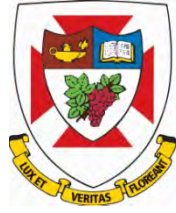


The Case of Manitoba: Notes for an Address Delivered Friday, April 3, 1970 to Canadian Association for the Social Studies Annual Convention

by Lloyd Axworthy
1970

The Institute of Urban Studies





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**THE CASE OF MANITOBA: NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS DELIVERED FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 1970 TO
CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES ANNUAL CONVENTION**

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to

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

ANNUAL CONVENTION

by

LLOYD AXWORTHY
Director
Institute of Urban Studies
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It's time to examine the reality of urbanization. For too long the facts about urbanization have been lost in a fantasy, concocted by an assortment of academic prophets, over-dramatic urbanologists, keynote speakers at annual conventions of architects and planners and any stump lecturer from preacher to politician who drowns his audience in a sea of those modern day woes - pollution, over population, moral decay, and urbanization.

Often a discussion of urbanization becomes linked to the school of futuristic thinking. The latest intellectual fad is to project to the year 2000 - or 1980 for the more conservative minded. By thus casting one's glance so far forward, seeing a world of mass megalopolis, one is able to avoid the annoying problems of today, and free one's mind for the exhilaration of conjuring all kinds of fanciful solutions.

Three weeks ago I attended an international conference on urbanization sponsored by the French government. At the conference were displayed a veritable Disneyland of architectural delights. Exhibits on mile high cities contended with fortress-like mega-structures for the honour of winning the Grand Prix for the best solution to the ills of urbanization. The discussions at the conference were no more realistic.

In other words, we are in danger of hyperbolizing the fact of urbanization, of making it larger than life, of making it appear as an inexorable grinding force of unfathomable universal proportions, calling for monumental human response.

The reality of urbanization is far more mundane. It is a quiet happening, perhaps no more noticable than the irritation of having few additional cars in line at a traffic stop or finding less and less room to move downtown. It is the aggregate of thousands of separate decisions, by individuals to change their location to move from town to city, from one neighbourhood to another. There is no grand command for such a movement to take place, each individual makes his own decision, for reasons slightly different from the rest. But it adds up to a significant change in the way we live. Perhaps the only way to gain some sense of what is taking place is to establish a weekly watch on our downtown bus depot. There you will see the reality of urbanization.

It is a reality that is different in every region, calling for a variation in response, although a lack of response results in the same kind of problems. It is an issue that is only barely understood.

It is both old, having been occurring for a long period of time, but decidedly new in the changes it brings about. It is a force that can be of great benefit, if handled well, or one that will give birth to its own virulent social pathologies, if left unattended.

Urbanization must thus be treated carefully. Flowery speeches or rousing calls of alarm will not substitute for closely focused examination of the different ways it occurs in different regions. If its reality is properly discerned and the responses accurately shaped to fit the problem, then there must be individualized handling in each of the separate urban areas across the country.

For this reason, the opportunity presented at this meeting to center on the fact of urbanization in Manitoba is welcome. We can get away from the global village and examine a concrete happening. The mind-boggling universe of vast urban conurbations can be forgotten. We can concentrate on a particular application of the urbanizing forces that are seriously affecting what is normally thought of as the bucolic rural Prairies. It is a chance to address the reality of urbanization in Canada as it should be - in defined, delimited, specified regional terms.

Only by such analysis, can useful answers emerge. Answers that are not borrowings from Sweden, Great Britain or the United States, which are the normal spawning grounds for the birth of solutions to Canadian urban problems. For that matter, it is the way to arrive at answers which are also not pale duplications of what urban experts prescribe for Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. The only effective technique for responding to the national issue of urbanization is to establish a framework that enables each city to work out the peculiar way it operates in its own region and determine these policies that best fit the situation.

MANITOBA'S REALITY

The reality of urbanization in Manitoba can be seen first in terms of figures. Greater Winnipeg grows slowly compared to other cities in North America. Its annual population growth rate of some 1.4% is a cause of concern to some local boosters who despair that Winnipeg doesn't sprawl quite as fast as Toronto or Los Angeles. For others, those in particular who look upon Winnipeg as an ideal resting place, an expanded country town, this is a cause of satisfaction and an excuse for inaction.

