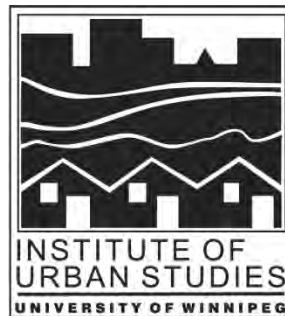


Urban Issues

Vol. 1, No. 1 (November, 1971)

The Institute of Urban Studies





THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

of the University

In the world of ambiguous institutions the Institute of Urban Studies is attempting to become relevant. And, it is attempting to do so from a platform, traditionally considered to be one of the most aloof that of the university.

The University of Winnipeg is a small, arts and science university in the heart of downtown Winnipeg. Although it is surrounded by urban problems, the problems it has always talked about and studied have been taken from books. Many people have always been of the opinion that the talents, resources and manpower of the university campus could be used in the solution of urban problems. The difficulty has been the channeling and co-ordinating of these resources. This was the impetus behind the establishment of the Institute of Urban Studies.

Working out of the University of Winnipeg and sponsored by the Federal Government, the Institute is reaching out from its central city location to become involved with the urban issue. It is designed to probe the city and test the means of treatment for the pressing ailments of our urban society. The University offers a multitude of talents and resources which could be channeled and co-ordinated by a multi-disciplinary Institute. The University also offers another essential quality on which the Institute can capitalize. That is its freedom — freedom to ask tough questions, to propose new ideas and to go beyond the tried and true.

What then is the difference between the Institute and the University? The Institute is not a campus-defined discussion forum but rather it aims at analysis, research and actual testing in the field or on the street.

The Institute encourages much needed innovation, and experimentation and undertakes an honest independent appraisal of what exists with regard to urban problems. It can work across lines of government and can deal equally with both the public and private sectors. It can explore, probe, test and try the different ideas and proposals that can lead to new and better solutions to the housing crisis, to urban renewal, to the tax system, to the way people use their leisure time.

The Institute has been able to blend the legitimate wishes of neighbourhood people, the skills of the planner, the authority of government and the resources of private enterprises in projects designed to revitalize areas of the city. But there is no limit to the number of issues that demand immediate attention. The real difficulty comes in defining the choice of priorities and in moving from broad concepts to definite actions. An Institute such as this with limited funds, limited staff and no authority to move without persuasion, must necessarily define priorities carefully.

Attempting to do this, the Institute has moved into activities which are manageable and into areas where its presence is acceptable. Being private and independent, the Institute has freedom and flexibility to operate in the realm of public responsibility — but it has done so, as far as possible, in a compatible relationship with the powers that exist. Working with some freedom of action and in concert with the objectives of those persons already involved, in a given area, the Institute has shown the value of its capacity to explore and test.

During the past two years the Institute has been involved in a great number of projects — projects which have indicated that the Institute can succeed in achieving its objectives. It has also been shown that there are no easy answers to the problems of our cities and that if people share in the willingness to change and have the chance to voice that willingness, then the search for these solutions becomes empowered by their combined strength.

but, in the Community

These projects and the research associated with them have pointed out many viable new directions and new techniques for approaching the problems of cities in general and of Winnipeg in particular. The research behind these projects and the projects themselves will be reported and commented on in future copies of URBAN ISSUES.

In this, the initial copy of URBAN ISSUES, some of these projects will be briefly explained.

In October of 1969 the Institute began an experimental project in the central part of Winnipeg's Urban Renewal Area II, a district which came to be called Roosevelt Park. The purpose of the demonstration project was to explore ways in which the process of renewal in our inner city areas could be effectively carried out with the involvement of the residents of the area. The results accrued to date in this area provide an apt demonstration of the achievement of these purposes. The community responded to the entre of the Institute and established a Steering Committee which later came to be known as the People's Committee for a Better Neighbourhood Incorporated. This committee identified adequate low-cost housing as the first priority for the community. The major accomplishment of the People's Committee has been the purchase of an apartment block which was originally scheduled for demolition. The apartment block, under the management of the People's Committee is presently being used for low rental housing in the area and effectively demonstrates the capacity of a neighbourhood group to become responsible for the development of their own area.

