ENGAGING THE URBAN ABORIGINAL POPULATION IN LOW-COST HOUSING INITIATIVES: LESSONS FROM WINNIPEG

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Résumé

L'accroissement de la population autochtone dans les villes canadiennes présente des occasions d'améliorer le développement économique et culturel des centres urbains au Canada. Il y a beaucoup de problèmes auxquels font face les autochtones lorsqu'ils s'établissent dans les villes. Dans plusieurs villes, ils forment le groupe social le plus désavantagé dans le domaine du logement. Le racisme individuel et systémique persiste dans le secteur de logement. De plus, les autochtones ont des besoins et des aspirations différents par rapport au logement. Cet exposé propose que les urbanistes, dans chaque secteur et juridiction, qui jouent un rôle dans l'aménagement des programmes de logement devraient observer quelques principes fondamentaux pour engager les autochtones lors de la rédaction des nouvelles politiques concernant le logement à bas prix. Les autochtones devraient être engagés dans toutes les étapes de la création des programmes, ce qui inclus la planification, la mise en oeuvre et l'évaluation. Cet engagement est nécessaire afin d'améliorer tous les programmes de logement et de les rendre plus sensibles aux besoins et aux aspirations des autochtones. De plus, d'autres stratégies de logement devraient

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être facilitées pour ce groupe afin de promouvoir leur désir légitime d'autodétermination dans la planification de leurs programmes urbains.

Abstract

The number of Aboriginal people in Canadian cities is rising, presenting opportunities for economic and cultural growth in urban Canada. There are many problems facing Aboriginal people as they establish themselves in cities. They are the most poorly housed social group in many cities. Individual and systemic racism persists in the housing sector, and Aboriginal people have specific housing needs and aspirations. This paper argues that planners in every sector and jurisdiction that have a role in housing programming should practice some basic principles of Aboriginal engagement when drafting new urban low-cost housing policy. Aboriginal people should be involved in every stage of program design, delivery, and evaluation. Proper engagement should occur to make mainstream programs more sensitive to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people and specific housing strategies should be facilitated for this group to take account of the legitimate Aboriginal desire for self-determination in urban programming.

Key words: Aboriginal, housing, urban, self-determination, planning

The number of Aboriginal people living in Canadian cities is increasing, and this trend presents some exciting opportunities for economic and cultural growth and diversification in urban Canada. Compared with the non-Aboriginal population, however, urban Aboriginal people face some very acute cultural, social, and economic challenges. Education levels tend to be lower, unemployment rates higher, and incomes are on average lower than those of non-Aboriginal people (Hanselmann 2001).

The present affordable housing crisis in urban Canada is very evident within the Aboriginal population (Ark Research Associates 1996). The majority of Aboriginal households in Canada reside in urban areas (Hanselmann 2001), and most live in rented accommodation. A significant proportion of this housing is inadequate and not affordable. The number of Aboriginal households living in core housing need is over three times higher than the number of non-Aboriginal households (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 1998). Aboriginal homelessness in major urban areas ranges from 20 to 50 percent of the total homeless population (Canada, Privy Council Office 2002 as cited in Graham and Peters 2002). Aboriginal households may reflect different cultural values that affect the composition of the household (Ark Research Associates 1996;

Peters 1984) and the design of housing developments (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 1995). Culturally appropriate housing is seen as being of great importance to the social, cultural, and economic strength of Aboriginal peoples in urban areas (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996[a,b]).

For planners working in the field of low-cost housing[1] production in Canada's urban areas, this might be considered an exciting time. The federal and many provincial governments have made new commitments to low-cost housing production. Many municipal governments are also finding ways to engage in the low-cost housing initiatives to address these problems that most immediately affect them (Pomeroy 1999).

Even though Aboriginal people are among the worst afflicted by the shortage of affordable housing in urban areas, it is not clear how governments plan to bear this population in mind as new national and provincial affordable housing programs are designed and implemented. It is important that planners reflect upon the reasons why it is necessary to properly engage the urban Aboriginal constituency in these processes.

