve the “possibility of a togetherness in difference” that Sandercock has set forth as a planning goal for the twenty-first century. Once Aboriginal peoples see their contributions to the city represented in the urban landscape, and non-Aboriginal peoples begin to embrace and promote ever greater breadth and depth in the reach of urban indigeneity, we will all enjoy a greater quality of life in our cities.

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Planning for Diversity in Canada: *From Rhetoric to Action*

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framework of a settler nation. As official multiculturalism still lags in redressing the structural imbalances born of colonialism, questions emerge about its potential for addressing contemporary inequalities arising from globalization.

After nearly four decades of multicultural policy, Canada has perhaps never been more socially divided. In Canada’s largest cities, one can easily locate both the core and periphery. Amidst the increasing isolation of social groups, plans for new and renewed modes for securitizing, criminalizing and marginalizing emerge. In Toronto’s gentrified neighborhoods, public housing projects and mental health institutions—barely maintained after decades of disinvestment—are being demolished, rebuilt and rezoned

for market housing and retail to promote “social mixing.” Yet, why, to paraphrase John Clarke of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, do planners never talk about the need to diversify the homogenous urban enclaves of the rich?

As the articles in this issue illustrate, persistent inequities that cross lines of race, class, gender, age and ability intertwine with planning and policy. Land use ordinances, economic development strategies, the development and marketing of built form and the increasing privatization of public space and social services contribute to the creation of an environment that divides rather than unites. Together the articles connect processes that involve taking a progressive idea and bringing it into action with the structured

constraints that limit how these ideas actually materialize. Each piece underscores how planning has been implicated in a number of these structural constraints, while also harnessing the productive tension between the rhetoric and practice of diversity to show the centrality of planning in building a genuine mosaic society.

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Citizen Hall: Reclaiming City Hall for the People

by RYAN HAYES

How can we, as residents of Toronto, transform Toronto City Hall—the city bureaucracy’s democratic core—into a youth-friendly space, one that comes to terms with historical practices of exclusion embedded in the site itself? On 24 March 2008, thirteen young people participated in a critical tour to discuss and debate this question. For the majority of participants, it was either their first or second time visiting City Hall. Following a CAN\$40 million redesign competition for Nathan Phillips Square, the public space surrounding City Hall, the Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) wanted to encourage young people to look inside and critically examine how Toronto City Hall functions—or does not function—as a democratic space.

The critical tour opened with a discussion of the history of Toronto City Hall and current issues at hand. The name was broken into each of its constituent parts to investigate what it meant to participants. “Toronto” was identified as an indigenous word, linked to the colonial history of the city and its continued existence on stolen land. “City” was linked to the etymology of “citizen,” originally meaning inhabitants of the city, but now a status granted by the state that creates an exploitable class of

non-citizens, many of whom live in Toronto but cannot access vital services. “Hall” was related to the concept of the town hall, where people come together to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making.

As the center of democratic governance in Toronto, spaces in City Hall should be particularly inviting to historically marginalized people, from indigenous and other racialized groups to young people. Every effort should be made to overcome representations that perpetuate social exclusion. The space itself should serve to welcome all voices as equal participants in the city’s decision-making processes.

The Toronto Youth Cabinet: Making Change at City Hall and Beyond

The TYC is a youth-led advocacy organization that represents the voices of Toronto’s 300,000 youth. The TYC was created in 1998 with the support of then City Councillor Olivia Chow, who would become the city’s first children and youth advocate. Based in City Hall, TYC’s general activities include outreach, capacity-building and advocacy work. Members of the TYC organize annual events such as the Cause, a celebration of youth activism held at Yonge-

Dundas Square, and a city budget campaign that seeks to include the needs of young people in the city budget. In the past, the TYC ran a Recreation not Ammunition campaign to reallocate money from a new police shooting range towards the construction of community centers in under-served communities, and it successfully advocated for the city to create a grants program for youth-led initiatives.

The City of Toronto: A Critical Tour Uncovers Histories of Social Exclusion and Oppression

Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation: Participants in the critical tour found no evidence that adequately or accurately spoke to the history of indigenous peoples in Toronto. While there were permanent pieces of indigenous artwork hanging in the mezzanine, there lacked any recognition of the significance of indigenous peoples to Toronto. Moreover, the imagery of the large quilt hanging in the basement perpetuated the myth of oppression-free settler and Indigenous relations.

In fact, the City of Toronto is situated on land that was fraudulently acquired from the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation. When the British Crown

registered the Toronto Purchase of 1787, it was done so on a blank deed with no description of the physical boundaries or quantity of land surrendered and no signatures on the original document.

The Mississaugas are currently in mediation with the Canadian government about a land claim submitted in 1986 in an effort to correct these historical injustices. The Coalition in Support of Indigenous Sovereignty, along with other social service and activist groups, are bringing light to indigenous sovereignty issues, working alongside members of the 60,000 plus indigenous population living in the Greater Toronto Area. Given that expropriation of indigenous land is so integral to the story of Toronto, recognition is critical—not just for indigenous peoples to see themselves as part

of the fabric of the city, but also for those ignorant of histories and practices of social exclusion.

The Ward and Chinatown: Participants also learned that the site where Toronto City Hall now stands is itself embedded with historical acts of exclusion. During the early 1900s, on the land where City Hall now stands, a neighborhood called the Ward existed. An infamous “slum” where immigrants from Eastern Europe settled, an average

of eight people lived in each dwelling in impoverished conditions. These Jewish, Italian and Polish immigrants were criticized for their “dirty habits” and concern for the area grew to hysteric proportions with allegations, according to historian Sean Purdy, that the Ward posed a “constant menace to the physical and moral health of the city.” Chinese businesses and residences began clustering in this area as the first settlers moved out. Due



Image courtesy of Ryan Hayes

RIGHT: Poster for Citizen Hall, a youth-led critical tour and brainstorming session on making Toronto City Hall into a youth-friendly space.

to exclusionary immigration policies, Toronto’s emerging Chinatown was predominantly inhabited by “married bachelors” who were unable to bring their families to Canada.

In 1947, the exclusionary Chinese Immigration Act was repealed. That same year, the City of Toronto decided by plebiscite to establish a civic square in Chinatown by expropriating the land from local residents. In 1951, plans to build a new city hall on the site were added, and by the mid-1950s, two-thirds of the area had been demolished to make way for development. By the end of the 1960s, however, not all the needed land had yet been expropriated, primarily due to fiscal restraints. A special meeting to consider Chinatown’s future was packed by over 400 Chinese Torontonians—who over the intervening years had gained better access to power and greater social acceptance. The outcome of the meeting was a unanimous decision to keep the remainder of Chinatown in its location on Dundas Street West.

According to the City of Toronto’s official history, prepared for the twentieth anniversary of Toronto City Hall in 1985, the choice of site generated a wave of opposition, not on the basis that it required Chinatown to be razed over the Chinese community’s wishes, but because two of the city’s landmarks—Shea’s Hippodrome, a former

vaudeville house on Bay Street, and the Beaux Arts Registry Office at Albert and Chestnut Streets—were slated to be demolished. Chinatown, located roughly between these two landmarks, participants of the tour learned, was not even mentioned as part of the slated demolition, as if it never existed.

Participants noted that while there is a small plaque commemorating Chinatown situated near City Hall, it was so poorly maintained and so well hidden on ground level that it defeated the purpose of having it at all. This plaque also neglects to mention the razing of Chinatown to construct City Hall. Just as the history of old Chinatown had effectively been erased, so too had the history of the Ward, which preceded it.

Erasure of unsanitary history may make sense for elites who care more about economic development and tourism. Dwelling on injustices or complicating an issue by inserting multiple narratives may slow down the march of progress. Who wants to develop on bloody, stolen land? Nevertheless, if there is a safe space where people who have been historically oppressed—and denial of their history is part of that oppression—can come together to discuss issues they are facing, then city hall, the city’s democratic core, should be that place. Indeed, the guiding

rules issued for the 1957 Toronto City Hall international design competition express a similar goal:

In the eighteenth century, the cathedral and the town hall frequently dominated the urban scene both physically and spiritually. Our present City Hall is largely overshadowed by commercial and financial buildings, but it still dominates by its presence. It differs in that respect from those centers of civic administration in North America where the “hall” is just another office building. One of the reasons for this competition is to find a building that will proudly express its function as the center of civic government. How to achieve an atmosphere about a building that suggests government, continuity of democratic traditions and service to the community is a problem for the designer of the modern city hall. These were the qualities that the architects of other ages endeavored to embody in the town hall of their time.

How to Transform City Hall to Citizen Hall

Participants liked how City Hall’s indoor public space—the rotunda—could be used as a multi-use space and wanted to see some programming geared towards young people. On the day of the critical tour, for

example, the space was being used for a lively religious service marking the abolition of slavery. This space presents an opportunity to promote civic participation and the exchange of ideas, and its use by residents must be encouraged.

Other participatory activities could provide open space to describe or illustrate how ones family came to Canada or is indigenous to Canada. Another option is to solicit feedback on municipal policies, such as the City of Toronto’s Youth Strategy, asking young people what their assets are and how the city could support them to improve their communities. This participation could be strategically linked to future opportunities to get involved with city planning and civic policy.

The visual economy of the front lobby of City Hall offers little in the way of information on civic participation. Only if one happens to ask will the front desk security guards provide a small, out-of-date guide to City Hall. Countless meetings may be going on in City Hall that affect everyday life, but they are very poorly promoted. At least in a movie theatre, visitors know about everything that is going on that day due to the presence of large digital display boards. As is the case in many community centers, a display board could be used to notify people of scheduled city and community meetings. Furthermore, tourism brochures should be complemented with

actual information about the city and ways to get involved, including a prominently featured guide to City Hall that is youth-friendly and available in multiple languages.

As part of the democratic center of the city, the restaurant at City Hall should reflect democratic values rather than its current focus on market values of privatization and outsourcing. The equivalent of the TYC in Gatineau, Québec, for example, started a cooperative bistro as a reflection of the city’s democratic principles and a concrete illustration of the type of change the city is working towards. Similarly, the library should not be isolated from the other democratic functions of the building. It should also feature a prominent section on civic engagement as well as rotating community-created displays on the city’s social history.

Finally, in terms of the historical wall displays near the library and the artwork throughout the building, greater accuracy and representation is needed such that the history of City Hall does not begin with the construction of the actual building on the site, and the art does not consist merely of a quilt in the basement that presents a fairy tale version of relations between settlers and indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

Toronto City Hall must make strong efforts to be inclusive of traditionally marginalized

groups, such as young people, in order to serve as a model of a democratic space where everyone feels welcome and participates in decision-making processes. The reasons for the under-representation of particular groups are rooted in histories of oppression, which, if ignored, only serve to reproduce exclusion and ignorance.

As a means of becoming a more youth- and resident-friendly space, Toronto City Hall should invite members of the community to participate in improving the building and its day-to-day functioning. Brainstorming sessions such as Citizen Hall are one of many possible starting points towards a larger ongoing discussion that must include all of the people of Toronto, and extend beyond Toronto City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square to include the organization of the city as a whole.

Ryan Hayes was a member of the Toronto Youth Cabinet from 2004 to 2008.

Montréal, a Divided City

by JASON R. BURKE

As one of the oldest cities in North America and the second largest French-speaking metropolis in the world, Montréal stands out as one of Canada’s most eclectic and vibrant cities. While the city continues to undergo somewhat of an urban renaissance, with an increase in dedicated bike lanes, improvements to urban streetscapes and the construction and/or restoration of public squares and cultural buildings, one characteristic remains: segregated residential spaces of the French and English population. In order to understand why and how this divide has persisted until today, I examine how historical linguistic and class divisions have contributed to this segregation. I look at two major government policies, the Charter of the French Language in 1977 (Bill 101) and municipal amalgamation/de-amalgamation in 2002 and 2006, to show how attempts to equalize the status of both groups has actually reinforced the linguistic and economic divide. This divide presents a unique and difficult task for planners seeking to create cohesiveness in the city.

Since the conquest of the British over the French in 1760, Montréal has been a city divided along linguistic lines where the French-speaking majority and the English-speaking minority have lived in separate parts of the city with separate institutions.

This institutional parallelism has ensured that each entity has its own separate social and spatial sphere, at the same time reinforcing the isolating boundaries between the two groups. Historically, Saint-Laurent Boulevard has been the symbolic boundary between these two populations, with the French to the east and the English to the west. This divide, embedded in the city’s historical economic development, is consequently expressed through its urban form. One might not notice the segregation as French and English populations mix harmoniously in the different public spaces of the city, but this divide continues to shape the dynamics of Montréal and how it is understood.

