

A NATIONAL URBAN POLICY FOR CANADA? PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Jeanne M. Wolfe
School of Urban Planning
McGill University

Résumé

Cet article passe en revue les publications de 2002 du Groupe de travail du Premier ministre sur les questions urbaines. Il esquisse le rôle actuel du gouvernement fédéral en politique urbaine, décrit les tentatives précédentes de formuler une politique nationale en la matière, en particulier sous la forme de l'éphémère Ministère d'État aux Affaires urbaines des années soixante-dix, et il examine les recommandations du Groupe de travail à la lumière des défis contemporains. Les rapports du Groupe de travail adoptent sans le critiquer le nouveau discours régionaliste de la compétitivité. Les recommandations du rapport final sont jugées raisonnables en tant que telles. Mais certains problèmes urbains particulièrement inquiétants qui relèvent de la juridiction fédérale, notamment l'augmentation de la pauvreté en milieu urbain, sont négligés.

Mots clés : Canada, politique urbaine nationale, Groupe de travail du Premier ministre sur les questions urbaines, urbaine.

Abstract

This paper reviews the work of the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues which reported in November 2002. It outlines the current federal role in urban policy, describes earlier attempts to articulate a national policy, particularly through the short lived Ministry of State for Urban Affairs in the seventies, and examines the recommendations of the Task Force in the light of contemporary challenges. The reports of the Task Force adopt the new regionalist discourse of competitiveness uncritically. The recommendations of the final report are judged reasonable so far as they go. However, some of the more worrying problems of urban areas that are within federal jurisdiction, notably increasing urban poverty, are neglected.

Key words: Canada, National Urban Policy, Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, Task Force, Urban

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The recent publication of the Final Report of the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues inevitably leads to all sorts of speculations: Is there to be an articulated federal urban policy? What is a national urban policy? Why now? Are the recommendations sound? Should they be adopted? Is there any chance of their being adopted? If so, how?

The Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, inaugurated on May 9, 2001, presented an interim report in April 2002 and its final report in November 2002 (Task Force 2002a/b). Chaired by Judy Sgro, M.P. for York West, and made up of twelve liberal parliamentarians, including two from the Senate, it held round table meetings in eight major cities,¹ received briefs from many groups, including the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP), the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC), The Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA), The Urban Development Institute (UDI), the Heritage Canada Foundation, Pollution Probe, and from many municipalities, associations, citizens groups, urban experts and individuals.

The recommendations of the Task Force focus on three priority program areas: affordable housing, transportation, both regional and transit, and sustainable infrastructure. In the interests of improving coordination, coherence and efficiency in matters relating to urban development, it proposes the designation of a Minister responsible for Urban Regions, the establishment of an external Advisory Body to work with the Minister on urban policies, a National Urban Summit to include provincial ministers responsible for urban affairs, and the institutionalising of a best practices data base and serious research perhaps through a university network or institute.

The purpose of this paper is to address some of the questions raised about the work of the Task Force and to attempt to position them in the context of contemporary Canadian urban development. It is divided into five parts. The first briefly looks at the federal role in cities and towns, the second at the history of federal intervention, the third examines the Task Force proposals in more detail, comparing them to the activities of the short lived Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA) (1971-1979), the fourth section evaluates the proposals, and the conclusion speculates on the future.

The Contemporary Federal Role in Urban Affairs

The federal government clearly plays an enormous role in urban areas both directly and indirectly (Wolfe 2002). It owns an extraordinary amount of property: office buildings, laboratories, defence installations, transportation and communications infrastructure, post-offices, national parks, museums, the holdings of the National Capital Commission, and the like. Through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation it has a powerful role in housing. Canada Lands, as a

crown assets disposal corporation, owns many key urban sites. More indirectly, the government is a huge employer in many cities. Further, it controls monetary policy, including mortgage rates, and much of the social and economic policy which determines the welfare of urban populations. In many domains, it sets the environmental agenda, and is responsible for trade policy, in both cases including signing and managing international agreements. It is worth noting that there is almost no aspect of Canadian domestic policy that is not under international influence, which ranges from formal treaties to world-wide pressure group activities such as Greenpeace (Doern *et al.* 1996).