The Roosevelt Park experience tested a number of approaches to the introduction and organization of community renewal in a deteriorating urban area. Among the approaches tested and found effective were — the practice of seeking to develop and maintain a representative group, — an alliance between the resident's group and an organization such as the IUS — the concept of anticipatory planning by the community for its continuing renewal.

Similar studies have been carried out in three other areas of the city. These studies attempted to initiate further forms of neighbourhood organization to compare techniques of entre and to analyse the results achieved in Roosevelt Park. In each case data and information has been recorded and compared in order to allow a number of factors related to the issue of community-based planning and implementation to be isolated, compared and evaluated.

The Institute also undertook in co-operation with the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, a probe into the difficulties faced by native people in the city.

Out of this project the Kinew Housing Corporation was established as a non-profit company. This corporation is being used to buy and renovate twenty older homes in different areas of the city. The corporation has been aided by government and by private foundations. This experiment has shown the capacity

of private people, in conjunction with an organization such as the IUS, to effectively use the public and private sectors to seek solutions to their problems.

A Community Communications Project to acquaint people with the concept of new aspects of communication, to begin the process of bringing community television to Winnipeg has been in operation for over a year. A large workshop was the initial vehicle used to introduce people to this concept and this was followed by a series of smaller workshops which have to date trained some 400 people in the use and techniques of video-tape.

This brief overview of just a few of the action-oriented projects that the IUS has been involved in during the past two years has hopefully illustrated the direction and the potential of a university-based Institute working in the community.

Rehab Research

Across Canada citizens groups are challenging the way our cities are being governed. These citizens organizations have emerged because existing systems of government have not been able to successfully manage the changes taking place in the urban environment. Conflicts over public housing, programs of redevelopment and renewal, expressway systems, the delivery of services, have been the catalysts for the formation of new groupings of citizen-based action. New structures and a new process of policy making must be devised in dealing with such issues as housing, social services and urban redevelopment. The Institute, as a part of its study of these problems has been studying the potential of the rehabilitation of older homes in a lower-income inner-city district.

The Institute has prepared a number of reports on the process and results of rehabilitation projects in an Urban Renewal Area of Winnipeg. From its research and its practical experience the Institute has begun to develop step-by-step procedures for a rehabilitation program. Much of this information once disseminated to the neighbourhood can be used by people who wish to do some rehabilitation work in their area either by themselves or in co-operation with other area residents. The following are a few of the aspects of a complete rehabilitation program, as outlined in a major report "REPORT ON THE REHABILITATION OF OLDER HOUSES IN A LOWER INCOME, INNER CITY DISTRICT", prepared by Eric Barker, an architect on the staff of the IUS.

- A. The first step would be a survey of the houses in the area. This survey would be carried out by a "repair team" which could be made up of local contractors, plumbers, electricians and architects.

This team would give advice or possibly arrange for work to be done. The emphasis here would be advice on minor repair work and the testing out of cost ceilings on major priority repairs.

- B. A local rehabilitation company would be established to back up the repair team and to do the actual renovation or repair work. This company could work as:
 - (i) an independent company, initially funded by the government.
 - (ii) a general contractor for the government.
 - (iii) as salaried employees of the government.
- C. A list of all available tradesmen in the area would be compiled.
- D. The repair team could experiment with new and innovative construction materials and work with experts on experimenting with new ideas geared to the renovation of older homes.
- E. A cost and design feasibility study on the possibilities of internal spacial re-organization of existing housing would be undertaken.
- F. The types of home improvement loans currently available to lower income people would be studied with a view to lowering the cost of repairs.
- G. Basic health standards and their application would be studied with a view to finding a more meaningful set of standards. These standards could be geared for lower income people who have less buying power and are less able to take advantage of other alternative accommodation.
- H. The possibility of a bank of "emergency" accommodation in the form of trailers would be studied. These trailers would give the person renting a possible alternative and give the health authorities a chance to enforce their laws without the fear of putting someone in the street.
- I. The feasibility of low cost loans available to absentee landlords would be studied. In this way they may be induced to repair the "poor" houses that they own.
- J. The government could request that houses be repaired and could offer to buy them at a reasonable price or the government could buy houses in poor condition at the asking price and offer them as "handyman" specials to the neighbourhood. These would be considered specials in that the government would finance the resale at low interest rates, unavailable on the current real estate market.
- K. Information about the "sweat-equity" concept of financing should be disseminated - this information could be a part of a larger information service to the community on all matters regarding renovation - taxes, loans, assessment, prices, etc.