The History of Segregation in Montréal

In the mid-1800s, Francophones became a majority in Montréal, and as rural-to-urban migration increased, Francophones moving from the countryside solidified their demographic clout in the city. In the early- to mid-1900s, as the Francophone majority continued to grow, the English-speaking population began an exodus to the western part of the island’s suburbs to form separate municipal enclaves outside the jurisdiction of the increasingly French Montréal. This move not only coincided

with a general North American trend towards suburbanization, but it presented a way for the English-speaking population to, first, escape the political control of the French-speaking majority and, second, ensure that accumulated wealth and tax dollars remained within their own municipalities.

The Anglophone population was economically and politically powerful despite its minority status. Before 1960, even though Montréal’s linguistic composition was predominantly French, English was the dominant language of the economy and prevailed in most commercial signage. Francophones, who constituted a majority, could rarely receive service in their own language or attain high managerial positions. In order to accommodate the economic power of the English-speaking population, the conservative political party of the time, the Union National, took a *laissez-faire* approach to the economy, meaning that most wealth remained in the control of the Anglophone elite. The economic power of the English-speaking bourgeoisie was expressed in the city’s urban form: Anglophones lived in the upscale neighborhoods close to the city’s central business district to the west while Francophones lived in the industrial, working-class neighborhoods to the east.

A key factor perpetuating linguistic segregation was the social control exerted over the Francophone population by the Catholic Church. Clergy endorsed spatial separation by urging the population to reject the evils of a liberal economy and avoid assimilation into the English-speaking majority in order to preserve the French-Canadian identity. The church believed that residential concentration could ensure the survival and preservation of French language, culture and religion.

Come the 1960s, Québec society was poised for modern transformation. The Liberal Party was elected, setting in motion a series of major social and economic reforms that would come to be known as the Quiet Revolution. Socially, the state assumed control of health and education, previously controlled by the Catholic Church. Two of the most significant economic transformations were the nationalization of hydro-electric power and the establishment of large public institutions such as the *Caisse de depot et placement du Québec*, which manages the public retirement and investment fund. The former in particular, along with the undertaking of a series of massive hydro-electric dams in the north, assumed mythic proportions, coming to symbolize Québec’s modernization and economic

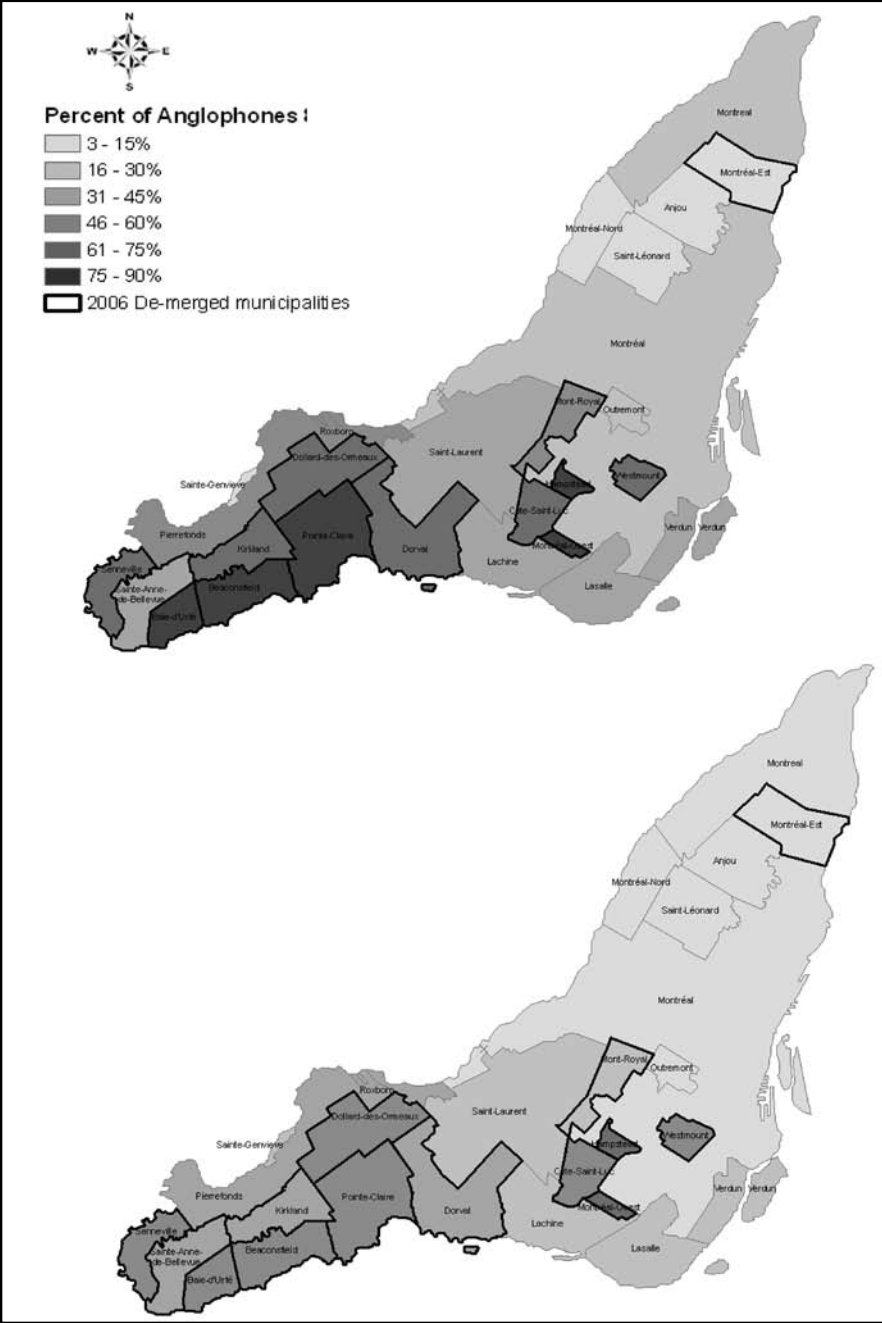
emancipation from the English-dominated economy. The improved socio-economic opportunities available to Francophones made the slogan for the revolution—*maître chez nous* (masters in our own house)—a reality.

Bill 101

Improved socio-economic well-being for Francophones also

triggered a cultural awakening. Instead of the more benign type of nationalism espoused by the Catholic Church, which focused on survival, Francophones in Québec became politicized through a profound will for independence. In 1976, the separatist Parti Québécois was elected and one of its primary concerns was the preservation and promotion of French language in Québec. ➔

RIGHT: Figure 1: Proportion of Anglophones in each of Montréal’s Municipalities, 1976 (above); 2001 (below). Created by Jason Burke using Statistics Canada data.



They passed Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, which would forever alter the linguistic structure of Québec as a whole, and Montréal in particular. This law enshrined French as the official language of Québec and required all businesses to operate in French and all commercial signs to be French-only or clearly French-dominant. (One significant exception to the rule is that a French equivalent is *not* required for international company names such as *Foot Locker*.) In short, the law transformed everyday life, attempting to ensure that members of the French-speaking majority would no longer be second-class citizens in Québec.

The law, while not of an explicitly physical or spatial nature, gave Montréal a French commercial façade and had a significant effect on spatial segregation. The law initially triggered an exodus of Anglophones out of Montréal and Québec based on fears of economic collapse and loss of opportunities and services in English. It has been estimated that Montréal's Anglophone population declined by close to 100,000 in the ten years after the Parti Québécois came to power, about one-sixth of its population. Figure 1 (previous page) illustrates the decline of Anglophones in the West Island municipalities since the imposition of Bill 101.

It might be assumed that with socio-economic improvements, Francophone mobility would have increased and that since businesses were now required to provide service in French, Francophones could migrate to the wealthier Anglophone municipalities of the west with the expectation that they could carry out all their daily activities in their native language. While there has been a small influx of Francophones into the West Island municipalities, the decline in the proportion of Anglophones is more a result of their departure from Québec overall rather than the in-migration of Francophones. Thus, the legislation ensured that the West Island municipalities

would appear French but that these enclaves of Anglophone segregation would continue to persist.

Amalgamation/De-Amalgamation

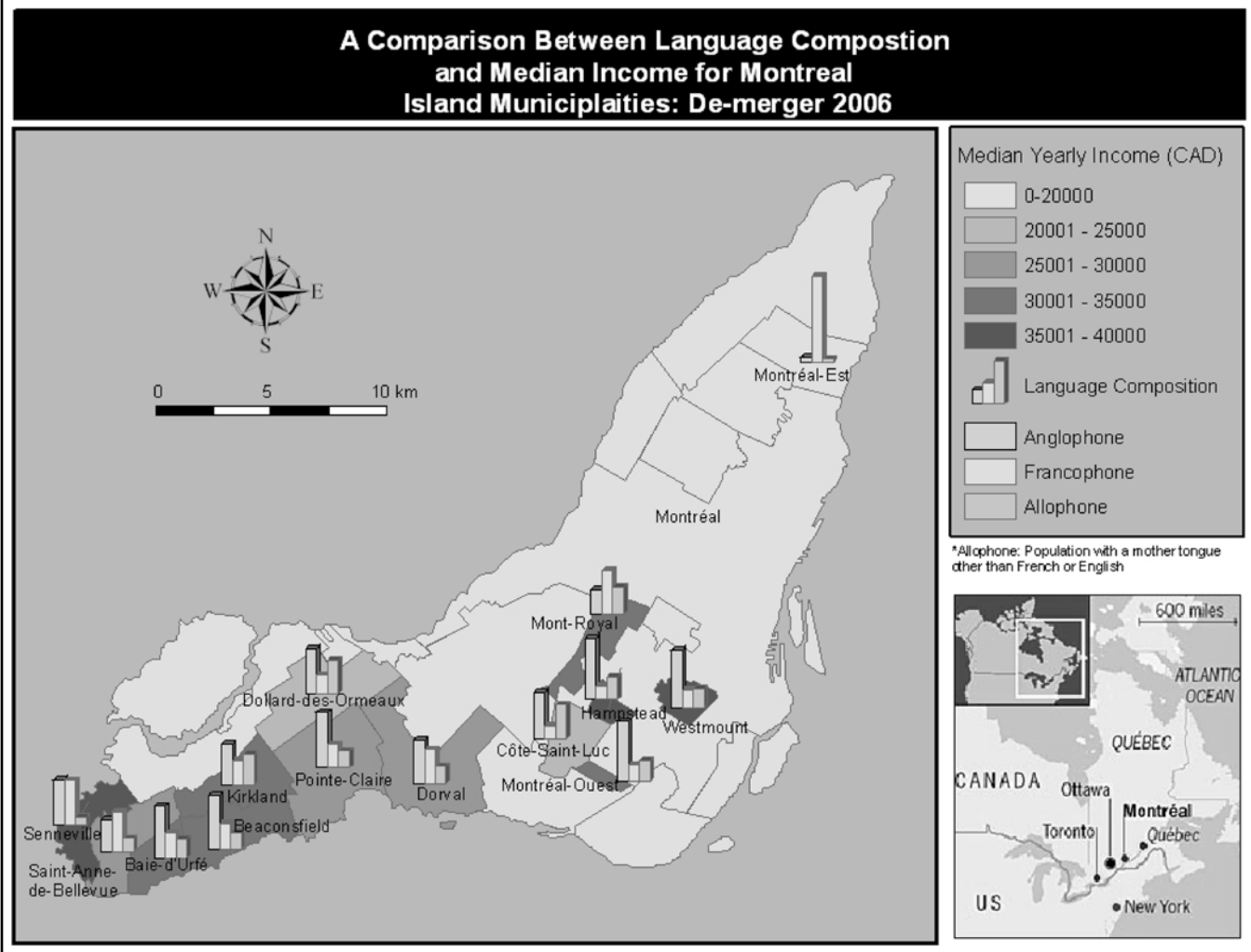
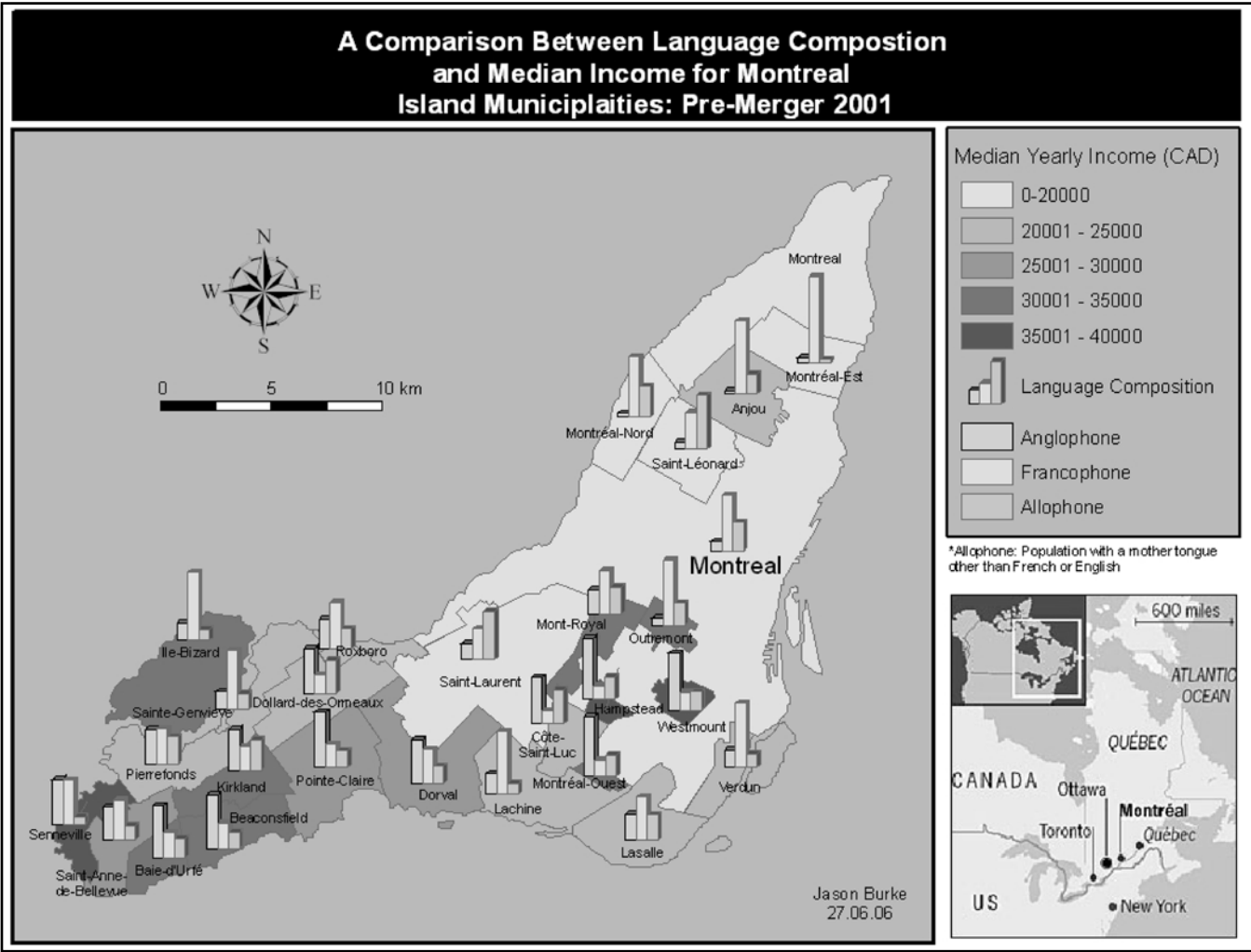
The island of Montréal was divided into twenty-seven separate municipalities, of which Anglophones constituted a majority in eleven. According to Statistics Canada, census results from 2001 indicate that nine of the thirteen wealthiest municipalities, those with a median yearly income above CAN\$25,000, are Anglophone, while only four are Francophone. With few exceptions, as illustrated in Figure 2, the island