Using research conducted in Winnipeg, Manitoba[2] as a basis for discussion, this paper will argue why it is important for planners in all jurisdictions, in public, private, and voluntary sector organizations, to engage urban Aboriginal people in the creation of new affordable housing strategies for urban Aboriginal people. First, an argument combining normative and pragmatic considerations will be advanced for why it is necessary to engage the urban Aboriginal community in the design and implementation of housing initiatives that respond specifically to their needs and aspirations. Following this, I will present some ideas on how to engage the urban Aboriginal constituency in housing programming. Finally, as a means of exploring some key points of the argument advanced in the first two sections of the paper, strengths and weaknesses of a selection of prominent neighbourhood housing initiatives and the federal homelessness initiatives currently underway in Winnipeg will be discussed.

Both the neighbourhood housing initiatives and the federal homelessness initiatives are representative of the type of housing programming Canadian governments are likely to undertake in the future, i.e., playing the role of a strategic partner in broader governance initiatives, rather than principal architect and administrator (Government of Canada 2001; Pomeroy 1999). For this reason, a discussion of the merits of these programs vis à vis the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people will make an important contribution to our understanding of emergent experiences in the Aboriginal community, among community development organizations, and in housing policy development generally. For this portion of the paper, narratives from research conducted in Winnipeg between May and August 2002 will be used to supplement the review

of documents and scholarly literature, adding some first-hand perspective on these relatively new programs. These data are drawn from a larger study that is ongoing, examining how state and public institutional restructuring are affecting the production of low-cost housing for urban Aboriginal people.

Arguments for Engaging the Urban Aboriginal Constituency

Planning theorists are urging us to understand and incorporate the distinct ethnographies of daily life among different socio-cultural groups, in order to understand their aspirations and concerns, and how best to address these (e.g., Holston 1995). Theorists such as John Friedmann (1979) have been urging planners for a long time to engage in a genuine dialogue as part of our transformative urban praxis, imploring us to blur our established social roles as mainstream and minority social groups in order to truly engage the one with the other. Beyond that, Leonie Sandercock (1998, 124-125) argues that:

> Difference speaks to us with *a collective voice*, in the voice of specific 'social groups'. Thus it is beyond liberalism. The individual voices to whom we have been listening speak not only as individuals but also as and for collectivities. Their claim is to be allowed to be different *within an inclusive society*. They want to be acknowledged and valued as different within a society of citizens – with the right to make claims on the political community and to participate in it. Difference then is not just different *interests*, not just a reincarnation of the familiar pluralist politics, but a different way of being in the world. This involves the need, and the right, to give expression to difference in the *public sphere*.

Open dialogue, the understanding and incorporation of the various ethnographies in planning, and the right to express difference in the public domain, are all important principles for planning practice. There is, however, more to the urban Aboriginal situation than that. Aboriginal peoples in Canadian cities do not simply comprise another ethnic group contending for cultural preservation if and when it does not conflict with mainstream[3] institutions. Aboriginal peoples comprise one of two national minorities (the other being the descendants of French colonists) that had the Canadian state imposed upon them (Harris 2001). Unlike other ethnic minority groups in Canadian cities who understood that by moving to Canada they would have to accommodate a certain degree of cultural change, Aboriginal peoples were living here in self-determining societies with distinct societal cultures prior to the Canadian idea (Kymlicka 1998).

The Aboriginal population within urban areas is more diverse than on a reserve or in a rural community (including a number of First Nations, Métis,

and Inuit) and as such, people may question the plausibility of a distinct Aboriginal societal culture in an urban area. Arguments for basic commonalities among the urban Aboriginal cultures that co-exist in urban areas are well established (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996$_a$), particularly as new generations of urban-born Aboriginal people identify with a common 'native' culture in the city (Andersen 2002). Further, racism by mainstream society has not been very discerning with regard to the nations of origin of Aboriginal people in urban areas. The common experience of racism and the experience of colonisation alone are a sufficient basis for cultural collectivism (Pahl 1973).