On the constitutional front, the authority of the federal government in urban affairs has always been challenged because local government and land-use planning lie clearly in the provincial domain, as laid out in the British North America Act of 1867, and its successor, the Constitution Act of 1982. However, a careful reading of the BNA by the prominent jurist Frank Scott, just prior to the founding of the short lived MSUA, concluded that the federal government has plenty of space in which to manoeuvre under these arrangements without usurping provincial turf (Scott and Lederman 1972). In some provinces, and especially Quebec, municipalities are not permitted to deal directly with the federal government: all program negotiations must be made with the provincial agency responsible.

The History of the Concept of a National Urban Policy

The idea of a national urban policy is of course not new in Canada: it has emerged forcefully in times of crisis over the course of the twentieth century. The urban reform movements of the turn of the century focused on corruption, vice and crime, social injustice, unhealthy environments, unregulated public utilities, and the lack of planning and of green spaces (Rutherford 1974). The Commission of Conservation, originally founded in 1909 to examine the problems of natural resource exploitation, soon realized that Canada's best natural resource, its people, and particularly those inhabiting cities, were most often living in conditions of utter squalor, exacerbated by extraordinary rates of immigration (Woodsworth 1910). Clifford Sifton, Federal Minister of the Interior (a famous promoter of immigration) and Chairman of the Commission of Conservation, was well aware of the need for government action (Sifton 1915). At the end of the First World War (1914-18), prompted largely by fears of civil unrest, the first small federal housing program was adopted by the Dominion Government. It took the form of a \$25 million loan to the provincial governments "for the purpose of promoting the erection of dwelling houses of a modern character to relieve congestion of population in cities and towns" and was terminated in 1923 (Jones 1978:1).

In the great depression of the thirties, again the deterioration of cities and city life was much in evidence as municipalities, then largely responsible for

social welfare, fell prey to financial hardship and even bankruptcy, as property taxes remained unpaid while demands on their coffers increased. The League for Social Reform (LSR 1935), for instance, while outlining wholesale government reform in terms of economic and social welfare, also proposed a Federal Housing and Town Planning Authority to be based in Ottawa. While this was not to come to pass, by mid-decade, as conditions worsened, the Dominion Housing Act (1935) was adopted, a tentative foray into lending, and the fore-runner of Central (now Canada) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

The urban crises of the Second World War, promoted both by the need to provide housing for the workers in newly invented war-time industries, and the back-log caused by the depression when very little new building occurred, led to a very serious examination of conditions by the Advisory Committee on Post War Reconstruction (1944) appointed by the federal government. The report on "Housing and Community Planning," prepared by C.A. Curtis and Leonard Marsh, showed how widespread were slum conditions, documented the desolate waste of scattered sub-divisions, and urged a national program of social betterment, housing and community development.

It was in these circumstances that Wartime Housing Ltd., a Crown Corporation, was set up to provide for war-industry workers; that the National Housing Act of 1944 was passed; and that Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, a lending institution, was established one year later. The subsequent influence of CMHC on Canadian urban development has been enormous. In the field of housing it started with direct lending to the public. Later on it went into public housing (1949), mortgage insurance (1954), urban renewal, with the provinces and municipalities (1956), and loans for sewage treatment systems (1960). It promoted sound planning practice through research and publication, produced two journals of wide interest (*Habitat* and *Living Places*), spawned the Community Planning Association of Canada (CPAC) to provide a forum for citizens, politicians, municipalities and developers to debate urban issues, and generously supported university education and research in planning, housing and architecture.

The next urban crisis was diagnosed towards the end of the sixties. Post war peace and prosperity had propelled rapid urban growth, but housing shortages, speculation, the high cost of land, increasing interest rates, escalating house prices, and growing dissatisfaction with public housing schemes caused alarm. This was coupled with mounting protests against urban renewal and highway projects, which destroyed inner-city neighbourhoods, and with the resultant burgeoning environmental and heritage conservation movements. (For accounts of these boisterous times see for example Sewell 1972, Frazer 1972, Lorimer 1972.) In 1968, the government appointed a Task Force to investigate Housing

and Urban Development, under the chairmanship of Paul Hellyer, then Minister of Transportation, and responsible for CMHC.