remained segregated: French and less wealthy in the eastern part, English and more wealthy in the western part.

In 2001, the Parti Québécois government introduced legislation mandating the amalgamation of all the municipalities on the island into one mega-city. Part of a controversial trend, this policy aimed to establish a city-region with a more efficient and financially stable urban government. The largely suburban and wealthy Anglophone-dominated municipalities of the west viewed this as a threat to their continued existence and as yet another attack on their rights as ⇨

BELOW LEFT: Figure 2 -- A comparison between language composition and median income for Montréal Island municipalities: Pre-amalgamation 2001. Created by Jason Burke using Statistics Canada data.

BELOW: Figure 3 -- A comparison between language composition and median income for Montréal Island municipalities: De-amalgamation 2006. Created by Jason Burke using Statistics Canada data.



Anglophones in the manner of Bill 101. Preserving their municipalities was not only a way of ensuring that municipal services in English be maintained, but also a way of preserving the high quality of services overall given the wealth of their municipalities. Despite massive protests, Montréal and the surrounding municipalities of the island were reduced to one entity in 2002 and thereafter declared a unilingual French city.

A disenfranchised public elected the Liberal Party in 2003 on the platform that the amalgamated municipalities could hold a referendum to determine whether or not to reinstate their previous municipal status. In 2006, fourteen municipalities voted to separate from Montréal, eleven of which were Anglophone, including Mont-Royal, a traditional bastion of the wealthy English-speaking population but a place where Anglophones were no longer the majority (Figure 3).

The Conundrums in Planning the Divided City

Models of planning are often not adequate to address the types of situations illustrated in Montréal for two reasons. First, the politics of language in Canada is mostly dealt with at the national and provincial level while the jurisdiction of planning is mostly at the municipal level such that issues of language rarely enter into the realm of planning. Second, planning practice and theory has primarily developed from the study of linguistically unified cities where planners are

not required to accommodate linguistic conflict. By applying universal planning principles to a linguistically divided city like Montréal, planning ignores the deeper issues of cultural preservation and class conflict manifested through linguistic tensions.

What complicates this situation even further for planning is the fact that municipal boundaries make decision-making processes more difficult and costs more exorbitant. Having to work with different local regulations makes creating a more cohesive city an arduous task. For planners, this is problematic because it creates a disjointed city, difficult to plan as a cohesive unit. There are no physical boundaries between the City of Montréal and the de-merged municipalities; they form one continuous urban region. And though residents of the separate municipalities use many of the public services and infrastructure paid for by Montréal, their tax dollars do not pay for these services. In reality, it is the less wealthy citizens of Montréal who are subsidizing the activities of the wealthier (mostly English-speaking) citizens who have chosen to live politically separate from, yet physically connected to, Montréal.

From a less technical perspective, planners must address issues of cultural and linguistic preservation. As the Anglophone population continues to diminish, fears arise about the future of social and educational services in their language. Every year

schools and churches are left abandoned due to the declining English-speaking population, leaving planners with the task not only of finding new uses for these buildings, but also of addressing the needs of a seemingly threatened population. While cultural preservation may not register in the minds of many planners, it is crucial when planning amid the complexities of a divided city.

Conclusion

My initial impetus for writing this article was to show that language could be a useful tool in understanding segregated cities. As the story began to unfold, however, it became clear that *language intertwined with class* was a more effective way of understanding the complexity of segregation in Montréal. The two pieces of legislation I discuss, while seemingly unrelated, were reactions to linguistic and class-based inequalities exemplified by spatial segregation. This historic segregation is ingrained in Montréal’s spatial geography, with the wealthier English enclaves to the west and the French working-class areas to the east. Although the government has implemented policy measures to create more socio-economic equality between the two major linguistic groups, divisions persist. Obviously, the maintenance of separate municipalities reinforces existing spatial divisions, however, the ethnic diversification of Montréal and the exodus of Anglophones from the city have

both complicated and diluted this division.

Linguistic segregation has become an almost assumed feature of Montréal, though this is changing as Anglophones either assimilate into or leave Montréal in search of better opportunities. De-amalgamation is a last attempt at preserving what is left of the Anglophone economic hegemony on the island. What emerges from this scenario is a power struggle between the English-dominated West Island municipalities and the City of Montréal. While government legislation has attempted to ameliorate this conflict, attachment to language and class politics have proven strong enough to maintain the linguistic divide. Planners must now cope with this persistent reality and create a situation that is conducive to collaboration across linguistic, class and political divides.

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**The Right to the City:
Prospects for Critical Urban Theory and Practice**

Berlin, November 6-8, 2008

Organizers: Margit Mayer, Neil Brenner and Peter Marcuse
in cooperation with the Center for Metropolitan Studies, TU Berlin

The conference will focus on the meaning of the “right to the city” in the context of neoliberal urban restructuring. While the notion of “the right to the city” was popularized by Henri Lefebvre in the late 1960s, it has become something of a keyword among contemporary critical urban theorists for analyzing struggles to reappropriate urban space towards collective social uses under circumstances in which private capital and state institutions are dominating the urban process. It thus provides a focus for reflecting on the legacies and contemporary possibilities of critical urban theory, and exploring its relation to practice, in the context of early 21st century transformations and struggles.

Specifically, the conference aims to investigate the evolution of critical urban theory since its consolidation over three decades ago, and the changing relation of critical urban theories to ongoing struggles over the form and pathway of urban development [often seeing “urban” as a crystallization of the societal]. Inquiry into this relationship entails an analysis of a number of key theoretical, empirical and political issues, including (a) the changing global and national parameters for urban development under post-1980s capitalism; (b) supranational, national and subnational political strategies to influence the trajectory of urbanization; and, against this background, (c) the proliferation of popular initiatives to reshape cities towards progressive or radical-democratic political ends, such as enhanced social and spatial justice, greater equality and socio-ecological sustainability; and (d) the alternatives available for action to produce desired changes in the constitution of urban life today.

The contributors will grapple with the following issues, which have been proposed for debate and discussion at the conference by Peter Marcuse, whose oeuvre will be central to this conference:

- How best to capture the transformation of cities under contemporary capitalism? To what extent can such transformations be understood through notions of neo-capitalism, neoliberalism or globalization?
- What is “critical” about critical urban and social theory today? Is the Frankfurt School still relevant?
- How does “space” structure and result from forms of inequality, and how has this role changed in both historical and contemporary contexts?
- Is another type of city—and society—possible? Are there lessons to be drawn from earlier 20th century experiments, or those of the GDR?
- What are the possibilities and limits of “urban planning”?
- Oppositional movements yesterday and today: in what ways can which of them be actors for social change?

The conference is made possible by the support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Center for Metropolitan Studies and the Transatlantisches Graduiertenkolleg Berlin-New York, and the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation.

The full program will be available on the CMS-website:
www.metropolitanstudies.de

Planning in Particular: Considering Psychiatric Survivors

by LILITH FINKLER

Most people assume that issues pertaining to mental health belong solely in the psychological realm, however, planners—whether of a social, land use, heritage or transportation nature—can all contribute to the creation of accessible environments. Indeed, both urban and rural planners have had major effects on psychiatric survivors, a term used by our liberation movement to describe anyone with a psychiatric history.

In situations where planners have overlooked psychiatric survivors and/or disabled persons more generally, the effects have been negative. Progressive planners can, however, have a positive impact by acknowledging that survivors exist as a distinct community, implementing provisions of provincial human rights codes that pertain to psychiatric survivors and, perhaps most importantly, involving survivors in planning processes.

Planning as a Systemic Barrier

Planning has certainly been implicated in the creation and maintenance of systemic barriers for psychiatric survivors. When planners ignore or minimize important issues, both planning processes and products can be affected. For example, the creation of affordable housing

becomes difficult when restrictive zoning is implemented.

In May 2008, the Ontario Human Rights Commission released a report that discusses results of its province-wide consultation on human rights and rental housing. The government document, entitled *Right at Home*, notes that many municipalities employ planning processes that limit housing developments for psychiatric survivors. The report describes the use of restrictive zoning and public meetings, over and above statutory requirements, to buttress NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) sentiment.

In contrast to the negative impacts of planning highlighted in the Ontario Human Rights Commission report, there are many ways in which progressive planners can be allies to psychiatric survivors. Planners can focus on area(s) of specialization, i.e., land use, transportation, heritage or social planning, and consider ways in which psychiatric survivor issues might apply. Not all survivors require alterations to their environment, and not all survivors have disabling conditions that are readily evident. Planners can contribute to psychiatric survivor liberation by considering implementation of the suggestions below.