What it in fact means is that a set of different constraints are put on the way a city such as Winnipeg, and it is not the only low-growth city in Canada, must manage its response to urbanization. It must be far more careful how it husband its capital resources, where it locates its urban facilities, when it decides to intervene in redevelopment

and what efforts it makes to exploit its advantages. It just cannot afford mistakes the way high-growth cities can. It just doesn't have the wealth or the excess growth to squander. It can't succeed by relying on random, ad hoc decisions. When a new office building complex is placed in Winnipeg it has significant effect on the flow of pedestrians and traffic, location of supporting shops and services alignment of public transit and the areas that will be vacated in the move. That is why, past decisions, particularly by the provincial government to place major facilities employing large numbers of people in the fringe areas had severe deteriorating effects on the downtown. That is why we must carefully design planning and industrial development policies to insure that the city can compete with others and seek out particular advantages.

This is not a problem faced by cities such as Toronto or Vancouver. Our urbanization problem is of a different category. Several other cities are similar to Greater Winnipeg and this particular kind of urbanization must be handled in a different way.

The fact that growth takes place at a slower pace than elsewhere certainly does not mean that urbanization is not taking place. If you examine the Greater Winnipeg area within the confines of the province of Manitoba, then it becomes an issue of serious proportion. Greater Winnipeg now has a population of over one half million which represents over 50% of the population of the province. Metro Winnipeg absorbs 80% of the population increase of Manitoba. This will create in a matter of a few years a severe imbalance between city and rural areas. This carries increasingly difficult political implications for the provincial government. The transfer of political power, the disequilibrium of people and resources, the role of the provincial government itself vis-a-vis a metropolitan area government are tough issues to face. The danger is that, the rural areas and their representatives will increase their resentments over the changes, and take refuge in a last-ditch defense, rather than working through useful solutions.

The fact is that urbanization is equally a rural phenomenon as it is urban, because it is from the country that the people move. What the city of Winnipeg might lose in the young and well educated who leave, it gains in rural, often poor families or individuals looking for a better chance. The Social Service Audit estimated that between 1961 - 1966, some 25,000 people moved into Winnipeg from rural Manitoba, among those 10,000 Indians and Metis. The strength of that flow continues, often aided and abetted by regional development programs such as ARDA and FRED.

This means that within its own borders Manitoba wrestles with a variety of urbanization issues. First is the pure economics of expansion.

The World Health Organization estimated that for an average North American City, an increase of even 1000 new people creates the following demands:

- 8.4 school rooms
- 100,000 gallons of water
- 8.8 acres for schools and recreation space
- 382 Acres of residential development
- 1 - 3 policemen and firemen
- 1 hospital bed

With 10,000 people migrating to the city annually, plus the national birth increase the never-ending job of running just to stay even doesn't stop. The result is more taxes on property, pinched local treasuries, and a cutting back on those activities designed to make urban life better, improvement is overshadowed by expansion.

More important, though is the situation of the new arrivals. Where do they settle? How well prepared is the city to absorb them? The problems of transition from rural to urban living become ever more difficult, as the city becomes an evermore crowded and complex place. The simple needs of finding a good place to stay, when there isn't much around, of securing employment in a market that has fewer and fewer places for the unskilled, of learning to be an urban consumer in a system of credit and shopping that is too often planned to catch the unwary - become serious handicaps in the way of the new arrival.

The problem is particularly in Manitoba, acute with the Indian-Metis who are leaving rural Manitoba in large numbers and who are often unprepared for what they find once they arrive. Winnipeg can be a strange and frightening world when you first step from the bus at the Mall Center. It is a world where all the familiar contact points are lost and where a whole new set of skills must be learned. The question is how, and where. The system of social service and welfare, the system of education, the system of government services are not designed to cope with this problem. They deal with it only in a glancing, partial way. There must be a better way of response than treating after the fact, the demoralized victims of a city that is not geared to effectively ease the transition from one style of life to another.

A settlement of disillusioned people is occupying the central core of the city, with more being added every day. At some point they will reach a critical mass, and we can chalk up another calamity to the forces of urbanization. Look at the welfare rolls - the average monthly caseload has gone up from 2575 to 3180 a month in the last 3 years, a 23.5% increase. The other social indicators of trouble show the same signs of discontent.

It is not an insoluble problem. It is simply a case of recognizing that it is happening and adapting attitudes, approaches and institutions to digest the problem in an effective way. But, that is the real problem - how to alter what exists - how to reconstruct what is tried and true. The central dilemma in fact that urbanization poses is that new forces and new issues must be channeled through old, outworn circuits. How to re-wire and re-circuit the system to cope with the urban issue is the question.