A little later Harvey Lithwick, an economist from the University of Western Ontario was commissioned by CMHC to undertake a study that would examine urban problems and the potential federal role in their solution (Lithwick 1970). Both Hellyer and Lithwick recommended the establishment of a much stronger federal role in urban affairs, the former proposing a Ministry for Housing and Urban Development (Hellyer 1969:72). (In fact, because the Trudeau government did not respond to Hellyer's report promptly, he resigned in rage.) By 1971 the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs was established (Oberlander and Fallick 1987).

The beginnings of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA), and its subsequent history and demise are particularly interesting in relationship to the proposals of the Prime Minister's Task Force of 2002. The MSUA was set up as a policy, rather than a program department. It was to focus its efforts in three major areas aimed at integrating federal efforts in the urban arena: policy development, coordination, and research (Fallick 1987). In terms of policy development, it was to initiate policy, evaluate new and existing policies, and participate in policy and project formulation in or with any agency of the federal government that had a bearing on urban affairs. In terms of coordination, it had to orchestrate urban activities among the various agencies within the federal government, between the federal government and the provinces and their municipalities, and between the government and NGOs in both international and domestic spheres. The final mandate was to initiate research, to coordinate urban research in other agencies of government and to recommend research priorities.

The diagnosis of the perceived urban crisis in these beginning years of the 21st century has taken a different turn, although the recommendations for a cure are extraordinarily similar. While poverty, the lack of affordable housing, and environmental problems still rank highly, at the top of the list is the urgent need for urban centres to become economically competitive in the global economy (Task Force 2002a). In order to do this cities must become centres of learning and innovation, with a skilled workforce, good infrastructure, and a highly desirable quality of life, complete with a range of cultural and green space amenities.

This of course resonates with the doctrine of the "new regionalism" which began to be articulated in the last decade of the twentieth century (Anas 1999-2000, Frisken and Norris 2001). Previously, at least from the fifties onwards, advocates of urban reform have espoused metropolitan government to cope with rapidly growing urban regions and to ensure equity in services (Orfield 1997). At the same time an opposing school of thought, the public choice

Table 1: Urban crises and federal policy responses

PERCEIVED CRISIS	FEDERAL RESPONSE
<p>EARLY 1900s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *rapid growth/massive immigration *overcrowding *poor housing *insalubriousness *vice, crime *corrupt municipal governments *returning veterans *fear of civil unrest 	<p>1918 Housing Program</p>
<p>DEPRESSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *unemployment *poverty *overcrowding *poor housing *insalubriousness 	<p>1935 Dominion Housing Act 1944 Curtis Report</p>
<p>POST WW II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *overcrowding *poor housing *returning soldiers *back-log of needs 	<p>1944 National Housing Act 1945 CMHC</p>
<p>LATE SIXTIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *rapid growth *housing shortages *cost of urban land (speculation) *spiralling interest rates *escalating prices *dissatisfaction with urban renewal and public housing *environmental protection movements *heritage conservation movements 	<p>1969 Hellyer Task Force 1969 Lithwick Report 1971-1979 MSUA (Ministry of State for Urban Affairs)</p>
<p>21 st CENTURY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *need for Cities to be globally competitive *people at risk (homeless, first nations etc.) *widening polarization of incomes *shortage of affordable housing *aging infrastructure *environmental degradation *transportation – inter-city and transit 	<p>2002 PM's Task Force on Urban Issues</p>

advocates, have claimed that fragmented local government, which encourages competition between municipalities within an urban region, promotes efficiency, which lowers the cost of services to the residents, and that if they do not like what is offered they can “vote with their feet” (Tiebout 1956, Orstrom and Orstrom 2000).

The new regionalism emerged in the early nineties, as globalization revived interest in the efficient management of ever-expanding urban regions (Savitch and Vogel 1996, Scott 2001). It promotes the notion of governance rather than government, understood to be the cooperation of the state, the market and civil society, in managing urban areas. Partnerships, coordination, cooperation and orchestration, both horizontally and vertically throughout the urban system, are considered absolutely essential for an urban centre to become a competitive player in the global arena. Strategic alliances are the name of the game.