Engagement in Mainstream Programming

At this stage in Canada's social and political evolution[4], planners in all sectors and at all levels of jurisdiction should understand some key points about programming for urban Aboriginal people. The first is that urban Aboriginal people are not having their needs and aspirations realized through mainstream social programs to the same extent as non-Aboriginal people (Graham and Peters 2002; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996$_a$). This is true in the housing field, where among other things, discrimination against Aboriginal people limits their success in attaining affordable and adequate housing (Klos 1997; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996$_{a,b}$). Further, their level of social marginalisation is deepening (Hanselmann 2001). Given that mainstream social programs are not meeting the needs of urban Aboriginal people proportionately to the rest of society, a specific attempt should be made to learn what the specific issues are among urban Aboriginal people and improve the accessibility of mainstream programs.

Dialogue (Friedmann 1979) and the progression in planning towards consultative strategies that validate and incorporate previously marginalised perspectives (Skelton 2002) are necessary, but not sufficient. Planners should not only be seeking to incorporate Aboriginal voices in mainstream programs (although this is necessary as well), but should also be working to facilitate the development of specific Aboriginal program initiatives.

Recognizing Different Needs and Aspirations

A second point that should be understood by planners as we proceed with our work is that there are differences between the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in service areas such as low-cost housing. There are strong connections, for example, between urban living and life on a reserve or in a rural community. The high mobility between urban areas and reserves (Norris, Cooke, Beavon, Guimond, and Clatworthy 2001) is one

example of where urban housing needs will differ from the mainstream for many Aboriginal people, particularly First Nations peoples.

Exploratory studies of residential mobility among Aboriginal single mothers in Winnipeg (Mochama 2001; Skelton 2002) discuss some of the reasons for residential mobility presented by interview participants. Having a home in Winnipeg and a home in northern Manitoba (reserve or rural community) was a common theme, and at home in Winnipeg, participants periodically boarded friends and relatives who were in the city for medical services. One participant's choice of neighbourhood – Winnipeg's north end in this example – was selected because she felt that the area provided refuge for her children from racial harassment that they would suffer in other parts of the city. This preference of neighbourhoods was in spite of the street itself being run down, with vacant and boarded up houses and prostitution. Commenting on what was learned from the interviews, Ian Skelton (2002, 140) notes that, "residence in Winnipeg appeared a staging point, while 'home' was on the reservation up North. Time in the City could be interrupted by periods up North related to employment or care-giving, and contacts were kept with the reserve even while in the City."

Culturally appropriate services are an important goal of urban Aboriginal constituencies that is often overlooked by service providers. In housing alone, marked improvements have been made in the lives of Aboriginal people who have lived in urban Aboriginal housing organizations. Some of the greatest successes of the Urban Native Housing Program[5] (UNHP) were that it provided secure and affordable housing that was sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal people. From there, education, employment, and cultural and social fulfilment could be more securely pursued (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996[a]). In an evaluation of urban social housing programs, the UNHP outperformed the mainstream programs on indicators of emotional wellbeing (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 1999). Managers and staff at UNHP developments realized that many tenants were new to urban living, and tenant counsellors were able to assist them in adapting to the urban setting. Allocations for maintenance costs were higher for UNHP than for other non-profit and public housing because of the age of the housing stock and the larger family sizes, and in response to the fact that tenants often moved from rural or remote areas without much experience of homes designed for urban living (Lipman 1986). Tenant counselling costs were covered in operating agreements, and non-traditional households were recognized in determining household income (National Aboriginal Housing Association 1999).

With boards of directors comprised mainly of Aboriginal people, there was (and is still) an inherent cultural sensitivity to issues that might in other housing developments result in eviction (e.g., greater tolerance for extended stays by family and friends from rural and reserve communities). Many UNHP managers also

used housing as a tool for further economic and social growth (Fulham 1981; Lipman 1986). For example, managers would use Aboriginal labour for maintenance work, in at least one case leading to the initiation of an Aboriginal home renovation firm. Others provided day care services and offered courses in homemaking and budgeting to residents and the broader urban Aboriginal community.

Facilitate Self-determination in Aboriginal Housing Strategies

A third point for planners to keep in mind is that Aboriginal peoples have fought hard over the past decades to achieve recognition in mainstream society of the right to determine their own affairs, including measures of urban self-determination (or self-government). Popular in the urban context is a model that operates through self-governing urban Aboriginal institutions (e.g., housing, health, education) that serve the needs of a self-identifying urban Aboriginal constituency (Peters 1992).