The same question is raised by another aspect of the urbanization issue - the movement of people within a city. Normally we think of urbanization as people moving into the city. It is also a phenomenon of how and where people move within the city.

Everyone has read the standard treatises on suburbia. The automobile is what made it possible, FHA mortgages made it feasible, and the North America aspiration for everyone having his own plot of land made it necessary. So the move outward became a way of life and still is. The actual City of Winnipeg has been declining in population, the suburbs growing in some instances by 200 or 300%.

Why do people go? Because of the children, some say. Others, such as Robert Nisbet, a noted sociologist, say it is in quest of community, a place where one can belong, and through association with one's neighbours in clubs, organizations and churches, find an individual identity. Some move because there is a quality of independence - a 50 foot lot may not be much, but at least its your own. Others simply because there isn't good accomodation and good amenities in the center. Whatever the reason, there is a distinct change in the style of life. As politicians and others are now finding out, it is not city or country that counts, but the suburbs.

This is obviously not a happening unique to Greater Winnipeg. But, the way it works in this area, the effects it has, the responses that are required have a distinctive Made in Manitoba quality.

For example - there are presently several major decisions pending involving hundreds of millions of dollars that can be directly attributed to the movement outward. The Downtown Development Plan proposed by the Metropolitan Corporation is a major attempt to re-invigorate the central city by attracting a new downtown population. The City of Winnipeg has an opportunity now to redevelop a major portion of the North Central city which has been suffering serious erosion over the last several decades as industry and the middle class have left. There is a large scale plan for an urban transportation network in the Winnipeg Area Transportation Study, envisaging a system of expressways designed to speed traffic between city center and suburbs.

These are crucial decisions. But, how prepared and able is this community to make the best choices with a full understanding of what these major development interventions involve, what the results will be, what private, local, neighbourhood interests will be affected. These are highly political issues, putting in contention different sets of values. The old days when civic government dealt with simple housekeeping issues is over. Urbanization brings a different class of decisions and calls for the institutions and the leadership that can guide and shape these decisions in an enlightened way. Yet our urban institutions are fragmented, and in many instances out of date. Leadership is split; with a good part of potentially strong civic leadership residing out in the suburban enclaves quite oblivious and unconcerned with the problems left downtown. The destinies of center and suburb are increasingly intertwined and they must make common cause.

Finally, there is a disturbing element about what is happening to the people of the city - a slight sniff of unease is in the air. You can see it in the increasing frustration of those in our central areas who are becoming tired of having decisions made for them. They are beginning to take on responsibility for more of their own affairs. You can sense it in the plight of the young family on moderate income who can't buy a house because it costs too much, and the interest rates are too high. They are beginning to wonder why all the attention is going to the very poor and the very rich - and none to them. You can see it in the questions raised by the growing number of older people who also need housing, but can't find it, and learn that many suburban residents don't want a senior citizens home close to them. It is clearly told by our young people who reject a society that pollutes its own environment and takes pride in physical ugliness. You can hear it in the questions of mothers who live in the large subdivisions or the high rise apartments and ask - is this the best we can do?

Putting these sights and sounds together, you can begin to grasp an important meaning of urbanization. It compels change, breaks down old values, spurs on mobility and movement, causes discontent and disquietude. But, those sights and sounds of indignation and anger, also mean that questions are being asked about dimensions of quality in the life of Manitoba. There is a search, for a new style of existence. There is a growing collective realization that there are opportunities being lost to advance human potential and enrich human life.

There is a rude awakening that inequality exists where it need not, and that the city needs an overhaul. So the force of urbanization poses options, gives choice. Either surrender and submerge in the noise, refuse, anger and frustration of an unattended urban place - or cultivate the offerings of an urban society and create a life of freedom, choice and community benefit. It all depends on what kinds of decisions we are prepared to make.

DECISIONS

It is tempting when you finally arrive at what should be done, to dig deep into the bag of tricks and come out clutching a large handful of all the favourite pet schemes of the urban experts - more housing, urban transportation, pollution control, parks, etc.

They've been displayed many times before. I won't repeat the Litany. Instead let me single out some decision areas particularly important to this province where some very useful changes could be made.

First, we need an urban policy for the province. Strangely enough, with all the hue and cry in recent years over how the federal government should change its approach to the cities, the provinces, where responsibility for the cities is reputed to rest, have escaped notice. Yet, they have been particularly noticeable for their absence of urban policy. This does not mean to say there are not provincial programmes related to cities - but separate programmes do not make a policy.