The Task Force recommendations

The proposals of the Task Force recognize the necessity for cooperation and collaboration between all players on the urban scene, and the interrelatedness of all urban problems and their solution. The final proposals are remarkably similar to those of the duties of the earlier MSUA (see table 2). They include the appointment of a Minister responsible for urban regions to give a voice to urban interests in parliament, although they do not actually specify setting up a department. The Task Force wants much more attention to be paid to the coordination and integration of federal initiatives, cooperation between stakeholders, and collaboration and consultation among the three levels of government.

It believes that research on best practices, both national and international, is essential, and suggests that this could be best organized through an Institute of Urban Research or a university network. It is also recommended that an external Advisory Body be constituted to inform and advise the Minister, to be made up of urban scholars, representatives from NGOs, professional and business associations, policy think-tanks and the like.

In recognition of the supremely important role of the provinces in urban development, it proposes that a National Urban Summit be established, consisting of provincial ministers responsible for urban affairs, and key urban partners. (Shades of the Tri-level conferences initiated by the MSUA!)

Further, as noted briefly, the Task Force recommends three priority programs, affordable housing, transit/transportation and sustainable infrastructure, but wisely perhaps, does not say how they are to be implemented. In terms of affordable housing, a review of CMHC is proposed, with a view to permitting it to be much more flexible in its dealings with non-profit providers. It recommends a whole range of financing initiatives, including those to promote the construction of

Table 2. Comparison of the mandate of the MSUA and the Task Force Proposals

MSUA 1971-1979	PROPOSAL FOR A MINISTER FOR URBAN REGIONS 2002
A policy Ministry – not programmatic	Devise a new approach to three pressing needs: affordable housing infrastructure provision transportation, both regional and transit
*policy development initiate new policy evaluate new and existing policies seek out cooperative opportunities	
*coordination between government agencies with other levels of government with foreign governments with NGOs	*promote collaboration and consultation coordination and cohesiveness capacity building
*research initiate coordinate identify priorities	*promote research via a university institute or research network best practices data base
*establish a national urban council (the Tri-level meetings)	Establish an external Advisory Body (civil society) National Urban Summit (provincial ministers and key urban partners)

Source: Oberlander and Fallick 1987

Source: Task Force 2002, Final Report

more rental housing, and advocates the renewal of both the RRAP (Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program) and the SCPI (Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative).

For transportation, the Task Force recommends improving both regional transportation systems and local public transit in order to relieve congestion and reduce environmentally destructive emissions. Similarly, for the infrastructure program, it proposes stable long-term funding (15 years) for upgrading. In fact, for both transportation and infrastructure, what is proposed is essentially a revamping of the current Strategic Highways Infrastructure Program, the Local Transportation Infrastructure Program, and Infrastructure Canada, to be certain that projects are undertaken wisely in a framework of well thought out plans, aimed at reducing the use of oil and gasoline-burning vehicles, protecting the environment, and using green technologies, while being certain of stable and equitable funding in order to see projects to completion.

Commentary

Apart from a slight sense of *déjà vu* what is there to comment on in the Task Force's work? What does its Final Report tell us about the current state of urban development and urban policy? The remainder of this paper endeavours to address the questions raised at the beginning.

Conventional Canadian wisdom has it that if the government of the day has a problem it appoints a Commission in the hopes that the problem will disappear by the time the enquiry is finished. In this case, the Task Force worked in double quick time, and completed the work in eighteen months. And the problems have not gone away.

However, was anyone uncomfortable with the fact that all the members were part of the Liberal parliamentary caucus? Was the Task Force representative? It included no one from the opposition benches, nor any ministers, not even one responsible for a department that is a major urban player, such as the Ministries of Transport (responsible for both transportation and Crown Corporations including CMHC, Canada Lands and Canada Post), Environment, or Public Works. Were there sins of omission committed to respect the party line of the Red Book (the Liberal's official policy document)?

As an aside: was the almost simultaneous appointment of the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Future Opportunities in Farming (March 2001), which presented its final report "Securing Agriculture's Future: Invest Today – Prosper Tomorrow" on November 27 2002, an attempt to deal even-handedly with the rural members of the caucus? Were they suspicious of an urban bias?

