

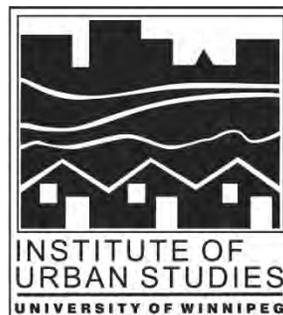
# **Shaping Tomorrow: Perspectives on Urban Policy for Winnipeg in the 1980s**

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**by Alan F.J. Artibise  
1983**

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**The Institute of Urban Studies**





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**SHAPING TOMORROW: PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN POLICY FOR WINNIPEG IN THE 1980S**

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SHAPING TOMORROW:  
PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN POLICY FOR WINNIPEG  
IN THE 1980s

Address to Annual Meeting  
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May 26, 1983

by

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I am delighted to have been offered this opportunity to speak publicly about urban policy at a critical time in Winnipeg's development. My remarks will address fairly general issues relating to thinking about urban policy, but I do trust that my comments will provide a useful framework in which existing ideas might be assessed and further developed.

Let me begin by sharing with you a rather distinct perspective on this city. I was born and raised in Dauphin and grew up with two strong emotions regarding the "Metropolis of the West." First, from the perspective of Dauphin, Winnipeg was the "big city"; it was excitement, bright lights, urbanity, and culture -- all the things that impressed a small town boy. But I also learned, at an early age, that Winnipeg was power. Ironically, my mother taught me this. I remember clearly her dislike of the city's arrogance, clearly displayed, she often noted, in the fact that Manitoba's CFL team was the 'Winnipeg' Blue Bombers while Regina, for example, had the Saskatchewan Roughriders. Similarly, she was often annoyed by the Winnipeg Free Press, which rarely carried news of the hinterland.

These early experiences remained with me as an undergraduate at the University of Manitoba and as a graduate student at the University of British Columbia. When I decided to pursue urban studies, it was natural that I would be attracted to studying Winnipeg and so I returned to the city to prepare my doctoral dissertation. I spent a full year in the bowels of City Hall studying the dramatic progress of the "Bull's Eye of the Dominion" from its beginnings through to 1914 and beyond. The story I uncovered was dramatic and exciting; indeed,

in my not unbiased view, it is a story that has no equal in the Canadian urban experience. I became so fascinated with the city that I continued for several years to write about it, unfortunately from afar in such places as Kamloops, Ottawa and Victoria. But now, as I plan to return to Winnipeg, I am faced with examining the city, not as an objective, disinterested urban scholar, but as a concerned resident and as the Director of an Institute that has at the centre of its value system the concept of service to the people of Winnipeg.

I have been forced by my impending move back to Winnipeg to reflect on the city and its people. Stephen Leacock is given credit for promoting the observation about Victoria (still retailed in various forms today) that the people there turn over in the morning to read the daily obituary column. Those who do not find their names there roll over again and go back to sleep. No such urban joke is applicable to Winnipeg; indeed, what makes this city unique is that there is (or at least there was) something about the city that is magical. As John Hirsch has noted, "In Winnipeg one has a sense of community, a sense of purpose, which might not be articulated but which is felt deeply by the people who are there. It's perhaps not as exciting as New York, but it has its own excitement, and its kind of excitement which is more productive in humane terms than the kind of excitement that exists in the too big, too busy, too alienated, too inhuman world of great metropolitan centres." In a similar vein, Jack Ludwig has stated that "Winnipeg stands a metaphor of vitality."

These opinions are ones that I share and they bring me to one key point I want to make today. Winnipeg's greatness in the past -- and the city's potential in the future -- depends on recapturing and sustaining this vitality by focusing on the city's greatest resource -- its people. I realize, of course, that Winnipeg's future is also delineated by the outside world and that macro-economic events ranging from the world price of wheat or oil to American foreign policy affect us directly. But I also believe that we must attempt to harness those resources we have within our grasp and not sit back and complain about how "outside" forces control our destiny.

