

CANADA'S URBAN LANDSCAPE: New Trends, Emerging Issues

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Throughout the 1990s, cities across Canada have played an increasingly important role in the economic, political, and social lives of Canadians. In the decades to come, this trend will likely accelerate. As Canada passes into the 21st century, the process of urbanization continues unabated, molding and reshaping the national landscape. The great bulk of Canadians now live in urban environments, and this is true for both the country at large and most of its component regions. Canada is no longer a nation of rural dwellers, and this reflects one of the most important and dramatic demographic changes of the last century – a huge shift from the countryside to the village, town, and city. In 1871, the year of the first national census following Confederation, only one in five Canadians lived in an incorporated urban centre. In 1996, four out of every five Canadians (78%) were urban. With that in mind, it is appropriate to pause and reflect on Canada's experience with urbanization, the ascendancy of cities, and how both impact upon the way the nation is governed.

The fact that most Canadians now live in urban environments is not a strikingly new finding, nor is it particularly surprising. However, it is only recently that cities and their governance have come to demand serious attention. In the 1990s, cities – or more properly the citizens who live in them – have shown themselves to be primary drivers of economic development, and municipal governments and community-based non-profit organizations have begun to play a major role in both the design and delivery of a host of social services. As a result, decisions made by local entities such as the *Capital Regional Health Authority* in Edmonton or the *Saskatoon District Health Board* could have just as great an impact on health care as would any new federal-provincial health accord.

In addition, cities are positioning themselves on the world stage. Globalization – perhaps the most popular buzzword of the 1990s – speaks not only to business opportunities, increased competitiveness, and the importance of exports to our standard of living; it has also created stronger links between Canada's local communities and the much larger global environment. Events like Montreal's Expo '67, which for the first time highlighted a Canadian world-class city, soon spawned other efforts including the 1976 Montreal Summer Olympics, the marketing efforts of Calgary's Exhibition and Stampede, and the billing of Banff National Park as a world-class tourist

destination. Such “global positioning” is reflected in more contemporary times by Expo ‘86 in Vancouver, the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, the 1992 and 1993 World Series in Toronto and, most recently, the 1999 Pan-Am Games in Winnipeg. Cities across the board are heavily engaged in international promotion, and often do so without reference to their provincial location.

Recognizing the growing importance of cities to Canadians, the Canada West Foundation has launched a new project entitled *Western Cities*. The purpose of this project is to explore the opportunities and address the challenges facing our country’s municipal governments, with a particular focus on urban places in the West. The project incorporates an ambitious research agenda designed to call attention to new urban realities, and to link that attention to sound research and argumentation on the appropriate design of political, social and economic relationships for the 21st century.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout the 1990s, cities across Canada have played an increasingly important role in the economic, political and social lives of Canadians. In the decades to come, this trend will likely accelerate. *Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape* begins to explore the importance of cities in Canada by meeting three objectives:

- 1) Detailing how urbanization has proceeded in Canada within a national, regional and provincial context.
- 2) Constructing a profile of Canadian cities based on population growth, demographic change, and a variety of social and economic indicators.
- 3) Constructing a future research agenda to address the issues facing municipal governments.

In meeting these objectives, *Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape* represents a highly comprehensive data collection sourcebook that can be used to inform ongoing debate and discussion over policy issues in urban Canada.

Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape compiles the most recent available and comparable data from Statistics Canada, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Canadian Almanac and Directory, the Canadian Real Estate Board, the Canadian Global Almanac, Revenue Canada, the Dominion Bond Rating Service, various provincial statistical bureaus and services, and the cities themselves. These data were analyzed and presented in a comparative fashion to highlight urbanization trends and to create profiles of Canada's 25 census metropolitan areas (CMAs).

Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape presents a variety of data that demonstrate the following:

- 1) Regardless of the measure chosen, it is clear that Canada has become increasingly urbanized. Over 55% of Canadians live in urban centres with populations exceeding 100,000 persons, while over 45% live in large urban centres with populations exceeding 500,000 persons.