Is there to be a real commitment to urban policy as the Governor General's throne speech of September 30, 2002 indicated, and as Prime Minister Chretien's

response boldly reiterated? It seems more likely than not, for the following reasons. First as Len Gertler has pointed out on many occasions, there is an astounding policy vacuum in urban affairs in Canada (Gertler 1987, 1994). Second, there has been an increasingly vociferous lobby seeking ways to, as a minimum, at least improve funding sources to municipalities, spearheaded by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which has become a much more powerful organization than it was thirty years ago (FCM 2002). Third, the merger-mania of many provincial ministries responsible for Municipal Affairs has resulted in the creation of much larger cities. The recent amalgamations surrounding Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Gatineau-Hull, Montreal, Longueuil, Quebec and Halifax, not to mention the uni-cities of the prairies, has resulted in urban centres with bigger populations than many provinces and the potential for serious political clout. Fourth, if the Kyoto promises are to be respected and green-house gasses reduced, then inventive urban policies dealing with energy consumption and environmental management are mandatory. Fifth, as the World Trade Organization continues to make the world safe for business, there is a very real threat of multilateral agreements on investment challenging local zoning codes (Clarke and Barlow 1997), a threat that can only be met by federal intervention. Finally, widely publicised US policy in terms of the New Urbanism movement, TEA-21 (the Transport Equity Act – federal funding for transit), and TODs (Transport Orientated Development), all adding up to “smart growth,” seem to have attracted the attention of many Canadians to their own problems of congestion and environmental degradation.

For all these reasons, along with the enormous majority of the Liberal party in the House of Commons, now into its third mandate, the recommendations of the Task Force must be taken seriously and debated with care. In fact, the February 19, 2003 budget reflected concern with our cities: federal support for infrastructure, environment and affordable housing were increased; and the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) established in 1999, a fifty percent matching fund for non-federal providers for the homeless, has been expanded.

The first striking thing in the Task Force report, as already mentioned, is the emphasis on building competitive cities. Even the Governor General talked about “Competitive Cities and Healthy Communities.” What is meant by competitive? With the world, or with each other? Current urban discourse, particularly that propagated under the banner of “New Regionalism” and what Cox (1993) terms the “New Urban Politics,” converges on the notion of the heightened mobility of capital and the need for cities to somehow ensure its capture. The globalization of capital has thus re-channelled the urban debate (Castells 1996). Hence the predilection in cities all over the world for super-sophisticated electronic

communications networks, signature buildings, improved cultural facilities, and pleasant environments, all in order to demonstrate their desirability as a destination for footloose investment (Donald 2001).

Now clearly, every urban centre in Canada cannot compete in these terms. The report is written as though it is based on the analysis of big cities given to boosterism. However, the problems of Toronto (population 2.5 million, growing at 4.0% per five years) are not the problems of Biggar, Saskatchewan (population 2,243, declining at 4.6% per five years).

The acceptance of the rhetoric of competitiveness by the Task Force is uncritical: it is an example of the collective colonization of minds by powerful beliefs. There is no discussion of the extent to which our cities are being shaped by foreign transnational corporate agendas, nor of the creeping commodification of what was naively considered to be public space (Lee 1994).

These are not trivial observations to be brushed aside. The city today is most often portrayed in corporate terms – a theme that was vigorously contested in the seventies (see for example, Aubin 1977, Lorimer 1978, Gutstein 1975), but today is generally accepted. The recent surge of interest in localism, in restoring and preserving the identity of place, and holding on to regional landscapes, is in large part fuelled by what is colloquially known as the “MacDonaldization” of the world (Hough 1990, Aberley 1993). Walmart, Price Club/Costco and Home Depot pioneered the big box discount “category killer” store, soon to be aped by Canadian Tire and others, and these, while doubtless providing great bargains for consumers with cars, drain traditional business districts, and turn the city inside out. At the same time, the downtown spaces used every day are becoming more controlled by the intrusion of private interests: surveillance cameras, private security guards and the like which promote discrimination against presumed undesirables (Hopkins 1996). The quality and shaping of urban space, and the nature of civic life received no attention by the Task Force.