The right to self-government has been recognized in Canadian policy (Government of Canada 1997) including processes at the urban scale. Internationally, Canadian Aboriginal agents have been active among the world's indigenous peoples in the process of drafting an international declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, where the right to self-determination is firmly asserted (United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations 1994).

Applied to the urban context, this right to self-determine must be recognized in service provision, and the urban Aboriginal constituency, through their service delivery organizations, should be determining the design and implementation strategies for housing programs that meet their particular socio-cultural needs and aspirations.

Engaging the Urban Aboriginal Constituency in New Low-cost Housing Programs

There is a well-established low-cost housing provision infrastructure[6] (Skelton 2000) in Canadian cities that was developed during the UNHP and co-operative housing programs (some co-operative housing developments were created by Aboriginal people specifically to serve the Aboriginal population). If one considers the number of Aboriginal housing managers, staff, tenants/members, and board members in Canadian cities, one will realize that there are a lot of low-cost housing experts. While they are primarily concerned with managing the existing portfolio of low-cost housing created during the non-profit and co-operative period of 1973-1993, they also represent the best store of legitimate housing knowledge in the urban Aboriginal community. The low-cost housing provision infrastructure that exists should be highly involved in new housing initiatives. The management and staff capacities are designed for the maintenance of

existing portfolios, however, so new initiatives would need to include allocations for human resources to expand the human infrastructure that already exists.

This low-cost housing provision infrastructure should be re-engaged not only in new dedicated urban Aboriginal housing initiatives, but the personnel should also be participants in new mainstream low-cost housing initiatives[7]. They can effectively represent Aboriginal people who are searching for housing in the city, with knowledge of their past experiences, their aspirations for tenure types, outstanding issues with respect to accessing available housing, factors leading to homelessness, and so on. Aboriginal stakeholders should be engaged in housing policy and program design, including the setting of objectives, the implementation and delivery, and evaluation.

Responsibility of Canadian Governments

The question of which level of government is responsible for urban Aboriginal housing, or which level of government ought to take some responsibility for this issue, is complex and bound up in a long jurisdictional history. Intergovernmentalism is a policy and programming option that is increasingly prominent in dealing with urban Aboriginal issues (Hanselmann and Gibbins 2002).

Multilateral agreements, such as the Memorandum of Understanding that unites the federal, provincial, and municipal governments in responsibility for the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, are useful instruments that allow governments to make program commitments without macro-policy shifts (Hanselmann and Gibbins 2002). In other words, no jurisdiction is forced to tackle the more complex and seemingly intractable problems of constitutional responsibility for urban Aboriginal programming, and institute unilateral program precedents that can be pointed to by other jurisdictions later on.

Although all levels of government have interests in addressing urban Aboriginal issues in an intergovernmental way, and should take shared responsibility, there is still a need for federal leadership on urban Aboriginal policy issues "by virtue of its fundamental relationship with Canada's Aboriginal Peoples" (Graham and Peters 2002, 28). Central (federal) leadership could legitimately catalyse the networks of actors in the federal, provincial, municipal, and voluntary sectors necessary for concerted action. Recent federal discourse is itself pointing to this realization as well (Government of Canada 2002$_{a,b}$).

Federal leadership in dedicated urban Aboriginal housing initiatives is important; however, provincial and municipal governments should also improve the equity of their programs by instituting formal and effective means of engaging their Aboriginal constituents. Where the population is large enough to warrant specific urban Aboriginal housing streams in provincial and municipal programs,

there are strategic reasons for doing so, such as enhancing urban quality of life and economic productivity.