Planning as Part of a Solution

1. Integrate a psychiatric survivor analysis at the outset.

Just as we inquire about the impact of plans on women, people of color and senior citizens, we need to inquire about the ways in which official plans, zoning by-laws and other planning instruments affect persons in the psychiatric system. Professors analyze gender, race and class in academic settings. Disability is an analytic category as well. Of course, just like members of the Deaf community, not all psychiatric survivors consider themselves disabled. Some survivors, aligned with theorists such as Thomas Szasz and Kate Millet, believe psychiatric incarceration is simply punishment for social non-conformity. Other psychiatric survivors, such as well-known journalist John Bentley Mays, believe they survived their “illness.” Clearly, psychiatric survivors are not a homogeneous group. Nonetheless, planning affects psychiatric survivor lives.

2. Be aware of the differential effects of planning policies and procedures.

Planners have many tools at their disposal. Some efforts at increasing public transit efficiency may provide benefits to one

group, such as transit riders, but become detrimental or even discriminatory to others, such as pedestrians. It is crucial to examine implementation of planning procedures from a variety of viewpoints. For example, in some large cities, buses and streetcars use transponders to truncate red lights in order to increase speed and efficiency of service. This means that buses move through intersections quicker—but it also means that pedestrians have less time to cross on the opposing green light. Non-disabled persons can run across the intersection, but psychiatric survivors, some of whom may have blurred vision or tardive dyskinesia (involuntary muscle movements, a side effect of long-term use of psychiatric drugs), may not be able to do so. Some may find themselves trapped mid-intersection as lights change. Although there is as yet no documented empirical evidence, transponder use and truncated red lights could conceivably lead to increased personal injury if disabled persons are unable

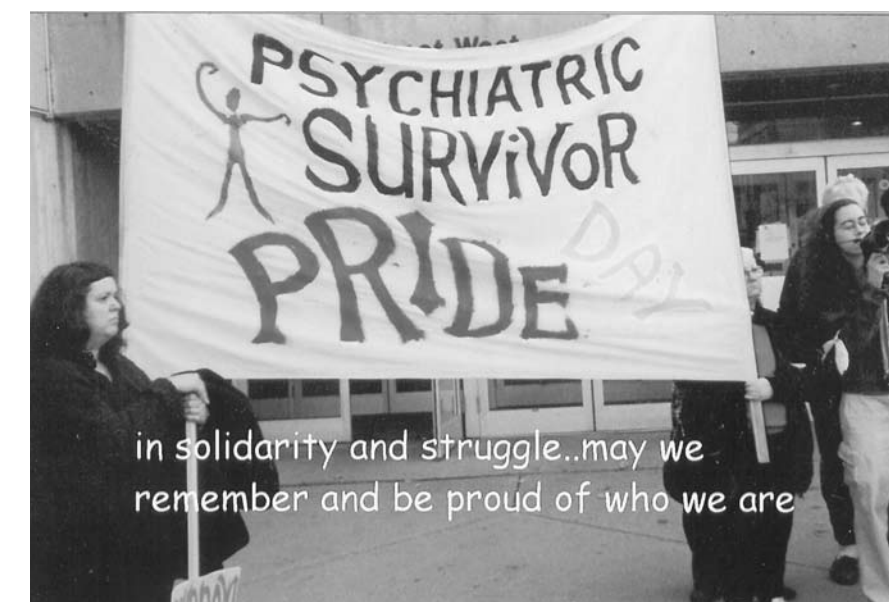
to clear an intersection before oncoming traffic resumes.

Minimum separation distance by-laws offer another example of the way in which planning instruments can have differential effects on members of the psychiatric survivor community. In rural areas, minimum separation distance by-laws are used to separate hog farms from residences. In that context, separation distances are useful because they separate sources of noxious odors from persons to whom they might be offensive. In contrast, minimum separation distance by-laws are also used to ensure group homes are a minimum distance away from one another. One survey I conducted in April 2007 revealed that forty-two of forty-five (93 percent) Ontario cities enacted group home by-laws. Of those forty-two cities, thirty-five (83 percent) also enacted separation distance by-laws. By-laws are supposed to prevent an “over-concentration” of group homes in any one neighborhood

and simultaneously encourage community integration. Despite this avowed intention, psychiatric survivor housing activists consider municipally enforced separation of group homes to be a form of discrimination based on disability.

Many psychiatric survivors, particularly those living on social assistance, prefer to live in downtown areas where shops and services are within walking distance. Public transportation can be an expense that poor psychiatric survivors cannot afford. Separation distance by-laws, known in the U.S. as dispersal by-laws, restrict the development of affordable housing and often reflect NIMBY sentiment. Since there are no separation distance requirements for housing for non-disabled persons, housing for psychiatric survivors, such as group homes, boarding homes and homes for special care, should be similarly free of such requirements.

3. Recognize that psychiatric survivors can create community with one another.



RIGHT: Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day, 1999. As we marched through Parkdale, the psychiatric survivor neighbourhood in Toronto, we declared, “We belong here too!”

Photo by Lilith Finkler

Planners justify dispersal by-laws by arguing that large numbers of group homes, boarding homes and similar dwellings located in the same vicinity constitute an over-concentration. The over-concentration argument assumes that boarding home tenants, i.e., psychiatric survivors, have few social bonds. Persons previously institutionalized often retain emotional links to one another, sometimes for years after leaving their institutional homes. Historically, friendships between psychiatric patients were established on hospital wards. Today, friendships occur in the context of boarding homes, shared accommodation or at psychiatric survivor community events, such as the annual Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day or Mad Pride Day.

Many psychiatric survivors share lengthy histories of institutionalization with each other and often consider one another “chosen family,” many having lost contact with their biological families. Like members of communities that share common linguistic, cultural or religious backgrounds, psychiatric

survivors also often want to live close to one another, although not necessarily in the same house. Due to economic constraints, psychiatric survivors can typically afford rental accommodation in group homes, boarding homes or homes for special care. Minimum separation distance by-laws that stipulate specific distances between the above forms of housing can disrupt survivor friendships and relationships. The perception that large numbers of group homes and, by definition, their inhabitants, in the same neighborhood constitute an over-concentration negates the possibility that psychiatric survivors constitute an identifiable community.

4. Involve psychiatric survivor organizations in public meetings.

A number of psychiatric hospitals in Canada are undergoing redevelopment. For example, Riverview Psychiatric Hospital in Coquitlam, British Columbia (just outside Vancouver) is being closed. There are plans to redevelop the site and condominium development has been discussed, although no

formal plan has been approved. The hospital website indicates that patients are being moved closer to their home communities. A recent study conducted by researchers at Simon Fraser University indicates that, on the one hand, some patients were moved farther away from friends and family, and on the other hand, some patients were moved closer to family from whom they were estranged!

Although municipal planners may not have direct involvement with the site at this preliminary stage, it is important to insist that psychiatric survivors participate in plans to redevelop former hospital lands. Planners, in their role as facilitators at public meetings, can insist psychiatric survivor organizations be invited to attend. There are many autonomous psychiatric survivor advocacy groups. There is no need to ask well-meaning social workers to speak out on behalf of survivors; survivors can speak for themselves.

5. Educate the public.

In most North American jurisdictions, there is at least one form of human rights legislation

that prohibits discrimination based on disability. Such legislation typically specifies that the definition of disability includes psychiatric disability. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada and the Fair Housing Amendment Act in the U.S. have both been used successfully to challenge discriminatory zoning. Planners who facilitate public meetings can educate members of the public. They can explain relevant human rights protections and simultaneously focus discussion and debate solely on planning elements of a particular project and refuse to consider anticipated inhabitants. Discriminatory attitudes articulated at meetings (such as the idea that the presence of a group home will lower property values) can be very painful for survivors in attendance.

Using a human rights framework to guide public discussion of proposed housing would promote sensitivity to psychiatric survivors attending public meetings and, ideally, curtail expression of NIMBY sentiments.

6. Promote preservation of psychiatric survivor history.

Heritage planners can develop an inventory of sites significant in psychiatric survivor history, ensure that such places receive a heritage designation and are properly preserved. For example, over 120 years ago, psychiatric inpatients built all four surrounding walls of the former Toronto Hospital for the Insane, receiving no compensation for their labor. The Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto, a local psychiatric survivor heritage organization, fought successfully to preserve the wall, despite initial opposition. Today, the remaining wall symbolizes the material contributions psychiatric inpatients made to the built environment and also provides tangible evidence of their history of economic exploitation.

7. Include psychiatric survivor concerns in planning curriculum.

Planning professors can ensure students are exposed

to psychiatric survivor issues in the classroom by including relevant material in the curriculum. Assign related readings and/or research questions. Invite speakers to class. Organize a movie night. Attend a public meeting or conference. Conduct a neighborhood tour. Encourage participation on municipally mandated committees. There are many ways to involve students in social issues. Planning students whose awareness is enhanced through the above methods will ideally integrate aspects of a psychiatric survivor analysis into their work. Consequently, students will become more effective planners once they are employed.

Lilith Finkler is a psychiatric survivor, a planner and a PhD. candidate at Dalhousie University. She extends her thanks to Bill Dawson, Kirstin Maxwell, Norma Rantisi and John Tulloch for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

For More Information

- Right at Home: Ontario Human Rights Commission Report on Discrimination in Rental Housing
www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion_consultation/housingconsultationreport/pdf
- Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto
www.psychiatricsurvivorarchives.com/index.html
- Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office Twentieth-Fifth Anniversary Report
www.ppao.gov.on.ca/pdfs/pub-ann-25.pdf
- Mad Pride
www.friendlyspike.ca/MadPride.html

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Something for Everyone in a Canadian Suburb?

by KATHERINE PERROTT

As greenfields are converted to suburbia, land developers and builders prepare the infrastructure, create detailed plans and begin to shape the look and feel of a future community through their marketing materials. Advertisements for a new residential development function as a prologue in the story of what a future community will be, offering pictures of who will live there, what they will own, what their houses will look like and what the quality of their amenity space will be. Planners working with the public also produce visions of what a future community will be in policy documents, such as official and secondary plans. Both the policy documents and advertisements represent visions of an ideal community. Who gets included in these visions? Are the Canadian suburbs portrayed as inclusive places where there is something for everyone?

This article examines these questions by drawing on findings from a study that I conducted in the fall of 2007 on how diversity is represented in builder advertisements and municipal policies in Markham, a town located in the York region on the suburban fringe of Toronto. Like many Canadian suburbs experiencing rapid population growth fuelled by immigration, Markham is navigating how to prevent

sprawl and accommodate an increasingly diverse population. Markham grew to its 2006 population of 262,573 at a 25.4 percent growth rate since 2001—more than three times higher than the provincial growth rate of 6.6 percent. Since the 1990s, Markham has adopted principles of new urbanism into its planning policies. New urbanism, also referred to as neotraditionalism, is an approach to planning that emphasizes elements associated with “traditional” town planning and design: compact urban form, walkable neighborhoods, an attractive public realm and mix of land use and housing types. Elements of new urbanism are incorporated in the developments built on Markham’s expanding border.

While the Town of Markham promotes the idea of diversity in its written planning goals, in the process of creating policy, social goals are filtered through the neotraditional paradigm of new urbanism, which limits the municipality’s approach to engaging social difference. Furthermore, homebuilders in Markham who are selling the new urbanism package of density and back lanes wrap it up in traditionalism, which reinforces dominant cultural norms and excludes those defined as “other.”

Diversity in Policy

Regional and town planning documents encourage diversity and promote respect for a variety of lifestyles. For example, York Region’s Official Plan of 2007 calls for the development of “communities where people of all ages, backgrounds and capabilities can meet their needs throughout the various stages in their lives by providing opportunities for employment, learning, culture, recreation and spiritual, emotional, physical and social well-being.”

New urbanism’s primary strategy for promoting social diversity is to provide a broad range of housing types at the neighborhood level in order to bring people of different ages, lifestyles, classes, ethnicities and family structures into daily interaction. Markham’s policies also address the concept of social diversity, although always couched within statements about housing mix. For example, Markham’s Official Plan of 2005 encourages “a broad range of housing, by type and tenure, suitable for different age levels, lifestyles and family structures.” New urbanism theory proposes that there is an ideal mix and distribution of housing types, and therefore households with different income levels. According to Markham’s plan, the “low-density housing category shall be so distributed as to achieve an appropriate housing mix.” Furthermore, policies specify that “major concentrations of medium- and high-density housing projects shall be

avoided, and where feasible, provision of mixed-density developments shall be encouraged to reduce the potential for such concentrations to occur.” To enable the construction of affordable units, Markham policy permits the development of coach houses, which are apartments built on the second level above detached garages located on back lanes.