Urban distributional problems are not addressed by the Task Force either, although it is noted that population growth between 1996 and 2001 concentrated in four major urban regions: the Golden Horseshoe of Southern Ontario, Montreal and adjacent regions (presumably including Ottawa!), the Lower Mainland of British Columbia and the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. The census shows that these four regions increased by 7.6% in the five-year period, compared to the slow growth of +0.5% of the rest of the country. Since it has been noted that the most golden thing in the Golden Horseshoe is the afternoon sun shining through the smog, perhaps this should be a matter of some concern, although control measures no doubt lie within provincial jurisdiction.

While the Task Force reports comment at length about the nefarious effects of urban sprawl, perhaps prudently, they do not ascribe blame. They do not comment on the obvious failings of provincial land use policies or municipal planning practices. To have done so would have been extreme political folly. Does any province have a coherent and effective urban land use policy?

Lithwick (1970) convincingly showed how urban problems are generated by the process of urbanization itself. City growth leads to competing demands for space driving core prices upwards and households and activities outwards. He shows how transportation, pollution, employment problems and the concentration of poverty all stem from this process. He predicted the continuing massing of population in the major conurbations, (and also forecasted a total population of 36 million for the country by 2001), a warning that does not seem to have been taken seriously.

A recent study of eastern Canada on the prospects for non-metropolitan areas confirms these forecasts of urban concentration, and further, shows that the advent of new information technology has not changed this pattern (Polese and Shearmur 2002). Knowledge-based industries continue to locate in or near large urban centres, but the peripheral regions, although efficiently connected in terms of electronic communication, still suffer all the additional costs of transportation for goods and materials. Smaller centres may attract low and medium value-added manufacturing, but the centres that have benefited from this shift are those located within a one hour drive of a major city. Polese and Shearmur predict that many peripheral communities will enter a stage of sustained population decline. While out-migration has been a fact of life for such communities for many years, declining birth rates will not even ensure replacement. Smaller centres in the Prairie Provinces have been withering for decades.

An urban policy for Canada, or for an individual province for that matter, will have to take these situations to heart. Burgeoning metropolitan areas, medium sized centres with a viable economy, and declining towns require very different policy responses.

Another distributional question that the Task Force did not address is that of income disparities. The interim report is aware of the problems of poverty and speaks of the ever widening income gap between the rich and the poor and of the shortages of affordable housing. It does not offer any suggestions or advice to the government about income support or taxation policies that might aid the poor, despite the fact that this is well within the federal bailiwick. Recent research has shown that growing poverty has spread to a neighbourhood scale in many cities in Canada (Kazempiur and Halli 2000, Lee 2000). Income support or changes in taxation would go a long way to solving housing problems.

In a similar vein, the housing policy suggestions are timid. The federal government, through CMHC, essentially cancelled all funding for new social housing in the early nineties (although it respects its financial commitments to the existing stock through agreements with the provinces) (Wolfe 1998). It is not surprising that the number of homeless people is growing, and that homelessness is affecting not only vagrants, substance abusers and people with psychiatric and social disorders, but also families with young children. There will always be a certain percentage of the population who cannot cope and require direct help with housing. The recently announced budgetary allocation of \$680 million for the years 2002 – 2007 is a derisory sum – at a modest average of \$100,000 per unit, this would provide about 6800 dwellings, less than 1500 per year for the whole country! CMHC’s estimate of households in “core need” a decade ago was 12% of the population; today it must be much higher (CMHC 1991).

It is interesting to note that the Task Force report steers away from the word policy, mostly using instead the word strategy. But if there is to be a national policy, what form should it take? Boothroyd and Marlyn (1972) laid out four theoretical possibilities: (a) central control applicable to all jurisdictions; (b) a unified policy for all federal activities – an internal coordinating mechanism; (c) a common policy adopted by all relevant jurisdictions (federal, provincial, municipal) through consensus building; and (d) a bundle of policies each formulated by a jurisdiction for itself, hopefully achieving consistency for any given geographical area.