Voice(s) of the Urban Aboriginal Constituency

The framework of intergovernmentalism among the federal, provincial, and municipal governments does not provide a ready answer to the question of whom to engage as the voice(s) of the urban Aboriginal constituency. With respect to new low-cost housing programming, however, there are several things to keep in mind when deciding how to engage the Aboriginal constituency.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996$_a$) provides support (although not uncontested) for the design and delivery of policies and programs that are status-blind, i.e., that are not centred on status under the Indian Act, or Métis or Inuit ancestry. Organising and acting on a status-blind basis in urban centres has been effective since the 1950s, and the success of the Friendship Centre movement and wealth of organizations and programs incubated in Friendship Centres across Canada is perhaps the most compelling argument for continuing to engage in status-blind endeavours. The urban Aboriginal infrastructure that exists today owes fundamentally to a status-blind urban Aboriginal community that has perpetuated itself since the late-1950s. Having said this, it does not seem unreasonable for Aboriginal identity groups to want to consolidate their cultural and economic strength in an urban area, through programs that meet the needs of their communities. In Saskatchewan, for example, the Métis and First Nations peoples have a history of pursuing separate initiatives in some areas of urban programming (e.g., housing).

A core planning concept comes to mind, and that is a respect for local history and context. When engaging the urban Aboriginal constituency in new low-cost housing initiatives, one should take the time to learn about the history of urban Aboriginal development in a particular city, tailor engagement to local circumstances, and allow time for the urban Aboriginal constituency to determine for itself the legitimate stakeholder groups in a program area.

Each urban centre will present its own challenges in identifying and engaging the voices of the Aboriginal constituency. There may be practical and time-consuming difficulties associated with competing visions of different Aboriginal political organizations around the types of programs needed, who they should serve, and how they should be delivered. Similar differences of opinion may exist among the service delivery organizations themselves. Perhaps most importantly, one should draw on the knowledge of the urban Aboriginal housing experts that were borne out of the UNHP and co-operative housing programs and use them as a starting point for identifying the voices of the constituency. The value and importance of working through these difficulties are likely to

outweigh the time-costs and hopefully the arguments advanced in this paper help to affirm this contention.

Low-cost Housing Programs in Winnipeg: Models for Aboriginal Engagement?

The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) is a single-window access point for the housing programs delivered by the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg which assist with housing renovation and allocation by way of rental-to-ownership models. The homelessness initiatives of the Government of Canada are a third component of programming delivered from the WHHI. On the basis of socio-economic and housing condition indicators (City of Winnipeg 2000), the Province and City have selected target neighbourhoods for housing funding. The delivery mechanisms for these funds are neighbourhood improvement and housing corporations (i.e., Spence Neighbourhood Association, West Broadway Development Corporation, and North End Housing Project) that consolidate housing stakeholders and residents in designated neighbourhoods. These organizations have created housing plans for the target neighbourhoods and in consultation with neighbourhood stakeholders, they bring housing proposals, compliant with the neighbourhood housing plans, to the WHHI for review and approval. All the levels of government review the neighbourhood proposals together and decide how they can co-ordinate and allocate funds from their respective programs, according to their parameters, in order to satisfy the housing proposals of the community corporations.

In this section, I will make some general comments on how the rent-to-own housing programs are coinciding with Aboriginal housing interests, and then I will comment on the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) structure as a prospective model for future urban Aboriginal housing programs. In this program, a community plan to address homelessness is developed by community stakeholders. Homelessness project proposals are then submitted to the SCPI administration by local organizations, or groups of agencies, for review. Upon review, if proposals are acceptable the federal government contributes funding toward capital costs.

It is important to bear in mind that although government interventions and governance networks addressing low-cost housing production in jurisdictions across Canada will likely exhibit similar broad characteristics, with governments participating as partners in housing governance rather than as sole providers, the programs and production processes themselves will vary widely.

Given the slow growth nature of the Winnipeg market, for example, the cost of housing in the inner city is low compared with other cities of comparable

size in other provinces (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 2001). This is at least partially related to the age of the housing stock, where much of the stock in inner city neighbourhoods is in need of significant repair. The conditions of the housing market in Winnipeg, particularly in the inner city, make the rehabilitation of existing housing stock an effective way of meeting the housing demands of low-income households (Federation of Canadian Municipalities as cited in Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 2001).