In this vein, I want to deal with several aspects that I believe relate directly to Winnipeg's future. My first concern is the question of vision. If I were to single out the one key problem facing Winnipeg today, I would not begin with population stagnation, unemployment, the shortage of investment capital or the decline of the core area. These are serious problems, to be sure, but we cannot hope to resolve them until we have a clear vision of where we want to be in ten or twenty years. We can never hope to harness the energy and resources which Winnipeg has waiting to be used if we do not build images and generate the kind of support it takes to turn images into reality. While it would be presumptuous of me to outline in detail all the elements of an imaginative vision, I can say that what is required for such a vision is a realism that will translate vision into action -- an ability that requires the vision to be shared by the diverse elements of the city's political, business, community, and neighbourhood leadership. It takes cooperation to make successful urban policy. We must, therefore, create

a vision that includes input from labour, religious and educational institutions; from business, government and social service agencies, and from neighbourhood organizations. And we must forge private-public partnerships to succeed. The fact is that the only kind of vision that pays off in real terms is the vision that can have enough input from a community's many leaders that they feel they have a stake in it, and one that can be broad enough that all the major elements in a community can accept it.

In formulating this vision -- in attempting to shape our future -- we must make use of underutilized resources, resources that are basic but often overlooked -- including people, institutions, the existing built environment, and so on. We have, if nothing else, learned by now that we cannot afford the luxury of ignoring or throwing resources away. Call it what you will -- recycling, reusing, regeneration or just saving the best -- restoration, rehabilitation, and revitalization are keys to the future.

Leadership for recovery can come from many places. It is not necessary to rely solely or even primarily on the local government to take the lead. It can come from citizens' groups, insurance companies, organized labour, or community institutions. But one thing is certain, without leadership, the vision cannot be projected and images will not become reality.

But even with a broadly based vision in place and with leaders willing to project the vision, Winnipeg faces other immediate challenges

that I wish to turn to now since they are closely related to vision-making and to turning images into reality. In particular I will address two crucial issues.

The first of these is municipal government -- both in terms of structures and politics. As you all know, Winnipeg is widely believed to have the most progressive and innovative governmental structure in North America. Yet the structural changes initiated more than a decade ago have not resulted in any new visions or even in any flowering of citizen participation. Indeed, for an outside observer, Winnipeg's civic politics remain remarkably similar to urban politics elsewhere. One reason for this, I believe, is that while the creation of Unicity imposed a new framework, it did not and could not, in and of itself, bring about significant changes in the practice of politics. In other words, substantial resources must go into the transitional process from one structure to another and, frankly, these resources have not been forthcoming either from the city or from the province. It is true that the province provided an elegant, potentially powerful new structure in legislation, but the people continue to think relative to the old one and little new happens. The old system is gone but, the citizens' mentality, their responses to situations within the new setting, remain a product of their experiences within the one now vanished. The citizens -- and many politicians -- continue in the old traditions.

What is needed is a more carefully considered transition from one form to another. It is necessary to understand that change itself is a critical component and that the people are unlikely to understand

it as quickly or as well as legislators might hope. In Winnipeg, the changes were enormous -- a city of some 12 or 13 separate municipalities was unified almost overnight. In the face of these dramatic and radical structural changes, the province tended to say -- "we've already been through a hell of a political trauma; we are going to suffer further for changing things so radically, and we prefer to be involved as little as possible from here on. Let the city take the responsibility for its mistakes, the slowness, and so on." The tendency, then, is for the province to let go just when its involvement should be greatest. In Winnipeg's case, the problem was most acute because the province was also worrying about its own reorganization. In this situation, active communication and cooperation was imperative to ensure that changes at the two levels matched up, but it didn't happen to begin with. Let us hope that it will occur now.

What is necessary, I believe, is an end to the resistance to decentralization; the city's government must be activated. Urban policy-making must arise from and be judged in accordance with local perceptions of urban activities; perceptions and policies must be linked. In the current state, with an upward drift of responsibility for urban matters from the city to the province and the federal government, we lose in two ways. First, senior levels of government are deterred from dealing aggressively with urban matters by the continuing and increasingly noisy existence of local jurisdictions; and, second, to the extent that policy-making is taking place at senior levels, it is hampered by ill-defined linkages with the city. Senior bureaucracies, over-centralized and out-of-touch at the activity or street level, are prone to information

pathologies whereby intelligence fantasies give rise to illusions of reliable information.