Clearly, the first option is impossible given the constitutional and political make-up of Canada. The second is what the federal government is attempting to do with environmental issues; this has resulted, for example, in the establishment of an Environmental Commissioner to monitor the work of departments – an interesting experiment. The third is essentially what CMHC has been doing most recently. In its early years its influence derived from its fiscal powers and its monopoly of technical expertise. After the establishment of provincial housing corporations in the mid-sixties and their promotion of municipal housing offices, and with the gradual evolution of community based housing providers in the seventies and eighties, decisions on the form, location and shape of affordable housing eventually became a local matter. Negotiated consensus is possible. The final option, a bundle of policies by all levels of government, achieving consistency in a given geographical area, is close to the Canadian reality in this post-modern world. Tri-level initiatives are common: the Winnipeg Core (twice), the Downtown East Side in Vancouver, the Lachine Canal in Montreal, the Old Port in Quebec City.

Within the Boothroyd and Marlyn framework then, the federal government has three approaches to urban policy: first internal coordination of its own activities, second consensus building on nation-wide federal-provincial-municipal programs, and third, tri-level consensus building around a particular urban project which is inevitably going to involve the private sector and civil society as well.

Does urban policy need to be guided by a vision? Clean, green, safe, and beautiful, as was Vancouver's ambition in the eighties? What about prosperous, rather than competitive? Or the Healthy Communities credo, based on the premise of the city as a place of self actualization, a supportive environment promoting fulfilling life styles, equity, and social, economic and personal health (Mathur 1989)? Or the sustainable city described by Rees and Roseland (1991)? Larry Bourne (2000:45) has bravely prepared a synoptic table of Urban Problems, Visions and Policy Responses, which deserves close study. His ideal city would be entrepreneurial, equitable, compact, energy efficient, wired, humane, affordable, sustainable, empowered, safe and efficient.

Should there be a federal Minister responsible for urban affairs? The argument put forward in the Task Force report, that a Minister is required to champion the cause of urban settlements in cabinet is entirely convincing. However, there may be a reluctance to form a true Ministry because of the difficulties experienced with the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs in the seventies. The demise of the MSUA has been attributed to five interrelated factors: (a) because it was a new experimental Ministry, "horizontal" in its scope: being assigned duties of policy formulation, research and coordination between other federal departments, it lacked prestige and respect; (b) since it did not deliver programs like other line Ministries, and thus had a relatively small budget, it lacked credibility within the culture of the federal bureaucracy; (c) because its mandate was spelled out in the most general terms it had no real power over the activities of other departments, apart from persuasion; (d) it seemed to be in conflict with CMHC, which had a long established history of programming, policy and research; and (e) the provincial governments were hostile (Lithwick 1972, Oberlander 1987, Crowley 1982, Doerr 1982, Gertler 1987, Goldbloom 1987, O'Brien 1982).

So what are the prospects? There have been major changes over the last decade in the way in which the federal government operates: some would call it a managerial revolution (Dwivedi and Gow 1999). Compared to the efficient, rational model of policy formulation and planning of the Trudeau era (French 1980), the new public administration is supposedly more effective and open, horizontal structures abound, consultation and cooperation are the order of the day, and partnerships are the way to get things done. There is a much better understanding of the questions relating to the integration of programs, and to the

integration of federal programs with provincial government priorities, and supposedly of provincial governments in their turn entering into partnerships with municipalities, despite the heavy-handedness of forced municipal mergers and downloading of recent years.

Further, the recognition of the broader machinery of governance has widened horizons. The role of the voluntary sector in program delivery (Phillips 2001), the cooption of business and civil society into policy formulation (for instance in the National Round Table on the Economy and the Environment), and the usefulness of broad-based organizations in selling and administering policy (for instance the FCM and the Municipal Green Fund) have become widely recognized. A Ministry of Urban Affairs today would likely not suffer the problems encountered in the seventies.

As for a research function, clearly research is the basis of sound policy formulation (Gertler 1985, 1987, 1994). However, the Task Force did not seem to appreciate the amount of urban research currently pursued in Canada. For example: the ICCUR (Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research), a child of the MSUA, serves as a publication and diffusion centre for much provincial and municipal research; CMHC produces both commissioned and in-house reports on almost all aspects of housing and urban planning; the university-government partnership, Metropolis, a policy network originally focussed on immigration, has an urban section; the CPRN (Canadian Policy Research Network), a mixture of government, think-tank and university policy gurus, produces an electronic bulletin, *Urban Nexus*; VRM (*Villes, Regions Monde*) run by INRS- Urbanisation, Culture and Societe; and the Canada West Foundation, all produce and disseminate electronically an enormous array of serious urban research.² All this in addition to the *CJUR*, *Plan Canada*, and other regular journals.