- L. New housing should be developed for the people in poor housing - this would act as a safety valve to allow the old housing to be torn down or repaired.

Rehabilitation is by no means the complete answer but is only one part of any comprehensive renewal program and should be viewed in that context.

COMMUNITY

In a very few months Greater Winnipeg will have a new form of government. For many citizens of the city this is a welcome occurrence. It has become clear over the past several years that the existing system of local government was not working very well. In addition to the petty bickering between Metro and City officials was the mounting evidence that the faulty, fragmented handling of critical urban issues was leading to poor performance in such fields as renewal, housing, tax reform, economic growth and development and community services.

When the Provincial Government introduced its legislation with regard to one large city it was a move to fundamentally redesign the way that one-half million people will govern themselves for many years to come.

The Provincial Government's purpose in creating one large city is two-fold - to increase the efficiency of local government - and, to provide for and encourage a greater amount of citizen participation in local government. The Institute sees the Uni-city concept as posing a tremendous challenge to the residents of these twelve municipalities. Since the citizen is the focus of the plan, the IUS felt that it could play a part in assuring that the individual residents of the Uni-city will be able to play a major role in the decision-making processes that affect them. Since a method for doing this is basic to the success of this concept, the IUS in conjunction with the Ad-Hoc Committee, a citizens group working towards the introduction of community television, presented a brief to the Provincial Government outlining a plan for the implementation of a Uni-city Community Communications Program to bring information and ideas to the people of Winnipeg.

This proposal which was accepted by the provincial government created a special election communications network designed to provide citizens with information concerning the new city government, the issues in the forthcoming municipal election and the positions taken by the various candidates and groups involved in the campaign.

Rather than attempt to stretch the capabilities of existing mass communications media, the IUS felt that community cable television, local closed circuit

programming facilities and mobile information units were particularly adaptable to the needs of the electoral process of debate, discussion of issues and methods, and individual decision making.

At the same time the citizen was provided with some of the information he required in order to understand his potential role in the future planning and direction of the new city government. His responses, based on the information received, could flow through a two-way community communications system which was previously unavailable to both citizen and politician, but which is a key factor in the one city concept.

Begun in the second week of September and continuing through to the middle of October, Channel 9 on the cable system was used to provide nightly programs relating to the new city government and the municipal elections. Not only did this provide a source of much needed information but also an opportunity to test the cable system as an alternative system for presenting information and ideas to the public.

Production of programs and organization of this was undertaken by the staff of the Institute and of Red River Community College, with the assistance of equipment and production personnel from the National Film Board, by members of the Ad-Hoc Committee, and private volunteers who were trained in the use of VTR and community television techniques at workshops sponsored by the IUS.

In addition to the programs on the community election channel, efforts were made to provide closed programming through schools and private displays, in shopping centers and other public places so that people can get information on the candidates, the issues and the workings of Uni-city.

The government has ensured citizens access to the machinery of local government but unless the citizen has the necessary information about and understanding of the entire concept, his access is meaningless. With this project the Institute is attempting to ensure that the citizens themselves are the ones to pass on the information and stimulate the discussion among other residents.

This was an experiment in television coverage of the citizens, by the citizens and for the citizens.

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