If local government is to be activated, cities must be assigned an independent and politically pre-eminent position in the formulation of urban policy. At present, our cities are inefficiently bound by the constraints of provincial legislation produced under a constitution in which local government has no specific role. While this provincial legislation is far from static, it is still not adequate for the challenges cities face. Policy-making in cities needs to be taken more seriously than planning or development permits. The whole relationship between efficient cities and internal city policy is in danger of being lost and forgotten as senior levels of government toy with the notion of controlling urban development while leaving urban government enwrapped in the cobwebs of old legislative restrictions. It is worth taking a moment to elaborate this point.

It's a fair presumption that cities exist because they are an efficient means of organizing the production of many of our physical and social needs. The dollar value of total output in a city exceeds the costs of production by an amount that might be called, for want of a better term, surplus value. In large part, this surplus value accrues to urban land owners in the form of higher land rent or land value than exists outside cities, although some part of the surplus undoubtedly is captured by other people whose services are at least temporarily in short supply.

Costs of production within a city consist of both private costs and social or public costs, where the latter are measured by the sum of official public expenditure and by environmental or congestion costs borne directly by residents. For any given city size and value of output, the level of private and social costs can be extremely sensitive to the city's internal organization. In other words, the distribution and density of land uses, the number and sizes of commercial centres, and the relative use of public transportation -- all of which may be influenced by public policy -- have signal effects on total production costs and therefore on total surplus value. For this reason, no useful meaning can be attached to questions about the best size and distribution of cities without reference to some particular internal organization. Our search for efficient city sizes should start not with fuzzy, ill-defined notions from senior levels of government about desirable inter-city distributions of population and economic activities: it should be based instead, on the assignments of a clear mandate and appropriate policy instruments to urban governments so that within cities adequate attention can be paid to questions of organizational efficiency.

In the long run, that happy Nirvana of the theoretical economist, land rents might reasonably be expected to reflect the true surplus value of urban economic activities, but in the sequence of short-runs that constitute the real world, both the natural processes of change and deliberate internal reorganization will affect the distribution of well-being among urban residents. Individuals, restrained in their ability

to move within cities, may come to benefit or to suffer unduly the effects of urban policy -- unless municipalities are given policy instruments through which these short-run effects can be moderated.

Take a simple example. Suppose as a result of commercial expansion in the central area of a city, traffic congestion comes to impose inefficiently high social costs on both commuters and central-area residents. Efficiency demands that these costs be shifted to businesses in the central area, but municipalities have no access to policy instruments that can directly accomplish this task. Ultimately, rising wages to commuters might produce some forward shifting of the costs, but even in the long-run some portion could fall on owners of residential properties through declining land values. As a policy response to traffic congestion the city might decide to widen roads or to develop more adequate public transit facilities into the central area. In either case, the cost of these changes will fall on taxpayers generally and not specifically on downtown business.

The inequities are not inevitable, but with the present inadequate set of policy instruments they are unavoidable. Municipalities have no direct way of controlling the rate at which any given area develops, and they have little freedom to vary their mill rates according to location or use so as to recapture for the public purse some of the enhanced land value brought about through public spending; neither do they have legislative sanction for the introduction of novel fiscal devices such as an office-space sales tax which could be used in the circumstances of the example both to deflect excessive growth in certain areas and to pay for needed transportation improvements.

There is no need to spin out in finer detail the various specific issues that currently require resolution. At stake is the general fabric of urban policy, which must be based on some explicit concept of urban government. Our best course at the moment is surely to nurture the present vitality of our city by liberating it in a legislative sense.