Provincial and Municipal Neighbourhood Programs

Between roughly a third and a half of residents in the neighbourhoods targeted for low-cost housing improvement by the Province and City identify as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada 1996). As a group, Aboriginal people in these neighbourhoods are the most disadvantaged in housing and general economic terms (Statistics Canada 1996). While comments on the neighbourhood housing programs were generally very positive, and while Aboriginal residents are accessing the housing that is being developed, these mainstream programs must not be confused with self-determined Aboriginal programs simply by virtue of the fact that Aboriginal people form a majority group within the target neighbourhoods.

The programs were not designed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people, and as such, the program parameters are not necessarily the same as they would be if designed by Aboriginal people themselves. In the summer of 2002, the number of Aboriginal board members at the three neighbourhood and housing corporations listed earlier were two out of 12 at one organization, and three out of 15 at the other two, evidence that de facto Aboriginal control over programming does not exist in these predominantly Aboriginal neighbourhoods. I do not want to convey the idea that these organizations have anything other than the best of intentions. Given that many Aboriginal people are among the most socially and economically marginalised in these neighbourhoods, their conspicuous absence on decision-making boards is not surprising. There are also outstanding issues of distrust for mainstream programs (Hanselmann 2002; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996[a]), and the possibility that Aboriginal residents simply participate in other ways. Acknowledging these factors, one neighbourhood corporation recently began a 'First Nations Advisory Committee' to actively include the views of Aboriginal community members in the broader community decision-making process. Efforts such as this one to ameliorate mainstream program access and outcomes for Aboriginal residents should be reproduced. As argued in this paper, there is a need to improve the equity of mainstream programs, as well as facilitate self-determined Aboriginal programming in urban housing.

Although I do not aim to speak for Aboriginal people about what problems they may have with mainstream neighbourhood housing programs, I have gained a few general insights that exemplify ongoing systemic discrimination (Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees 2000). Canadians, who are driven overwhelmingly by a liberal ideology which proffers that what is good for one is just as good for the other (StarPhoenix 2002), have an easier time affirming that Aboriginal people experience disproportionate hardship than they do agreeing with the idea that something specific must be done to address their needs and aspirations. The common belief in program neutrality and equitable access was reflected in interviews with mainstream housing professionals.

> They wanted to have their own direct funding from their Aboriginal institutions, you know, or agencies developed for that, with that sensitivity in mind. I'm not Aboriginal so I don't have Aboriginal sensitivity at my base. I'm strictly a mainstream housing development person, so I take, they have no more different housing needs than anybody…. I get applicants that are from all walks of life. And that's how I look at it. One's no more different than the other. Old family Canadian, new family Canadian, different ethnicities and stuff like that. Yeah, there's no discrimination here. It's pretty transparent. You got to make the income guidelines and the family size, and you got to go through the personal history, the financial, I don't care if you're native or not.

- Non-Aboriginal neighbourhood housing professional

Selection processes that include credit history checks to access rent-to-own housing may exclude many Aboriginal people who often do not have credit histories. As this participant comments, when asked about the equity of the mainstream neighbourhood housing programs:

> I know it's good business to do credit checks, but to me, it's almost a discriminatory practice, because simply, a lot of our people just do not have that credit history. Or a valid credit history to get them, to get them into low-cost housing…. I'm saying, well, I mean, aren't you a social housing program, isn't that contradictory?

- Aboriginal urban native housing manager

They may also lack experience in home ownership (e.g., for people moving from a reserve) or have different concepts of household composition and household income (Lipman 1986), to cite a few examples.

My aim in this paper is not a detailed analysis of the degree to which these mainstream housing programs do or do not meet the housing needs of Aboriginal residents. Rather, I want to point out that there are elements of systemic discrimination in these programs and emphasize that in addition to improving the inclusiveness of mainstream programs, planners should facilitate the creation of specific self-determined urban Aboriginal housing strategies. The National Aboriginal Housing Association offers a credible statement to this end in the first of its key objectives for a national urban Aboriginal housing strategy (National Aboriginal Housing Association 1999, 8):

> The strategy has to be premised upon the principle of self-determination. The Aboriginal community must be responsible for the delivery and management of its housing services. In some cases, this will require assistance in developing appropriate infrastructure supports. In other cases, it will require recognition of the delivery and management capabilities of existing housing providers.