- 2) Urbanization patterns vary across Canada. Urban growth in Western Canada has outpaced urban growth in other regions over the last 30 years.
- 3) Population distributions within CMAs are shifting, with anchor cities declining in population weight and surrounding cities and rural fringes increasing in population weight.
- 4) Cities are highly sensitive to changes in immigration policy, due to the fact that most immigrants reside in CMAs.
- 5) The dramatic variations in the demographic composition of the CMAs present unique policy needs and challenges, and prevent broad generalizations about the character of Canadian cities.
- 6) The West has dramatically higher reported crime rates than other regions. This is true for the region as a whole, and for large cities in the region.
- 7) Total crime is not correlated with urban centres. There is little evidence to support the contention that crime (as measured by all criminal code offenses) is higher in Canada's large cities as compared to smaller cities and rural areas of the country. However, there are regional and provincial variations to this national pattern, and CMAs are more likely to experience property crimes.
- 8) Cities are prime locales for much of Canada's economic activity, yet the economic potential of Canadian cities, as measured by a number of indicators, varies across the country.

Overall, *Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape* demonstrates that Canada is becoming increasingly urbanized. Cities drive the Canadian economy, and enrich Canadian life through the diversity of their populations. *Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape* also demonstrates that the cities vary greatly in their urbanity, social nature and economic realities. Due to this high degree of variation, Canada's cities each have unique policy needs and opportunities. A single "one-size-fits-all" policy strategy is inappropriate: policies that are effective in one city will not necessarily translate into success in another. The implication is that municipal governments require the flexibility to meet their cities' unique needs – flexibility not currently granted in constitutional or legislative terms. The role of municipalities within federalism must be reconsidered to reflect current social, economic and political realities.





Future Research Agenda

The *Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape* findings present the foundation for further urban governance research. There are five broad objectives facing Canadian urban researchers:

- 1) To orchestrate research on the role of Canadian cities in the 21st century, and assess the appropriate role and powers of municipal governments in Canadian federalism.
- 2) To identify the policy challenges faced by Canadian cities, and best practices in resolving such policy challenges.
- 3) To place the growing importance of Canadian cities within the context of globalization, and the related contexts of economic transformation and new electronic technologies.
- 4) To promote continued research on Canadian cities and urban governance by establishing a research network.
- 5) To promote public awareness of the growing importance of cities to the economic, social and cultural lives of Canadians.

In its research agenda, *Cities@2000: Canada's Urban Landscape* presents a number of strategies to meet these objectives. If Canadian municipal, provincial and federal governments promote and advance this proposed agenda, the findings will greatly enhance both the study and practice of urban governance for years to come.

CHAPTER FOUR: FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR URBAN RESEARCH

Cities@2000 has demonstrated that Canada is becoming increasingly urbanized. Cities drive the Canadian economy and enrich Canadian life through the diversity of their populations. *Cities@2000* has also demonstrated that Canadian cities vary greatly in their urbanity, social nature and economic realities. Due to this high degree of variation, Canada's cities each have unique policy needs and opportunities. A single "one-size-fits-all" policy strategy is inappropriate: policies that are effective in one city will not necessarily translate into success in another. The implication is that municipal governments require the flexibility to meet their cities' unique needs.


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- 1) To orchestrate research on the role of Canadian cities in the 21st century, and assess the appropriate role and powers of municipal governments in Canadian federalism.
- 2) To identify the policy challenges faced by Canadian cities, and best practices in resolving such policy challenges.
- 3) To place the growing importance of Canadian cities within the context of globalization, and the related contexts of economic transformation and new electronic technologies.
- 4) To stimulate continued research on Canadian cities and urban governance by establishing a research network.
- 5) To heighten public awareness of the growing importance of cities to the economic, social and cultural lives of Canadians.

These objectives lead to a very broad and rich research agenda. The following research directions are by no means exhaustive, but they do highlight the most pressing research priorities. While each of the following topics can be seen as self-contained, it should be stressed that knowledge gains from each will reinforce other dimensions of urban research.

- ***Urban Government in the Canadian Federation:*** There are three central questions surrounding the role of municipalities within federalism. First, what are the existing models of municipal-federal arrangements and public policy-making that can be extracted from the comparative experience of other federal states? Second, which models of municipal power best fit





current Canadian political realities and future challenges? And third, should municipalities formally be considered a "third order of government" within the text of national and provincial constitutions? In addressing these questions, research must provide a broader conceptual foundation for the study and practice of Canadian federalism, fully incorporating urban affairs.