Marketing Exclusion

How do the advertisements for new urbanism-influenced residential developments

in Markham portray social diversity? In order to answer this question, I collected marketing materials (including brochures, magazine print ads, outdoor posters, model suite imagery and websites) for thirty-five new residential developments. The majority of developments were subdivisions of single-family and semi-detached houses, but other developments included high-rise condominium developments, a townhouse condominium and a gated community targeted at senior citizens. Within the

marketing sample, I analyzed representations of the body, gender identity, romance, family, age, ethnicity and class. Many of the ads communicate social messages across these characteristics that define social difference in Canadian culture. Wording and images privilege those who conform to cultural norms and exclude those socially determined as “other.”

New urbanism literature often draws on images and ideals of small town, post-World War II America. In Markham, where the town’s policies and design guidelines endorse new urbanism, builders appeal to potential buyers’ nostalgia for an imagined past of back lanes, picket fences and harmonious neighborliness.

Most of us are accustomed to beautiful models selling us products like clothing. Planners seeking to encourage inclusivity and diversity within communities may be concerned to know that builders are also selling new developments using overwhelmingly young, able-bodied and attractive models. By making all other bodies invisible, marketing in Markham effectively displaces and disadvantages the disabled and everyone else who does not fit the exalted norm. While ads include many images of young children to evoke emotions associated with family bonds and a bright future, teenagers are remarkably scarce. (Image 1). ⇨

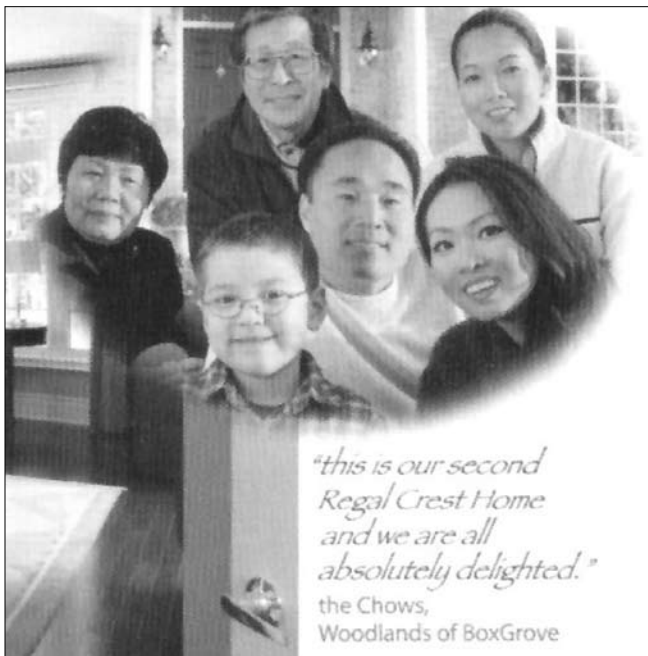
LEFT: Image 1 -- Young girl symbolizes innocence and future



Image supplied by Regal Crest Homes



One ad claims its development to have “something for everyone,” (Image 2) while others market their developments as attractive for young single professionals, families *and* seniors. The text in these ads, however, implies that single people will eventually form heterosexual unions, have children and later become grandparents, thus completing—in the neighborhood—the entire cycle of life that the dominant North American culture assumes to be normal. Two builders in the sample do recognize that people organize households in alternative ways and, for example, include images of multi-generational Chinese families living together (Image 3). Overall, advertising imagery in Markham promotes conventional gender identity and traditional nuclear families (Image 4).



Pervasive in the marketing materials are images of houses complete with all the upgrades and stocked with luxurious home furnishings. The text of the ads generally refers to privilege, exclusivity and entitlement (Image 5). Builders use images from the colonial era that offer historical authority to the ads’ displays of mass consumption and the luxury of having time to spend on leisure activities (Image 6). Residents are shown not just living comfortably, but indulgently. Coupled with high land prices in the area, this marketing strategy targets affluent households and maintains high-cost housing within the municipality.

According to census data from 2006, Markham has the highest proportion of visible minorities in all of Canada. Yet despite the fact that there are many different ethnic groups in Markham, white models are most prevalent in the advertising material. While most new developments do include some images of minorities in their marketing materials, images

AT LEFT, TOP: Image 2 -- Advertisement for a new residential development in Markham, Ontario

AT LEFT, MIDDLE: Image 3 -- Multigenerational family shown as an alternative household arrangement

AT LEFT, BOTTOM: Image 4 -- Traditional nuclear families represented as the norm



with white models prove more numerous and are larger and more prominently placed overall. Cultural differences are also downplayed; models all wear western clothing and there are no distinct symbols of religious difference. Furthermore, the images that include visible minorities are often smaller in size, and visible minority models are made into secondary subjects by positioning them on the edge of an image or through shadowing (Image 7). In an attempt to appeal to both nostalgia and diversity, one builder adapted a 1948 Norman Rockwell painting which Asian and South Asian models have been digitally inserted into a Christmas scene, in effect re-writing history to make it ethnically “diverse,” albeit culturally homogenous, Western and Christian (see www.heritagemarkham.com).

Lessons for Social Diversity Planning

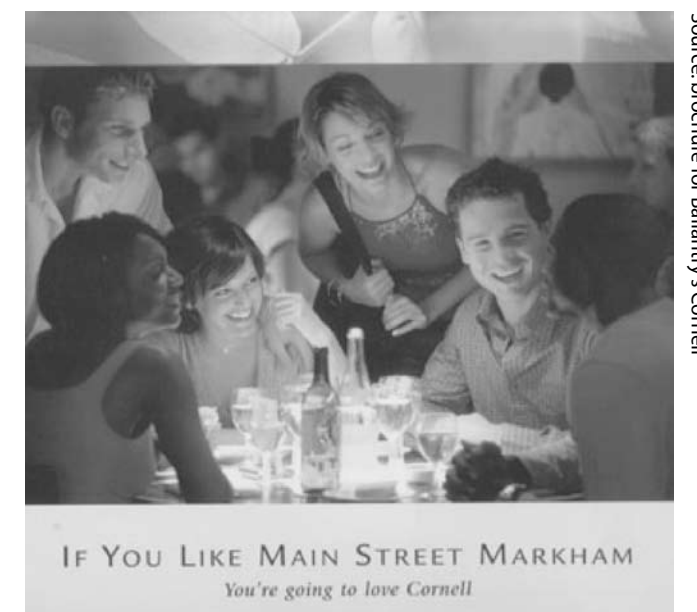
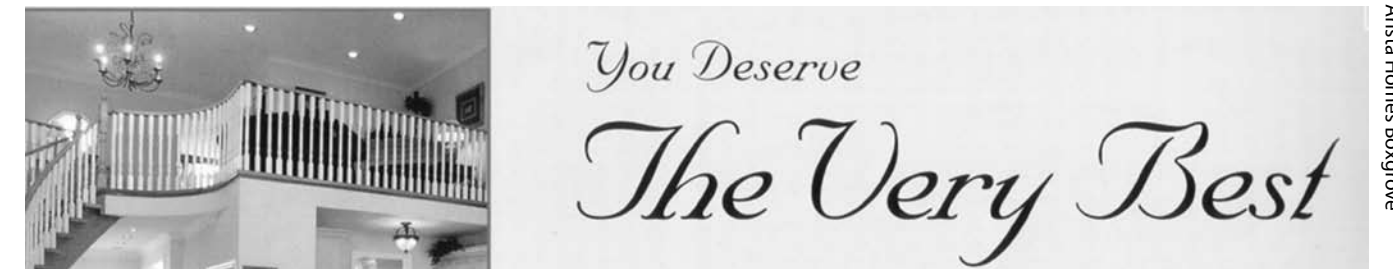
Municipalities that have adopted new urbanism into their policies should revisit and re-evaluate those principles in light of what they wish to achieve in terms of social diversity. Furthermore,

municipalities should question their motivation for seeking diversity at all. Is housing mix the end goal, or is the end goal a just, inclusive, safe and healthy community for everyone? By implementing new urbanism-influenced policies, Markham is laying the groundwork for mix, but not equality. For example, allowing the construction of coach houses can ensure that affordable units are provided and that there is an income mix at the neighborhood scale, however, it also establishes a landscape of inequality. Owning a comfortable home on one of Markham’s attractive and expensive to maintain ⇨

BELOW: Image 5 -- Advertisements reinforce attitudes of entitlement to wealth and luxury

BOTTOM LEFT: Image 6 -- Images from the colonial era lend historical authority to social messages

BOTTOM RIGHT: Image 7 -- Visible minority models present, yet made secondary through placement and shadowing



streetscapes is costly, leaving the less fortunate relegated to the back lanes along with the garbage, recycling, meters and other “unsightly” elements (Images 8 & 9). Markham needs greater incentives for affordable housing if it is going to support residential developments for an economically diverse population. Furthermore, decision-makers in Markham should consider policies beyond housing type mix that could facilitate the kind of inclusive and complete community they seek.

Advertisements for new communities can send social messages of exclusion, despite regional and town planning policies that may encourage social diversity, albeit in limited ways. Markham advertisements reveal that images of traditional urban design and its associated social conventions can work against

social diversity and compound messages of exclusion. The case of Markham demonstrates that new urbanism policy is insufficient for addressing issues raised in Canada’s increasingly diverse communities. A deeper understanding of systemic discrimination is needed in order determine appropriate actions and partnerships that can tackle social injustice in our society. There is no denying that Canadian suburbs are becoming more diverse. What remains

to be answered is whether or not our suburbs will become more socially just and inclusive communities where there will indeed be something for everyone.

Katherine Perrott received her master’s degree in planning from Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. The research upon which this article is based was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Photo by Katherine Perrott



Photo by Katherine Perrott

AT RIGHT, TOP: Image 8 -- Luxury home in Markham’s Angus Glen

AT RIGHT, BOTTOM: Image 9 -- Coach house on a back lane in Cornell

Strategic Sustainability: Opportunities Presented by Canada’s Infrastructure Deficit

by SEAN CONNELLY

“Near collapse, crumbling, looming crisis.” From tragic events, such as the collapse of bridges and contamination of drinking water, to the negative effects on overall quality of life, Canada’s infrastructure deficit has made headlines. The bulk of our existing municipal infrastructure investments were made at a time when there was little understanding of the impacts that humans can have on the environment (e.g., climate change) and, as a result, in many cases, those investments locked communities into ways of living that we now recognize as unsustainable. Recent studies by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities indicate that Canadian municipalities are facing the dual problem of declining infrastructure investments and aging infrastructure, resulting in an infrastructure funding deficit estimated at CAN\$123 billion and growing by CAN\$2 billion a year.

While this deficit represents an enormous challenge, it also provides an historic opportunity to replace aging infrastructure and re-shape our communities in a more sustainable manner. As municipalities across the country make significant infrastructure investments in the near future, they will be asking, “How can

we be strategic with those investments? How can we assess our priorities, identify our resources and implement infrastructure projects that will serve as catalysts for a broader movement toward community sustainability?” The Centre for Sustainable Community Development (CSCD) at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia has been examining how municipalities can best link planning to practice and address their infrastructure deficits in a sustainable manner. This article provides an overview of this framework and highlights key themes from this research about the elements needed for making strategic infrastructure investments that advance community sustainability objectives.

Sustainable Community Development: A Framework for Infrastructure Investment

The CSCD uses the community capital framework, based on Mark Roseland’s 2005 book *Towards Sustainable Communities*, as a way to illustrate the need for a holistic approach, as well as to understand and implement sustainability. The goal for sustainable community development (SCD) is to adopt strategies, structures and processes that mobilize citizens

and their governments to quantitatively and qualitatively improve all six forms of capital (natural, physical, human, cultural, social and economic - see Figure 1 on following page).

While there is much agreement on best practices for sustainable community planning, including the need to attend to social processes of governance and decision-making, a significant gap between planning and implementation remains. For urban, rural and First Nations communities in Canada, the key to strategic sustainability is to seize the opportunity presented by the need for new infrastructure investments as a catalyst to shift the way communities are organized. This will require decision-making processes that link specific infrastructure investments to a broader sustainable community development focus. Such a process requires a shift in the way planning and development occurs—moving away from local government fashioned in the “silos and stovepipes” model, where each department focuses only on issues related to their narrow mandate, toward more integrated governance and decision-making systems. We must consider not only resources available, but also the nature of community involvement, ➔

which actors are involved, the local context under which planning processes develop and the capacity for participants to engage with complex local sustainability issues. It is through increased community capacity that communities will be able to identify means of strategically selecting, prioritizing and implementing the policies, programs and structural changes that enable communities to attain sustainability objectives.