Federal Homelessness Programs

In addition to the SCPI money directed at resolving homelessness in Winnipeg, the federal government, through the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS), channelled an additional $10 million to specifically address Aboriginal homelessness in Winnipeg. It was stipulated that the money was to be allocated in the same way as SCPI funds, using the same application process and parameters.

The community centred model of engagement that is central to the implementation of the federal SCPI program provides an example of how the federal government could directly engage Aboriginal people at the urban scale in the future, not only with respect to homelessness, but in low-cost housing and other program areas (Graham and Peters 2002; Hanselmann 2002). The focus on community-designed solutions within broadly set federal parameters is a promising model that offers the potential to combine Aboriginal self-determination objectives with the federal government's desire to play the role of facilitator and partner rather than grand architect and administrator in social programming (e.g., Government of Canada 2001).

The dedication of homelessness funding for Aboriginal people was a progressive step by the federal government. There are areas, however, where improvements could be made in future programs of this kind. Two

principal criteria that project proposals must meet in order to receive SCPI or UAS homelessness funding are those of 'partnership' and 'sustainability'. In and of themselves, these are not unreasonable criteria. They were developed for the mainstream SCPI program, however, and then afterward applied to the UAS homelessness funding.

Concerns have been raised that creating broad community partnerships for Aboriginal initiatives can be difficult because of the special relationship that Aboriginal peoples and organizations have with the federal government, and the distrust that can occur between mainstream and Aboriginal institutions and service users. Further, demonstrating long-term program sustainability after the initial capital investment by the federal government can also be more difficult for Aboriginal organizations because they are under-staffed and under-financed in many cases, and do not have the financial capacity or partners necessary to demonstrate sustainability. As a result, there is a risk that the organizations that will end up delivering the Aboriginal-specific homelessness programs through the Aboriginal homelessness funds will be non-Aboriginal organizations that have the capacity to 'do for' the Aboriginal community. This perspective was expressed several times by Aboriginal housing experts.

> There is no Aboriginal organisation that can guarantee sustainability. So, it's not going to happen. Who are the people getting funding? Well-established organisations like the Salvation Army, pity groups. Related to the word partnership is sustainability. So how are you going to get sustainability from an Aboriginal group, organisation, when historically they were never allowed to have any kind of economic base, or any kind of real estate? And you want them to have partners with the rest of society. And you want them to have sustainability. Ah, it doesn't make sense to me.

- Aboriginal homelessness professional

In future Aboriginal low-cost housing programs that apply community centred models of engagement, it is important that the process of engagement include the setting of program objectives and parameters, and proceed in a way that reflects Aboriginal self-determination in all aspects of the program.

Conclusion

It is an exciting time for planners involved in the low-cost housing field. Governmental and non-governmental actors are engaging in new low-cost housing initiatives set within a policy environment characterized by the emergence of governance networks that centre on collaboration between the public, private, and voluntary sectors to achieve policy outcomes. It is important for planners, at this formative stage in housing programming, to understand the reasons why it is necessary to engage the urban Aboriginal constituencies effectively in the design, implementation, and evaluation of new low-cost housing programs.

Proper engagement must occur to improve the inclusiveness and equity of access to mainstream programs. Planners should also understand the need to facilitate the design of specific and self-determined urban Aboriginal housing initiatives. The Winnipeg housing programs reviewed in this paper offer some valuable lessons that can be, in many cases, transferred with some adaptation to other locales. For example, mainstream housing programs at the neighbourhood level, while serving a population where a third to half of the residents identify as Aboriginal, are not guided by principles of Aboriginal self-determination, leaving a significant gap in housing programming. One neighbourhood corporation has, however, undertaken to improve the incorporation of the aspirations and needs of Aboriginal community members by forming an Aboriginal advisory council.

The federal Aboriginal homelessness strategy reveals a promising way forward toward meeting the self-determination objectives of Aboriginal peoples, but still needs to be improved if this is to be achieved.