- ***Municipal Government Finances:*** Due to provincial downloading and growing urban populations, municipal governments face increased public demands upon their services. To what extent are municipal governments financially able to meet these demands? What strategies – such as increased property taxes and user fees, borrowing for capital needs, and reallocating spending – are cities employing to meet needs? What are the impacts of the various strategies? Overall, what is the fiscal health of Canada's cities?
- ***Issue Agendas of Canadian Cities:*** As *Cities@2000* has demonstrated, each CMA has a unique social and economic profile. How do these profiles translate into issue agendas? Policy issue research could explore cities within regions or provinces, or look at cities on a case-by-case basis. Such research would identify key issues that policymakers, businesses and families should be aware of when planning for the next decade.
- ***Best Practices in Urban Policy:*** What can policymakers do to address specific urban policy issues? The goal of best practices research is not only to provide solutions to cities that need redirection, but also to assist cities in "getting it right the first time." It is financially and socially astute to foresee and avoid problems experienced in other cities. By learning from others' experience, Canada's cities can continually advance. Transportation policy, environmental protection, urban growth and development, housing and homelessness, urban decay, urban working conditions, and regionalization in social service delivery are all topics worthy of consideration.
- ***Managing Growth in Urban Centres:*** The rapid growth of many cities presents particular challenges. While the cities have an improved tax base, there is increased demand upon public services, and cities can face difficulties keeping pace. A study of how different Canadian cities have attempted to manage growth, and the impacts of their efforts, would provide comparative knowledge.
- ***Crime in Western Cities:*** Recent data indicate that reported crime rates in Western Canadian cities remain high, despite dropping rates through out the rest of Canada. What factors explain the crime rates? What responses are being taken by municipal police forces? What community

responses to crime are appropriate? Such research should present alternative courses of action, and assess municipal responses to similar crime issues in other jurisdictions.

- ***Lessons of Urban Amalgamation:*** Since 1971, there have been at least four major amalgamation efforts at the municipal level in Canada. The logic for amalgamation is that it reduces service duplication and improves efficiency. Does this argumentation hold true? What is the impact of amalgamation upon communities within the city? What new challenges does amalgamation create for municipalities? The four amalgamated cities could serve as case studies of the advantages and disadvantages of amalgamation in Canada. Given that Vancouver, Victoria and Edmonton frequently face amalgamation pressures, this study would be highly informative for future policy decisions.
- ***Urban Aboriginal Peoples:*** Unlike cities in the central and eastern provinces, Western cities have growing Aboriginal populations. Western cities capture an important part of the contemporary social dynamics confronting Aboriginal peoples, and the intersection of Aboriginal communities and municipal governments is becoming increasingly important. Urban Aboriginal peoples take on greater political prominence than their numbers alone suggest because of related issues of homelessness, the quality of available housing and, particularly in Winnipeg, the recent focus on youth-related crime. Research is needed to explore the issues facing urban Aboriginal peoples, the impact of these issues upon the city, and how the three orders of government might best work together to find appropriate policy strategies.
- ***Development of Urban Economic Indicators:*** There is a great methodological challenge in comparative urban research on economic dimensions. On some indicators, there is a lack of comparable data. For example, housing statistics merge centres, such as Sudbury with Thunder Bay, that are normally considered separate entities. On other indicators, data are not available for all CMAs. An example of this is the lack of resale housing data for all centres. While Statistics Canada and other statistical organizations are beginning to focus on municipal data, for the benefit of future urban research, statisticians and economists should work together to establish proper, comprehensive and comparable economic measures. Admittedly, this is not an easy task and would require significant amounts of cooperation and communication. However, the net benefits of the process would be great.





- **Urban Research Network:** Despite its importance to Canadian governance and the quality of life in Canada, urban policy does not have an established and wide-reaching research network. By definition, urban research is cross-disciplinary research. As a result, isolated researchers in the "think tank", political science, economics, environmental studies and urban planning communities are generating important studies on Western Canadian urban issues. What is needed is a formal network of researchers so to avoid duplication and allow the cross-pollination of ideas. An Urban Research Network would identify researchers active in urban policy studies, and link these researchers through electronic list-servs, workshops and other forums. This step would ensure broader dissemination of the research findings, and allow researchers to benefit from the ongoing findings of other projects.

Clearly, this is an ambitious research agenda, and if Canadian urban scholars are able to fulfill it, the findings will greatly enhance both the study and practice of urban governance for years to come. The Canada West Foundation is committed to the task, and we invite others to join with us in exploring this important area of research. Working together, we can find ways to improve the "urban" places that a majority of Canadians call home.