**Implementation-Planning Gap:
Award-Winning Initiatives**

As part of the *Strategic Sustainability* project funded by Infrastructure Canada, four award-winning initiatives were selected for detailed case study research to explore process lessons related to bridging the planning-implementation gap.

While the themes and lessons discussed in the article are based on all four case studies, in the interest of space, only two of the case studies are briefly discussed here.

**Case Study 1: Craik,
Saskatchewan: Craik Sustainable
Living Project (CSLP)**

The motivation for undertaking the Craik Sustainable Living Project (CSLP) was a crisis regarding the town’s long-term viability. Faced with the de-population and decline of rural Saskatchewan in general, the community of Craik realized that something had to be done to generate positive attention to the town and raise its profile. Rather than embarking on traditional economic development initiatives in competition

with surrounding towns (i.e., free land, town marketing and highway-oriented development), leaders in the community were convinced that sustainable community development provided the key to long-term stability and rural revitalization. Sustainability was seen as a necessity because neither the town nor the rural municipality could afford to expand services. The CSLP was keen to demonstrate the viability of a community that could build its own homes, create its own energy, handle its own waste and link economic development initiatives to environmental stewardship.

In 2000, Craik, both the town and rural municipality, joined forces to help establish a community-based sustainability project that would bring attention to the town and

provide a model for sustainable living for other rural communities. There were four components of the project: 1) the Eco-Centre demonstration building; 2) community outreach and education; 3) community action; and 4) eco-village development. Each of these components was community driven and designed to provide employment opportunities, demonstrate energy efficiency in buildings and transform and promote Craik as a sustainable community.

From the time construction began on the Eco-Centre in 2003, it has served as a focal point for outreach, education and community action activities, such as hosting a seminar series and housing local ecological footprint campaigns. The eco-centre demonstrated the viability of energy-efficient and alternative approaches to construction (e.g., straw bale construction, alternative energy sources and integrated environmental design) in the Saskatchewan context in order to spur interest in the broader eco-village development.

**Case Study 2: Toronto, Ontario:
Better Buildings Partnership (BBP)**

The initial motivation for the Better Buildings Partnership (BBP) can be traced back to 1988, when the city hosted a conference on air quality and cities. At the time, Toronto was experiencing air quality problems, such as smog. This spurred the city to commit to a 20 percent reduction in greenhouse gases (GHGs) from 1988 levels, making it the first

city to make such a commitment. This goal served as the “defining moment” that spurred future commitments from the city.

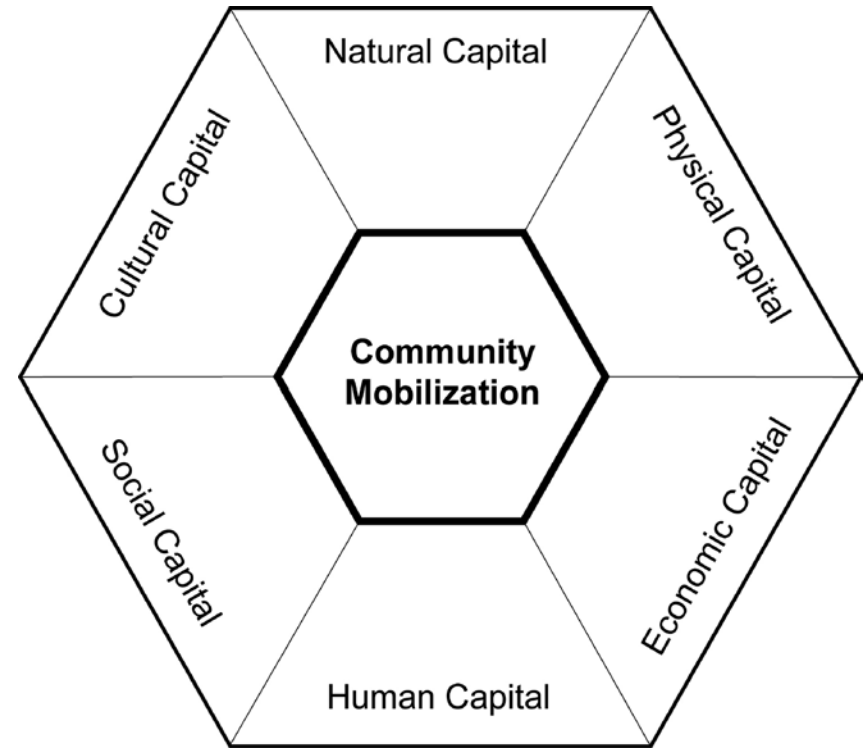
In order to achieve air quality goals, the city established the Energy Efficiency Office (EEO) and the Toronto Atmospheric Fund (TAF). The EEO was responsible for developing and implementing energy-efficiency and conservation strategies. Based on preliminary studies, the EEO determined that buildings were the single largest contributor to GHGs; the BBP was established, therefore, as a means to target this sector. The BBP started with one employee and a consultant, but eventually involved the contributions of over 200 people via charrettes and consultations. The three major activities the BBP undertook were: 1) financial studies; 2) evaluating similar existing programs elsewhere; and 3) assessing internal capacity within the city.

The BBP has been called the best example of the practical implementation of the city’s CO² emission-reduction goals as the program aims to decrease GHG emissions and improve urban air quality through energy-efficiency retrofits to buildings in the industrial-commercial-institutional (ICI) sector. The program, launched in 1996, provides comprehensive energy retrofits to private and public buildings through lending schemes that allow building owners to pay back retrofit costs through efficiency gains. The

BBP has survived eleven years within constitutional constraints of municipal financing and has made improvements to over 600 buildings, resulting in a reduction of 200,500 tons of CO² annually. It has also yielded CAN\$19 million in savings to building owners and has had a local economic impact of CAN\$176 million.

**From Action to Planning: Using
Tangible Projects as Catalysts**

What is the role of planning in these best practices? These case studies challenge the dominant view of planning in most SCD planning frameworks as a linear, rational process that starts with identifying where you want to go, the strategies that will get you there and the implementation and review of those strategies and actions to determine if you are on the right track. Rather, this research suggests that it is actually tangible demonstration projects that are most effective at shifting the way things are done, the way options are evaluated and the way stakeholders are engaged with the decision-making process. Each of the award-winning initiatives arose out of a specific local concern or crisis (e.g., viability of the town or local air quality problems) and served as a means of engaging citizens in planning processes and raising awareness of particular issues in a given community. The planning processes were valuable not so much for the planning outcomes but rather for developing community ⇒



LEFT: Figure 1: Community Capital Framework (after Roseland, 2005)

leadership and awareness around sustainability issues and for identifying the key opportunities, actors and strategies to advance sustainability in a given context.

The case studies also highlight two key inter-related themes that were relevant across all contexts and critical in each stage of the planning-implementation process. The first theme is leadership. Community leadership is identified in the literature as critical to obtaining the necessary political commitment to undertake sustainability initiatives. Many studies, however, focus on local government leadership in terms of leading by example, aligning policies and obtaining political and management support. While this kind of leadership was critical in this research as well, leadership was also thought of more broadly.

Community leadership was critical in setting the sustainability agenda in each of the case studies, yet it was also recognized as being closely tied to engagement, as community leaders were able to engage non-traditional partners, promote and motivate participation, develop consensus around shared values and proactively engage broader support. For example, Toronto's BBP arose out of partnership between the city, the private sector and trade unions in response to dealing with the impacts of an economic recession. In order to generate interest in the project

and secure involvement from various partners, the city did not sell the BBP based on the benefits to the environment, but rather highlighted the expected profit gains and local jobs to be created through implementing efficiency measures.

Leadership was also particularly important in decision-making, where decision-making processes could be influenced through a willingness to push for innovation and accept a certain level of risk. The key to being strategic lies in the ability to balance the innovation required to do things different from the status quo and the associated risks of doing so. For example, in Craik there were a number of different risks that had to be faced: financial risks (using town reserves and bank loans to help finance the project); technological risks (using innovative and untried technology); personal perception (participants were identified early on as crazy or as "wing-nuts"); and volunteer burn-out. Again, the ability to manage risk was closely tied to engagement and a sense of shared ownership (and risk) over sustainability initiatives. In part due to strong community leadership, many communities were willing to take that "risky" first step towards sustainability based on demonstration projects that served as tangible examples of sustainability in their communities. These projects contributed to raising

awareness, building capacity and engaging a broader cross-section of participants.

The second theme is one of information, education and awareness of sustainability options. Earlier studies have stressed an ability to manage the complexity associated with sustainability initiatives as a critical factor for success. People in each case study recognized their limited capacity for research related to their particular contexts and therefore relied heavily on information and best practices from other communities. For example, the lessons from Toronto's BBP regarding decision-making processes, funding mechanisms and partnerships now inform other environmental initiatives, such as the city's Green Development Standards. These best practices served as "pretty good" solutions and provided the foundation for tangible demonstration projects. Communities recognized that the search for information could be a crippling barrier to implementing sustainability and were able to take a more pragmatic approach. In Craik, the primary focus was on building local expertise through a learning-by-doing approach to problem-solving. Faced with limited human resources, there was a conscious choice made between planning and implementation. Craik was successful in obtaining a grant to use the Natural Step to guide local action planning, but there was the sense that the CSLP

could either do the action plan or build the eco-centre; they did not have the financial or human resources for both.

Conclusions


While many municipalities and First Nation communities across Canada are facing an infrastructure crisis, there are a number of encouraging signals. Governments at all levels have recognized the reality of the infrastructure deficit. A number of communities are addressing their infrastructure deficit through a SCD lens and are either investing in green infrastructure or establishing innovative projects designed to reduce demand on existing infrastructure. These case studies serve as tangible

models for other communities and provide real learning opportunities of how to change the status quo towards SCD.

As these case studies also demonstrate, however, a number of these sustainability initiatives are independent of official sustainability planning processes. This finding provides a cautionary tale with regard to the requirement for all communities to produce Integrated Community Sustainability Plans in order to obtain federal support for infrastructure investments. Communities need more than plans. They need committed leadership, resources and willingness to learn and adapt as they make the transition to more sustainable communities. By thinking strategically about

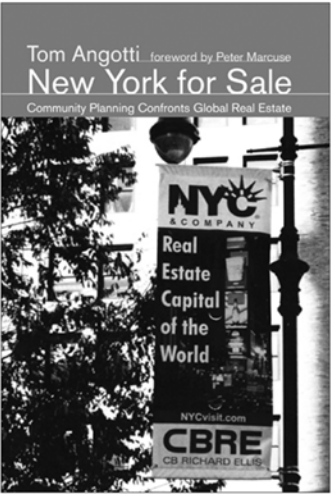
sustainability and making the connection to community infrastructure, communities will be able to identify the quick wins for sustainability in the short term while retaining and building support for broader and more complex solutions in the medium and long term.

Sean Connelly is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography and a researcher at the Centre for Sustainable Community Development at Simon Fraser University. This research has been made possible through funding from Infrastructure Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.

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Tom Angotti
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Healing Abandonment: *When Houses Have No People and People Have No Houses, Use it or Lose it*

by SHIRI PASTERNAK and DAVID WACHSMUTH

In Detroit, which is choking on tens of thousands of abandoned properties, the housing abandonment problem is easy to see but effective solutions are hard to imagine. In Toronto, the opposite is true. The abandonment problem, though real, is easy to miss, and effective solutions are available. This article briefly describes Abandonment Issues, a Toronto-based campaign for affordable housing. The campaign was built around a demand that the municipal government introduce a “Use It or Lose It” by-law meant to prevent housing abandonment and reclaim already abandoned buildings through targeted expropriations, for conversion to social housing. One year since its inception, and with the bulk of the groundwork over, we want to reflect critically on the successes and failures of the campaign from the point of view of academics working in the planning field.

The Affordable Housing Crisis and the Motivation for Use It or Lose It

The centerpiece of the Abandonment Issues campaign has been an effort to persuade the City of Toronto to adopt a Use It or Lose It by-law to prevent buildings from being abandoned and to reclaim already abandoned buildings. Activists

have been trying to convince the city to adopt similar policies for at least a decade. In particular, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) issued this demand in tandem with a series of high-profile housing takeovers, such as the Pope Squat in 2002, timed to coincide with Pope John Paul II’s visit to the city.