Policy means a clear statement of priorities and objectives followed by an integrated set of activities involving co-ordination of the entire structure of the provincial government. It means that related decisions must be made on the growth rate of cities, the place it will occupy in the provincial economy, the ways to eliminate poverty, how to develop land, provide housing and so on. That means that decisions taken on matters of welfare, are tied to actions taken on the re-organization of government which must be related to capital investment policies in education and loan programmes for industrial development.

Clearly, such a state of urban policy does not exist in Manitoba, just as it doesn't exist in any other province in Canada. The provinces, have really not fulfilled their role in relation to the cities, and have really treated them like orphan children. But the children have now grown and fill up the whole house. Something must be decided on what to do with them.

This will require a heavy investment of time and resources by the province in just analysing what urbanization means in Manitoba, what the priorities should be, and how activities and programmes can be integrated and co-ordinated. That doesn't mean hasty responses, or crash programmes. It means setting frameworks for analysis, acquiring data, making decisions on priorities and building new machinery designed to deal with urbanization.

The federal government can help in this process. They are now in the midst of changing their own programmes. If in those changes the federal government were to create a National Urban Development Corporation which would operate in similar fashion to the World Bank, or other international loan agency, it would give the provinces and cities the flexibility and the funds they need.

Under the old NHA legislation, federal assistance to the provinces and cities was narrowly pigeon-holed into specified programs, carrying all kinds of detailed conditions. Urban renewal under NHA had more corners to turn and obstacles to jump than an eight-day steeplechase. Under the concept of an Urban Development Corporation, the federal government would make certain rough allocations by region, then let the cities and/or the province in that region determine priorities. Vancouver may want to have its harbour developed, Calgary a series of satellite new towns, Regina an expressway, Winnipeg its downtown renewed, Toronto, land for housing. Such choices could be made in consultation with federal advisors if so requested, and the formula of financing worked out to suit the requirements of each individual programme.

This brings the onus back to the province or the city to legitimately determine its priorities, working outside the present narrow constraints of federal financial programmes. It means that there can be a flexibility to cover the different ways that urbanization acts upon different communities. It might help to bring federal and provincial activities in this field into greater harmony and establish the proper balance in relationships.

This kind of open-end policy will not succeed, however, unless there are new urban institutions to make them work.

We have been trying to respond to modern day urban problems based on forms of government designed seventy-five years ago. Just as yesterday's narrow city streets won't carry today's traffic, neither can yesterday's institutions of local government carry the enormous traffic of today's decisions. For example, it is becoming clear that urban development cannot be an operation solely conducted by government departments. For development to succeed, there must be an involvement of a variety of interests, neighbourhood, business, university and volunteers. Several American cities have experimented with forms of urban development corporations which seek to integrate the resources of public and private enterprises. They are working out arrangements that incorporate the speed and efficiency that development requires, with new ways of providing accessibility and accountability for the public. This, therefore, is not happening in Canada.

At the same time, re-thinking must take place on the level of community participation. It is easy to use the rhetoric of citizen involvement. But, how in fact can it be accomplished? What are the techniques whereby residents can become part of the planning and implementation of improvement and change in their own area? For the last six months, we have been conducting just such an experiment in the center of Urban Renewal Area II in Winnipeg. We have been testing the ways of probing a community to reveal how people there live, so that renewal can fit the aspirations and life style of residents. We have explored the means of community organization, so that neighbourhood groups can acquire the skills for presenting useful, constructive proposals and

develop a sense of common interest. We have been seeking to work out how government, professional experts and the community can communicate so that one doesn't impose their will on the other. We are trying to construct a working example of a neighbourhood development corporation, which will enable residents to attract the finance, and determine the development priorities for their area.

This could be a forerunner, I believe to a much broader, wider attempt to reshape the institutions of city government, to give more control to citizens and to give new meaning to the concept of urban democracy.

Changes in our government institutions must go much beyond revisions of boundaries and shuffling of jurisdictions. A refinement of powers is necessary to accomplish the task of rebuilding and reshaping the urban environment. More importantly, the creation of new democratic means for people to exercise real choice and decisions must be made. The once every four or two year exercise-of-voting, which very few do anyway in civic elections, is not enough. Explorations can be made on different institutional means that could lead exercise of decisions on the new physical improvements, the introduction of new school programs, the provision of social service on the community level. This is not a hazy ideal, or impractical nonsense. It is the essence of what must be done if there is to be a viable urban community. It is a standard for the cities as old as the Greeks - who wrote as a motto over Athens "If the citizens cease to man the barricades, the city will not survive."