But this formula is dependent on our politicians -- at all levels -- having before them a clear vision of where Winnipeg wants to go. How can this be achieved? This is the subject I wish to turn to now by examining some potential sources for vision-making, including such agencies -- to name but two -- as the Social Planning Council and the Institute of Urban Studies. I think it would be fair to say that all of us who seek to provide advice in the urban policy area from outside the system feel that very little of the advice has the intended effect, or, indeed, any effect. I would suggest that city governments are particularly weak and constrained users of any advice and sharply limited in their capacity to act on recommendations for change. The constraints have little to do with any shortage or defect in the supply of good ideas. Rather, it is the limited ability and weak incentives of local officials to seek, absorb and attempt to apply such ideas, given the political, bureaucratic and fiscal limitations they face. Improvement in the "supply" side of the relationship, in short, can be helpful and may be necessary, but it will rarely prove sufficient. More effective urban policies require either that the "consuming" side of the advice relationship gains the capacity to use the advice available or that the producing side radically expand its role and responsibility. In the classical model of advice-giving the adviser analyzes a

problem, reaches a conclusion, presents the conclusion to the decision-maker and then withdraws. In the current circumstances, this approach is inappropriate and inadequate. The advice-givers must compensate for the deficiencies of the advised by providing the support politically vulnerable clients require. In the process, we must learn important lessons:

1. We must expect to receive less guidance than we need, so we must be prepared to clarify and even redefine statements of problems. (Here is the old problem of vision).
2. Like it or not, we must expect to become engaged in politics. Our work, unless trivial, will call for shifts in power, responsibility roles and resources. As a result, we must be prepared to find our results attacked or misrepresented, our motives questioned, our costs scrutinized, and our methods derided.
3. If our advice proposes substantial changes, we must expect that the changes won't be accomplished unless we are willing to devote the time, resources, and efforts necessary to implement the changes.

In learning about, accepting and putting into practice these difficult lessons, we in community-based agencies must keep in mind that in our pragmatic, action-oriented, highly politicised urban life, hard-pressed decision-makers simply have no time for scholarly experts whom they perceive as soft, abstract thinkers; "eggheads" spoiling their neat policy-making process. In fact, the word "egghead" conjures

up someone who cannot make a decision, as Louis Bromfield noted in this classic definition --

Egghead: A person of spurious intellectual pretensions who is fundamentally superficial and overemotional in reaction to any problem. Supercilious and loaded with conceit and contempt for the experience of more sound and able men. Essentially confused in thought and immersed in a mixture of sentimentality and evangelism. A supporter of European socialism as opposed to American ideas of democracy and liberalism. A self-conscious prig, so given to examining all sides of a question that he becomes thoroughly confused while remaining always in the same spot. An anemic bleeding heart.

Why would a mayor or any other public official want this type of person around to consult with?

Beyond this widely accepted stereotype, we are not automatically involved in urban decision-making because we are unpredictable rather than political. But surely this is a strength. What we can do in the public arena is to arm citizens with ideas and visions and help citizens, through public dialogue, make up their own minds about issues and participate in an informed basis in public decision-making. Above all, we must overcome apathy which is most often simply a form of "frozen hostility." But how can we do this in an issue-oriented atmosphere where we are often viewed suspiciously by public officials and a public that seeks actions and solutions -- not critical analysis.

There is, of course, no simple answer, but a few things are clear. The city desperately needs political, social and economic answers to problems and it needs to know how to turn ideas into action. There is, it is important to recall, a critical margin between thoughtful ideas and thoughtful actions.

In considering our role, we must continually seek to understand that there are covert or bureaucratic forms of violence to human dignity and to citizens as well as the more overt forms of criminal and civil violence. We have to learn to communicate with all sectors of the community and learn to see the inter-relatedness, the holistic nature of issues such as housing, education, jobs and neighbourhood self-help and development -- in spite of categorical government programmes which tend to segment these issues. We have to understand why questions of power underline most urban issues, and not concepts of ethics and justice. And, finally, we have to understand the nature of legitimate and illegitimate authority, and by what right or authority governments regulate and control people. In short, in accumulating knowledge and formulating plans, let us keep in mind what we want to use the knowledge for, and with our vision begin to shape tomorrow.

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