The need, aspiration, and expert capacity for engagement in Aboriginal housing programs is developed, and fundamentally urban Aboriginal people and their organizations have every right to pursue their own low-cost housing initiatives within a specific policy domain carved out between Aboriginal interests and the governments of Canada. The federal government, given its history of relations with Aboriginal peoples and its capacity to organise actors across jurisdictions, has a responsibility to lead this progression. Other jurisdictions, however, should also see strategic value in partnering with the federal government in this policy area. The political discourse in Canada has evolved sufficiently over the past 30 years to recognize this, and now, we have to work as planners to entrench the practice of proper Aboriginal engagement in low-cost housing programming. We must recognize that they are not simply an interest group, but constitute a national minority

group that is central to the cultural and economic landscapes of Canadian cities.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] When I refer to low-cost housing (initiatives) in this paper, I am also referring to programs dealing with homelessness.

[2] In 2001, the Winnipeg urban area had a population of 626, 685 (Statistics Canada 2001). In 1996, the population of Winnipeg included the third highest proportion of Aboriginal people in Canadian major metropolitan centres (at 6.9 percent of Winnipeg's population reporting Aboriginal identity, this figure trailed Regina (7.0 percent) and Saskatoon (7.4 percent)) (Peters 2002). While urban Aboriginal populations across Canada have much in common with respect to their social, economic, and cultural needs and aspirations, the specific characteristics vary considerably. The Aboriginal populations of Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Regina, and Saskatoon are among the most economically disadvantaged and marginalised (Graham and Peters 2002). Winnipeg also has the most well-developed set of urban Aboriginal institutions in Canada (Peters 2000), including an urban political body – the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg – and a variety of social, cultural, economic development, and housing service and advocacy organizations.

[3] Throughout the paper, when I juxtapose Aboriginal with 'mainstream' society, institutions, or programs, I do so as a purposeful simplification of Canadian society in order to highlight the unique status of Aboriginal peoples within the

Canadian federation, their associated rights claims, and their particular experiences in accessing low-cost housing. I realize that there is not a homogeneous mainstream in Canadian society, and I do not wish to suggest that 'mainstream' low-cost housing programs are meeting all of the needs of any particular group in Canadian society.

[4] This refers particularly to the reaction of the Aboriginal peoples (e.g., Cardinal 1969) to the 1969 White Paper on Indian Affairs which sought to extinguish group rights for Aboriginal peoples, the recognition of existing rights of Aboriginal peoples in section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982, the Penner Report on Aboriginal self-government in 1983, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the 1990s, and the expressed federal objective of strengthening Aboriginal governance and self-government in their policy document, *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* (Government of Canada 1997). As Jane Jenson (1993) argues, the Canadian 'universe of political discourse', where social actors fight for representation and legitimacy, has expanded considerably for Aboriginal peoples in recent decades.

[5] In 1977, under pressure from the Native Council of Canada (now the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples) and urban Aboriginal organizations, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation agreed to dedicate 400 units a year (ten percent of the 1978 social housing allocation) to urban Aboriginal housing (National Aboriginal Housing Association 1999; Lipman 1986). In 1983, a 'deeper subsidy' was begun unilaterally by the federal government for urban native housing units (400 units a year in 1983, increased to 1,000 units in 1984). The Urban Native Housing Program was cancelled in 1993, and the administration of existing units transferred to most provinces and territories in 1996. New programs to fill the space left by the Urban Native Housing Program have not been introduced.

[6] Skelton's (2000, 192) concept of 'provision infrastructure' refers to "the assembly of organisations, individuals, policies, legislation and practices associated with social housing provision in Canada." Elements of the provision infrastructure can transform dramatically and its direction can shift a great deal in response to changing elements. When I refer to the provision infrastructure in this paper, my interest in most cases is with the organizations and individuals and how those are able to transform in response to changes in other elements such as policies and legislation, and additionally, their roles in affecting those very changes.

[7] To be sure, many Aboriginal people do not wish to use services designed specifically for Aboriginal people and prefer mainstream programs. The depth and breadth of housing crisis among urban Aboriginal people is sufficient to warrant specific Aboriginal housing initiatives as well as Aboriginal input into mainstream programs.

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