OCAP and other anti-poverty groups such as the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee are frontline organizers who see the direct effects of the city’s policies on homelessness on other areas like access to services, police harassment and the lack of affordable housing. There are nearly 70,000 households on the waiting list for social housing in Toronto, and many of them are single-mother families. Over the last few decades, mixed-income neighborhoods, once ubiquitous across Toronto, have been disappearing as the spatial segregation of the working poor (overwhelmingly immigrants) in the city’s inner suburbs and the wealthy in the downtown—what University of Toronto Professor David Hulchanski has called the “three cities within Toronto”—has increased.

The municipal government is not entirely to blame for these problems. Canada has a

particularly poor record in the area of housing; rare among wealthy western nations, it lacks a national housing plan. Recent years have seen the deterioration of the position of low-income households in the rental sector—no surprise, given that Canada has the most free market approach to housing in the west, and the second lowest rate of social housing after the United States.

Despite the calculus activists have been doing for years using obvious math (people need housing + housing is going to waste when buildings are vacant = expropriate these properties and prevent others from being abandoned), research about addressing abandonment as a strategy for solving the affordable housing crisis has been minimal—mostly the work of devoted OCAP members.

The core of the Abandonment Issues organizing strategy was simple. Two main organizers (the authors of this paper, both graduate students in urban planning at the University of Toronto) partnered with a dozen community organizations that ranged from service agencies to militant anti-poverty groups to social justice think tanks. We developed a plan to undertake a thorough catalog of Toronto’s

abandonment issues and to follow this up with a proposal for a comprehensive by-law directly addressing our research findings. We would highlight our issues by planning some direct actions that forced the city and news media to respond to our proposal. The Abandonment Issues project was thus to have two pillars: policy research and community organizing. We believe our particular successes and failures in realizing these two objectives may speak to broader issues confronting academics engaging in planning activism.

Policy and Research Successes

The concept of “abandoned” has a decidedly different ring than either “vacant” or “unoccupied” when referring to a building. An abandoned building is one that has been neglected, scarred by boards patched onto its windows and in desperate need of attention. What kind of care is appropriate for something that has been abandoned? What kind of responsibility has been shirked and which obligations are incumbent upon witnesses? When babies are abandoned in stairwells, communities are roused to action. But what about when houses are abandoned? From the outset, we were determined to connect housing abandonment (houses without people) to the thousands of families either homeless or stranded in precarious living situations due to the lack of affordable housing in Toronto (people without houses). Abandonment, we

wanted to argue, was more than just an objective fact of vacancy or disrepair; it was a *social* phenomenon.

One of the central tasks for Abandonment Issues was thus to define exactly what we meant by abandonment. Drawing on academic literature from the United States and our own investigations in Toronto, we defined abandonment as an uneven and reversible process (as opposed to a yes-or-no binary state) that occurs along three axes—functional, physical and financial. One surprising and important outcome of understanding abandonment as a spectrum of neglect was that, having identified low-end high-rise apartment buildings with dwindling occupancies as a form of abandonment, we discovered that in the last five years rental vacancy across the city has concentrated in these buildings, which have consequently seen deferred maintenance and accelerated deterioration. Because these buildings provide an enormous share of Toronto’s affordable housing stock, this vacancy trickle-down is likely to represent a major policy challenge for the city in years to come.

We also found that, while boarded-up buildings were a significant issue mostly in the downtown core, there were properties scattered in wards throughout the city that justified a citywide response. Furthermore, we confirmed what is apparent to the naked eye: Abandonment is not widespread in Toronto the

way it is in American cities such as Detroit and Philadelphia (or Canadian cities such as Winnipeg and Windsor). Because Toronto’s abandonment problem is relatively modest, we have been able to argue that a Use It or Lose It by-law would be a workable solution. Moreover, since we found that many of the vacant buildings in the city are located in neighborhoods undergoing or on the threshold of undergoing gentrification, promoting expropriation for conversion to social housing and preventing existing private affordable housing from being abandoned would help ensure that people with a diversity of incomes could co-exist within prime Toronto real estate markets.

In the spring of 2008, we released *From Abandonment to Affordable Housing*, a comprehensive report on the abandonment problem that included a set of policy options for addressing it. The report was informed by our field research in Toronto and other research into strategies pursued by municipalities in North America and the United Kingdom. Our recommendations for preventing abandonment included licensing landlords and strengthening controls on the demolition of apartment buildings or their conversion to condominiums; our recommendations for reclaiming abandoned buildings included a citywide vacancy fee and a procedure for expropriating buildings and redeveloping them as social housing.

The most controversial aspect of the Use It or Lose It proposal, ⇨

expropriation for conversion to social housing, is no longer unprecedented in Toronto. Our model for the project was a building in the lower-income neighborhood of Parkdale, where a landlord sitting on a burnt-out former rooming house became the target of community activists who last year won their bid to have the city expropriate the property and turn it over to a non-profit, using a bidding process, for redevelopment into social housing. By similarly linking many of our other recommendations with existing municipal policies or policies currently being debated (such as landlord licensing), we were able to take an issue which had previously been unfairly ignored because it was championed mainly by radical anti-poverty groups and bring it to the attention of city councilors and staff.

The report presented a case for a Use It or Lose It policy in a concrete way that had never been done before. As a result of the original research we conducted and our ability, as planning graduate students, to present our findings in the technocratic language of municipal policy and law, many doors were opened for us at city hall. Our access was also made easier by the fact that we had previous experience navigating the city bureaucracy (one of us had worked for the City of Toronto) and that, as graduate students, we had the flexible schedules necessary to schedule and attend meetings with councilors and staff.

Through a combination of these structural advantages, hard work and luck, Abandonment Issues

was able to get Use It or Lose It on the table at the city council's Affordable Housing Committee, where the councilors decided to request a staff report on the feasibility of adopting such a by-law. After more than a decade of activism aimed at stopping abandonment in Toronto, the municipal government has finally begun to take the issue seriously, and the prospects for effective municipal action, while not certain, are better than ever.

Organizing Failures

When we started the Abandonment Issues project, we had a million ideas about how to turn vacant buildings into an opportunity for communities throughout the city to reclaim and transform them into badly needed social assets, such as affordable housing. We envisioned a grassroots campaign that mobilized interest and support through high school classrooms, anti-poverty groups and community centers. We also envisioned an online map that grew steadily darker with pins as people from across Toronto marked vacant buildings and lots, contributing vital local knowledge to a collaborative urban research project.

At the height of our excitement, stimulated by a campaign launch in the fall of 2007 that drew 150 people into a crowded community center, we felt encouraged that the demand for a Use It or Lose It by-law could be an example of successful community-driven planning activism. The momentum

seemed unstoppable. A number of national media outlets contacted us and ran stories about Toronto's abandonment issues, and we received messages of support and offers of help from Toronto's residents—both of which helped us progressively catch the attention of politicians.

We knew that despite all this early momentum, the project required a tremendous amount of research and a boost of support from city hall. As a result, we disengaged, temporarily we thought, from the broad-based organizing work we had tentatively begun and turned our efforts to the research-based investigations mentioned earlier. This was not a difficult decision to make since we knew we lacked solid information and policy proposals, and since we had initially conceived of the project as having two pillars—policy research and community organizing. But as the first pillar grew larger, the second crumbled.

In the interim between the launch of the campaign and the release of our final report, we worked hard on conducting and compiling our research, generally managing to keep community partners informed of our progress. We led a few workshops on Toronto's affordable housing crisis and the benefits of a Use It or Lose It by-law, mostly at the request of local university student groups, but then in Evansville, Indiana, London, Ontario, and Los Angeles, California. We fielded calls from other municipalities and distant activist groups who had heard about our project. But most

of all, we tried to find activist partners for a housing takeover to spectacularly launch the report, and though groups were interested and supportive, we ran out of time and energy. We ended up releasing the report through our networks and then holding one final meeting to discuss with our community partners what kind of event we should organize to bring people back together.

At that meeting we presented a plan for a panel discussion about Toronto's affordable housing crisis and the benefits of a Use It or Lose It by-law to be held at a rapidly redeveloping former social housing intersection in the city and were surprised when the idea was shot down from all corners. We were told emphatically that people didn't want another event without action they could plug into, that we were unable to initiate such action ourselves, and that we needed to focus our efforts on building support from where we would encounter the greatest resistance.

After much discussion around the table about policy priorities and opportunities with the provincial and municipal governments, a participant from the Women Against Poverty Collective asked about where the voices of the marginalized Toronto residents most affected by the affordable housing crisis were in this fight? It was true that we had not done enough to encourage those voices. Despite our initial intentions, the majority of our time had been spent researching and writing our report and shopping it around to

councilors and staff at city hall. We readily admitted that we had failed on this count, but to our surprise, two veteran community activists rose to our defense.

"I've been a community organizer for twenty-five years and I still don't think I'm doing it right," said Elinor Mahoney from the Parkdale Legal Clinic as a way to soften the criticism. Another of our mentors, Brian Eng of the Wellesley Institute, said: "Look, you've focused on your strengths here—research—and you've kept all the community groups in the loop, involved and consulted. That's more than most researchers ever do. And since you've focused on what you're good at, you're getting results and people at city hall are paying attention." Perhaps the nature of this project was more academic than we were at first willing to admit.

As planning academics trying also to be planning activists, we weren't able to align our practice with our political commitments. In such a technocratic and expert-driven field as planning, this is a challenge at the best of times, but particularly disappointing for two people politicized in direct action communities. It turned out to be a lesson in humility more than anything.

Though we are proud of the work we have accomplished—raising awareness of an important issue and making a set of substantive proposals that may just lead to a few hundred people finding housing in the coming years—we have also become aware of the

tensions embodied in our project. These are the tensions between commitment to community-led planning, which means a commitment to grassroots community groups already working on the ground, and the recognition of the privilege of our social capital to be taken seriously by municipal government and allowed to work with them. This article is a tribute to all those anti-poverty groups who broke ground before us on making the case for a Use It or Lose It by-law, and hopefully a lesson to fellow planning students on the potential of solid research that finds its way into the right hands.

Shiri Pasternak is a co-coordinator of Abandonment Issues, a doctoral student in planning at the University of Toronto and moderator of www.propertytaskforce.org. David Wachsmuth is a co-coordinator of Abandonment Issues and doctoral student in urban sociology at New York University. The full report and policy brief on the Use It or Lose It proposal is available at www.abandonment-issues.ca

Greek City Scenes as They Serve and Fail Women: A Photo Essay

by REGGIE MODLICH

Foreign cultures fascinate, especially when seen through a woman’s eyes. Greek cities and homes especially amaze me—from the tiny plastic dustpans with little drain holes and brushes with which women very effectively clean their sinks to the enormous presence of the Church, with its patriarchy, pomp and ideology. This photo-essay examines how the urban form of Greece provides opportunities for and imposes constraints on women. While specific to Greece, many observations noted here resonate across borders.

Mixed Uses: In these high-density residential areas, commercial establishments at, aboveground and belowground become viable. They provide interesting streetscapes and ensure a sense of safety, or “eyes on the street,” the phrase coined by Jane Jacobs fifty years ago and still valid today, especially for women, children and the elderly, who enliven the streets until well past midnight. This mix of uses also brings goods, services and jobs within easy walking distance, which is important for women, who may have multiple roles related to caregiving, domestic chores and, increasingly, paid jobs. This accessibility may become critical in the future, if driving private cars becomes too costly.



Small-Scale Commercial Establishments: Small and convenient spaces for commerce prevail. These provide women with an opportunity for work, and many women manage and own their own businesses. An amazing variety and range of goods, professions, crafts and services are offered and produced. Elegant displays provide shop owners with both creative challenges as well as competitive advantage. Recently, however, North American multinational chains from McDonalds to Starbucks to the Gap are appearing in both suburban and inner-city Cosmos and Hondos centers, North American-still shopping malls. Increasingly, empty stores appear along streets like holes in a beautiful fabric.



Waste Collection, Recycling and Reuse: The blue recycling bin (plastic, metal, glass, paper) is a recent partner to the old indiscriminating bin—now if there were only a green one for compost! They are located on every side of every block, accessible 24/7 and emptied noisily at night. With such frequent pick-up, the problem of storage and smell is greatly alleviated. Greek shopping bags don’t leak, and are therefore effectively recycled as garbage bags, but discarded plastic bags (*sakulitzes*) and bottles still litter both city and countryside. Dealing with domestic waste, in Greece as in most countries, is still the responsibility of women.



This recycling depot, sponsored by the Alpha Bank and located in a popular park, offers a penny for every three plastic, metal or glass containers returned. On the sides are special slots for discarding cell phones and paper. Judging from the bags of unsorted and unredeemed waste around the depot, the depot is either emptied too infrequently, or consumers are paid too little to ensure that they deposit correctly.