Finally, amongst the many other issues that one could choose, a few words are necessary on how we might create a more humane urban environment. The start obviously must be in the development of a comprehensive housing program. A city breaks down when there is a shortage of decent, good accommodation. To begin, this province should gather together all those involved in housing - developers, bankers, architects, and public officials and assess just what kind of housing for what kind of people at what level of income, in what kind of locations can be projected for the next few years. When the gaps are seen, when it appears that certain needs of the population will be missed, then appropriate steps can then be designed to see that both public and private enterprise combine to insure a fully balanced housing market. Right now the private market focuses on single family houses for \$10,000 a year and over families and on high rise apartments. The public agency focuses on public housing. They miss the family with an income over \$5000 and below \$8000. They ignore the working man who might want to buy a house. They forget young people who don't want high rise dwelling.

There can be a variety of incentives used, financial programmes worked out to expand the supply and variety of housing. But, it takes initial assessment, co-operation between public and private, and a spirit of experimentation.

Secondly, in dealing with a more human urban environment, the allocation and planning of land is long overdue. We allow the city to sprawl, then rush out expensive services and transportation to cater to the small pockets of development. The answer is a programme of public ownership of development land. This land would then be sold or leased to developers according to a rational timetable at a lower cost. The return on this are many. Planned new communities can be built using the best of the new technology for low cost housing. These concentrations of new development in one or two locations, will thus require that only one or two new major transportation routes and you need not have expressways scurrying in every direction. In fact, there could be no better investment in terms of economics or good planning than a large scale public acquisition of land.

Thirdly, there are the little things that could make city life more pleasant. Small vest pocket parks scattered throughout for old people to sit and small children to play, clusters of specialized restaurants, shops, open markets that make browsing fun, skyway streets, opening onto larger plazas, squash courts, tennis courts, swimming facilities that don't necessitate your having an income over \$10,000 a year in order to be available, attractive stimulating buildings, multi-purpose service centers where churches, clubs and groups intermingle with libraries, cinemas and coffee houses - these are the items of variety that can provide colour and charm to urban life. Unfortunately, as Bernard Rudofsky sadly concludes in his book "Streets Are For People", North Americans have a habit of perversely turning their backs on the things that make a city interesting and urbane.

This needn't be a permanent state of mind. Encouragement and investment by government can start the change. Imagination and investment by business would help. Organization and investment by the multitude of associations and groups that populate our cities could foster a variety of pilot projects for making city life humane. Just think of the Junior League as promoters of a vegetable market in downtown Winnipeg, or the Chamber of Commerce building a small park off Lombard Place. Whatever the project - the point is some organized effort with a clear idea of where we are going could spark the beginnings of some exciting urban happenings in the City of Winnipeg.

CONCLUSION

That quite probably is enough. There are many other propositions that could be talked about. In a subject such as this, there are never any lack of ideas of what might be done. The real task is in the doing.

There has probably been enough said, to demonstrate that urbanization in Manitoba is a very live force, and one that is apt to be virulent if treated only in a fitful fashion. At the same time, we mustn't

become so mesmerized by problems, that we ignore the opportunities. Urbanization could be our most important step forward in the new century of this province. It will bring together in Manitoba a large concentration of people in one place. That can create strength and dynamism if properly organized. It can open lines of thought and questioning that will clear away the hangovers of the past and enrichen the lives of Manitobans. It can focus our economic growth and become a center for new industry. There can be a release of human energy and talent in an urban setting that can if given choices to make, will create a new city - a little more democratic, a little more just, a little more free.

These are, of course, fond hopes. Whether they come to pass really depends on how soon and how well the people of this province decide this is what we want. Unfortunately, we have little time to ponder - urbanization does not wait for men to make up their mind as to how they should respond, it just keeps on happening.

So the test is very clear and very plain - what kind of city do we want, what must we do to give it life. Our answer can't take long. To cite the story of the old, retired General, who knowing that there wasn't much time left, devoted himself to the planting of his garden. He asked his gardener about seeding a certain kind of tree and was told there was little use for him to do so as it would take years to grow.

The old General replied - "Well, then we haven't a minute to lose, we must plant this afternoon."

That seems to be good advice for Manitobans as we fare our age of urbanization.