Is an Urban Research Institute required? It is a tempting idea, but specialized urban research centres already exist at universities in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver. A better solution, or at least more cost effective, would be to set up a better research funding mechanism – urban scholars often have difficulty in obtaining funds from the established research councils because their work does not fall into traditional disciplinary categories, and it is always applied, never “pure” and always trans-disciplinary. There used to be a Canadian Council of Urban and Regional Research in the early seventies, perhaps it should be revived.

So what does the future hold? One scholar, who has carefully followed the way in which Ottawa plans, maintains that the Throne Speech is a carefully crafted statement, that must be given flesh by a well known path of Cabinet committees, cabinet decision, budgetary consideration, and program

announcement (and then presumably, parliamentary debate) (Lindquist 2001). On the other hand, Gilles Duceppe, leader of the Bloc Québécois (the federal separatist party in the House of Commons), has already asked for assurances that whatever is done in urban affairs not encroach on the jurisdiction of provincial governments (Hansard, Nov. 19, 2002).

This of course underlines the major area in which the Task Force would have been constitutionally imprudent to offer advice. The governance of urban areas, how to manage urban sprawl, decaying infrastructure, traffic congestion and the like, is a provincial-municipal responsibility. While advocates of the new regionalism call for new forms of urban governance, linking the triad of state, market and civil society, and for new forms of city-region cooperation, there is no real model of how this might operate. The provincial governments have been opting for central city-suburban mergers, but the problems are still multiplying outside the new jurisdictions. At the same time, the managerial capacity of municipalities is too sensitive a subject to debate given the political power of most provincial municipal associations and residents' attachment to place.

Meanwhile municipalities are becoming more strident in their call for fiscal rebalancing (FCM 2002). They are lobbying for provincial governments to give them more taxing powers, or a share of gasoline taxes, sales taxes, hospitality or entertainment taxes and the like, arguing that cities and towns generate the largest share of national GDP, that their responsibilities go far beyond the ancient concept of services to property, and that their current revenue sources are hopelessly inadequate. They also seek more freedom from onerous legislation which denies them the flexibility to innovate. Only the provincial governments can solve these conundrums.

In conclusion, it is evident that the role of the federal government in urban affairs is conditioned by history and evolution. At this juncture in time it is unimaginable that it could assume new responsibilities: the provinces would simply not agree. The Task Force's ideas of improving complementarity, cohesion and cooperation between the activities of the numerous federal agencies involved in urban affairs and with the provinces, and appointing a Minister to champion the urban cause in parliament are commendable, and stand a good chance of success. In the fields of housing, environment, infrastructure and transportation this is already an enormous agenda. On the other hand, in some areas where the federal government does have power, much more could be done. Income support, child care support, social housing, and other poverty-fighting measures would do much to combat inequity and relieve distress in our cities and towns. It is lamentable that the Task Force did not attack these issues.

Notes

¹ Edmonton, Toronto, Winnipeg, Ottawa-Gatineau (twice), Halifax, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary.

² Web-site addresses are listed after the references

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Canadian Electronic Urban Research Networks

CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation), *Research Highlights* www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca

CPRN (Canadian Policy Research Network), *Urban Nexus* (within the Family network) http://www.cprn.org/family/Urban/Default_e.htm

CWF (Canada West Foundation), *Publications* www.cwf.ca

ICCURR (Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research), <http://www.icurr.org>

Metropolis Project (an international forum for research on migration, diversity and cultural change; a joint initiative of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, SSHRCC and the universities), *Cities initiative; Cities Corner*. http://canada.metropolis.net/research-policy/cities/index_e.html

Policy Research Initiative (Federal Government) *Canada's Cities* <http://policyresearch.gc.ca>

VRM (Villes, Regions, Monde) *Le reseau interuniversitaire d'etudes urbaines et regionales* www.vrm.ca