The idea of “r” for reuse” functions well in Greece. Furniture, household items and clothing magically disappear shortly after being placed on the sidewalk, especially in neighborhoods with many African and Asian refugees.



Courtyards in Residential Buildings: Most European apartment buildings require dual orientation and therefore feature internal courtyards, probably to ensure air circulation. Kitchens, bedrooms—often with balconies for drying clothes—and staircases open onto these courtyards. A bottom-level apartment tends to receive a fair amount of dirt from above, but it is also cooler and cheaper than other units and has the whole yard space at its disposal—often including stunning little gardens. In warm Mediterranean climates such as Greece, windows and balcony doors tend to be open. I wonder if this promotes “ears to courtyard,” the private sphere version of “eyes on the streets” in the public sphere, and thus inhibits domestic violence, the incidence of which some claim to be far less than in North America. But this is merely a hypothesis. ➡

Peripteros (Kiosks): Almost every street has a few kiosks, located on the edge of the sidewalk. With windows opening to both street and sidewalk, they are a convenient source of information, directions and goods to the walking and driving public. Many of them are operated by women and offer everything from cold drinks to aspirin, newspapers to telephone and parking cards, and a public telephone for those who don't have or can't afford cell phones. Open from early in the morning until late at night, they too provide "eyes on the streets."



Sidewalks: Try to navigate these in a wheelchair or with a baby carriage or shopping cart! Think of having poor eyesight, as is the case with most elderly—the majority of whom happen to be women. It certainly limits the benefits of the otherwise extremely pedestrian-friendly environment. Furthermore, desperation for parking spaces in an environment not built for cars leaves sidewalks invaded and cut off by parked cars.



Church: The Greek Orthodox Church is not unlike the Roman Catholic Church. Church and state are still not fully separated, as illustrated in the case of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religion. Religion is taught in all public schools as part of the curriculum for twelve years and priests are paid civil servants. The Church doesn't allow women to be priests or to enter the sanctum area behind the altar, and it considers abortion, divorce and homosexuality to be sins. In some churches, which come in all sizes, women are still expected to sit on one side and men on the other. In recent years, serious scandals and corruption have shaken the Greek Orthodox Church, but faith remains strong and it provides strong support networks among women.



Outdoor Cafes and Restaurants: Restaurants and cafés line popular shorelines, parks and streets. They provide women with a public presence and further enhance "eyes on the street" while their decors, music and smells create a safe and alluring ambience.



After-Hours Child Care: In Athens, parents can drop off their children for the evening while they attend a meeting or enjoy a meal out. *Paidotopos* accepts children aged eight months to eight years for a relatively modest fee of €4-6 per evening (from 6:00 to 10:00 P.M.)—a little more if the parents don't stay to help with supervision. Children can either bring or buy food and, through play, expend pent-up energy. Three young women help the owner to keep the children safe and happy. No governmental regulations burden this service, nor is any insurance needed in this particular case.



Reggie Modlich (rmodlich@evdemon.ca), MES, MCIP, is a retired urban planner. He is founder of Women Plan Toronto and active in its successor, Toronto Women's City Alliance.

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The Uses of Grand Plans

by participants of the Critical Perspectives on the Hudson Yards Studio,
Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, Hunter College, City University of New York

Dazzling plans, though nothing new to city dwellers, are hardly innocuous. Beyond merely representing potential buildings and physical spaces, grand plans are evidence of an uncertain relationship to the future, an attempt to produce and secure that future for particular interests. The example of the Hudson Yards in New York City offers an opportunity to think through the use of such plans and what it might mean for urban politics.

The site of the Hudson Yards is big and bewildering, just like the latest vision for what should be built there. Bordered by 31st Street on the south and 42nd Street on the north, Seventh Avenue on the east and the Hudson River on the west, the Hudson Yards area occupies a vast tract of Manhattan’s far West Side. At the core sits twenty-six acres of open rail yards owned by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). It is here that a large piece (around ten million square feet) of the future of New York City may be anchored. Formerly known as the West Side Rail Yards, the Hudson Yards now confusingly shares the same name as an overlapping fifty-five block rezoning that has already passed through one successful round of the New York City land review process. The rail yards themselves are split into two halves, east and west. As of June 2008, only the eastern yard has been rezoned, and a host of startlingly ambitious plans for the larger area remain in the preliminary phases.

The general public perception of these plans seems disconnected from the realities. Community activists have claimed that the conflation of one site and one planning process

with another is meant to give an impression that the whole project and its implicit vision for the future of the city is already a reality. Indeed, some locals seem to believe that the plans will happen, while others think they are totally dead, defeated by an organized community and never to rise again. Critical investigation reveals, paradoxically, that all of these notions contain some truth.

The Sites

The streets around the Hudson Yards (rezoning) site have a different feel than the rest of midtown Manhattan. Given the proximity to some of the most valuable real estate on earth, the contrasts are striking. There are few pedestrians. Sidewalks have been taken over by sanitation trucks. The area is occupied by repair shops, warehouses, light industry and mazes of concrete. There are few amenities to be found. Traffic is heavy in and around the infrastructure for the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the Lincoln Tunnel. A few signs of street life are present, but for the most part the area feels desolate and worn, like a forgotten relic from the days of a bygone industrial economy now turned into the garage of New York City.

All this lends credence to the idea that this site is an urban wasteland. Certainly this is what the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) would have us believe, and that is really the crux of the issue. Nobody would argue that this area is being used to its full potential, and almost everyone agrees that it could be made into something better for the future of New York City, but what kind of future should be built here? Who decides, and how?

The plans for this site are big. Zoning changes open the area up to densities dramatically higher than what presently exists. Plans call for a dozen blocks of new buildings, cascading down from some eighty stories above the yards themselves, to around twenty-five stories at the periphery. This would be the complete transformation of a sizeable portion of the city. The rezoning also includes several other separate and potentially major projects, including the Moynihan/Penn Station refurbishment, the extension of the No. 7 subway line, the possible expansion of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center and a new tunnel meant to increase commuter capacity between Midtown and New Jersey.

The sheer number and magnitude of all these pieces is only the first hint of the ambitions that are involved and what is really at stake. In a 3 December 2007 press release, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg predicted that “we will see this area give rise to a vibrant and exciting neighborhood with needed housing, office space, commercial and cultural venues and parks and open spaces.” The DCP’s website, furthermore, claims that “it is in these 360 acres that the city can meet its public responsibility to continue to provide job and housing opportunities for all New Yorkers.” U.S. Senator Charles Schumer has connected the Hudson Yards project to an even bigger picture, stating in a 26 March 2008 press release: “The redevelopment of the Hudson Yards site will not only bring much needed revenue to the MTA, but will catalyze growth throughout the West Side and ensure that New York stays competitive in the twenty-first century.” This sounds like very important change, but is it achievable, let alone desirable?

Investigating the Project

Determined to try and grasp the scope of what might happen here, we examined the details and talked with longtime community leaders, key people involved in the planning

process and even random people on the streets of adjacent neighborhoods. What we learned surprised us and gave us reason to deeply question the large-scale planning practices involved.

The future of the Hudson Yards area was produced in a seemingly backwards way. The initial rezoning preceded any specific plans for what should be built there. Orchestrated by the Bloomberg administration in an effort to spur large-scale development, this was one in a series of similar zoning changes to key locations across the city. In 2006, the city produced a general program vaguely specifying what should be built: open space, a cultural facility, buildings of a high density with a large amount of office space, etc. Finally, details were produced through a competitive bidding process in which private developers created mega-plans. The ultimate fate of the site was to be decided, quite undemocratically, by the MTA and the city.

The plans produced for the bidding process were visually breathtaking, and renderings of sleek towering clusters made for good press. Enticingly lit models and virtual reality videos of what it would be like to walk through these spaces were put on public display in the winter of 2007-08. The grand plans were seductive and wonderful to look at, but they concealed much more than they revealed.

At every step, the surrounding communities met the plans for the Hudson Yards with uncertainty and opposition. Housing advocates criticized a time-limited requirement that 20 percent of the residential units be affordable, arguing that only a more substantial amount of permanent affordable housing would meet the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods and the city as a whole.

Community organizations lamented the lack of basic municipal services, such as schools, police stations and fire stations, or any provisions for the increased waste ⇒

and sanitation demands that would no doubt accompany the construction and completion of what in other cities would qualify as another downtown. Because the far West Side is very deficient in public recreational space, this was a key element required of all bids. Much of the “public” space in the developers’ plans, however, took the form of open space enclosed between the towers and isolated from the street. This too received considerable scrutiny from the public. In effect, the planning process implemented here produced something almost entirely unacceptable to the community. Planners essentially started by giving the public nothing, whereupon the community was required to put up a fight if it wanted anything at all—even basic services. Whether or not this is a trend we cannot say.

Manhattan Community Board 4, a body that advocates for the local communities within the New York City municipal structure, told us that the plans would never be built and that everybody involved knew it. The Hudson Yards is right at the heart of its district. Just a few years ago, the site was at the center of a different development controversy involving a stadium for the 2012 Olympics, and failing that, for the National Football League’s New York Jets. These people spoke from hard-earned knowledge when they maintained that some of the things included in the plan would probably be built, but that it would be a mistake and a delusion to try and do them on such a grand scale, all at once, with no kind of centrally coordinated oversight. They argued that the essential transportation pieces must be put in place first, followed by a sensible build-out of something market appropriate over a long period of time, rather than the five-year span originally proposed.

At the same time, the director for policy and media relations at the MTA was telling a very different story. One developer had already dropped out of the bidding process and the winner was expected to be announced within a few days. Amazingly, the MTA was

discussing all the mega-plans for the project—including the one that had already dropped out—as if there was no doubt that one of them would eventually come to total completion. Meanwhile, those beautiful pictures were still in the papers.

Grand Plans

What should we do with all this and what is at stake here? Why would community members tell us that this was never going to happen while parties more entrenched in the planning process continued to discuss dead plans as forgone realities? At present, market turmoil has left the proposed plans in severe doubt. Still, the city, the MTA and the press continue to offer hints that they are still alive. Indeed, a bond issue was already raised for part of the plan, which means that the city is locked into debt and at least some elements of the plan will continue to move forward.

Grand plans are the trace of an uncertain future trying to colonize the present. The city, the MTA, real estate interests and the media have propagated the idea that this area is underutilized and that this is the only good land yet to be developed in Manhattan. Whether they believe it or not, they produce the perception that the development of affordable office space and upscale housing are nothing less than essential to the survival of New York City in a competitive, information-driven global marketplace. This narrative—the urgent appeal to a precarious future, the appeal to necessity—should be of great political interest. We have not heard the last of the Hudson Yards, and this case is worth thinking about. It says something about the process of planning in contemporary cities. At first glance, it seems like an incomprehensible landscape ruled by powerful private interests. After scrutiny, however, it is almost as if those interests are at the mercy of the same uncertain future that they hope to sway to their advantage. They perform a conjuring trick in which they rezone and chant a story

about the future, in hopes that markets will deliver a self-fulfilling prophesy. This must be recognized as a peculiar and vulnerable power. This example at least suggests that, in the over-eagerness to secure it, there may be ways of obstructing and countering the errant futures that this power attempts to produce. If this taught us anything, it is that the future is never a forgone conclusion.

The authors were participants in Critical Perspectives on the Hudson Yards Studio at Hunter College in New York City: Jenny Alcaide, Shaheda Ali, David Ciolino-Volano, Scott Copeland, Joseph Gaffney, Keneshia Hibbert, Tad Hilton, Nadiah Johari-Ramzan, Maria Cristina Laporta, Yanelys Millan and Anna Thomas; Christian Anderson, Instructor. The authors would like to thank the people who took the time to talk with them over the course of the project: Scott Larson, whose insights on the nature of planning in contemporary New York City were invaluable; Renee Schoonbeek and all the people at Community Board 4 who went out of their way to accommodate them and honestly answer questions; and John Raskin, whose lesson on urban power was one to never be forgotten.

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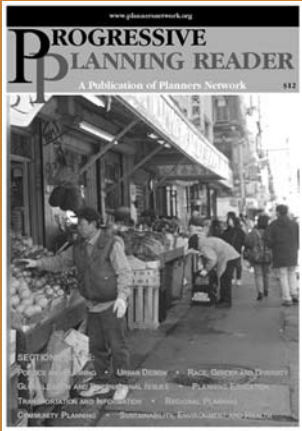
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