The Cities We Need / Les villes qu’il nous faut

2015 Annual conference of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (MISC)

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Phi Centre
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APPENDIX 1 - Conference Panels and Presentations

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1. The Cities We Need: McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (MISC) 2015 conference

How are Canadian cities reinventing themselves and, in turn, re-defining what it means to be Canadian?

It’s a big conversation, and one that the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (MISC) -- located in the heart of Montreal, one of North America’s oldest cities -- is well positioned to tackle. Founded as a hub for informed debate and discussion on issues that define priorities and public policy concerns in Canada, for over twenty years the MISC has hosted an annual bilingual conference welcoming leading thinkers from around the world to inspire, challenge and critique how we think about Canada and Canadians.

This year, the theme for the annual MISC conference was The Cities We Need. Held on February 19th and 20th at the Phi Centre in Old Montreal, the event welcomed academics, policy-makers, urban planners, developers, artists, journalists and politicians from all orders of government.

1.1 Key questions discussed:

- Do Canadian cities have the fiscal, political and constitutional powers they need?
- How do we identify and build the infrastructure our cities need now and in the future?
- What is a smart city?
- What is the role of urban culture in both imagining and making our cities?
- How does (or should) the urban night shape our labour patterns, economies, policies, cultures and infrastructure needs?
- How should we be thinking about urban citizenship – cultivating a sense of ownership, participation and belonging to our communities?
- What are meaningful and democratic urban spaces?
- How is Canada’s urban shift impacting Aboriginal life?
- How do we foster justice, equality and security in the city?
 How is Canada’s national health and prosperity linked to its cities?

 How are Canada’s cities located in the larger global context?

 How can interdisciplinary research on cites help us to understand our changing urban dynamics?
2. Conference Summary
What follows is a selection of highlights drawn from the conference discussion and debate. For full coverage of the panel presentations, please consult the conference videos available on the MISC website: https://www.mcgill.ca/misc/

2.1 Context

Why focus on Canada’s cities?
Cities haven’t always occupied a central place in the Canadian collective imaginary. We tend to think of Canada as a vast, sparsely populated country of wide-open spaces and uninhabited wilderness. Clichés about Canada and Canadians have a tendency to veer toward the caricatured or folkloric – Mounties, moose, lumberjacks, maple syrup, Pierre Burton and those bawdy canoes. Problematically, many stereotypes skirt all manner of historical and current realities about our national project and how it came to be. And yet it is those idyllic landscapes of lakes, mountains, snow and ice - not our unruly cities and the people who live there - that have long framed our national narrative and informed our ideas about life in Canada.

The impact of globalization: Canada’s urban shift
Demographics tell a different story. Our world is experiencing the largest wave of urban growth in human history. More than half of the world’s population now lives in towns and cities. By 2030, it is estimated that this number will grow to about 5 billion.

Canada fits into this global trend. Today, over 80 percent of Canadians live in cities. According to the 2011 Canadian census figures, six million live in the Greater Toronto Area alone. Over four million live in the Montreal Census Metropolitan Area, totaling more than the entire population of Canada’s Atlantic provinces. Canada’s fastest growing cities are not in the central part of the country, but in Saskatchewan and Alberta (Calgary, Edmonton and Saskatoon). Canada’s urban Aboriginal population is growing at almost five times the rate of its non-Aboriginal population. These urban shifts are bringing about significant social, cultural, economic and environmental transformations to our country.

One outcome is that cities are starting to claim their rightful place in the Canadian national imaginary. As processes of globalization and urbanization are impacting how Canadians think about, identify and engage with cities, there is a growing public interest in how cities help to define both our history and our future.

As more and more of us live, work and play in our growing or amalgamated metropolitan areas, issues such as transportation, infrastructure (roads, bridges, water and sanitation systems, electrical and digital needs), security, justice, and the
importance of green spaces are no longer only priorities for those in the urban inner core. Urban issues have become Canadian issues. As a result, cities have moved to the center of our public policy concerns.

**Canada’s cities are global cities**
At the same time, we are also seeing a deep public interest in how our cities define Canada’s place in the world. As people and their networks move within and across borders with more speed and purpose than ever before, cities have become important meeting points on the global grid. Increasingly, it is cities – not our federal or provincial governments – that are the standard bearers for Canada in the international arena.

So, what are the cities we need and how do we build them?

### 3. Key challenges facing our cities

**Infrastructure**
More people mean more life, development and dynamism in our urban spaces. But more people also mean increased pressure on our urban resources. Canada’s cities are already grappling with the costs and logistics of replacing aging physical infrastructure (roads, bridges, housing, water and sewage systems). Transportation challenges such as the insupportable gridlock and congestion in and around the Greater Toronto Area, Vancouver and the Montreal Census Area are having a negative impact on the quality of life for people in these areas, and were identified as an urgent priority for civic leaders.

At the same time, municipal governments are faced with planning for new kinds of infrastructure, including laying the groundwork for broadband needs in such a way that reflect not only current but also future needs. For example, Jessie Adcock, Chief Digital Officer for the City of Vancouver emphasized that digital culture is already an important part of a city’s success. Citizens today expect to be able to access information and resources, interact with their elected officials and participate in municipal dialogue online. Yet municipal governments are often so hampered by layers of bureaucracy that they are slow to adapt, respond and therefore find themselves at risk of being out of touch with their citizens. Harout Chitilian, Vice-Chair, City Council Executive Committee for the city of Montreal noted that governments need to try and become as connected and digital as the private sector. As cities develop strategies to support our digital future – preparing for the smart technology and open data needs -- building digital infrastructure will be as important as building other infrastructure.

And what of the possibilities and challenges offered by the urban night? As Luc Gwiazdzinski from the Université Joseph Fourier in France and Andreina Seijas, an urban night researcher who spoke of 24-hour cities suggested, cities also need to
consider the infrastructure required to accommodate new night-time rhythms of the economy. For example, with the rise of new information technologies, the traditional paradigm that suggests people will move from their homes in the suburbs to get to work in the cities during fixed 9 to 5 working hours in physical offices is fast becoming obsolete for many people, particularly those in the millennial generation.

Today, the office follows people wherever they go; it meets them wherever they are. When thinking about infrastructure needs for the future, cities should consider investing in electricity, light, transport and services; regulations (licensing/hours of operation) and in institutions (security/neighbourhood watches/Public Private Partnerships) that will allow people to live their lives along these different rhythms.

Climate is another factor that plays an important role in thinking about how to build the urban infrastructure we need in Canada. Adam Vaughan, MP, Trinity-Spadina and former Toronto city councillor pointed out that we are not only the most urbanized country in the G7, but that we also live in a country where climate and space is more extreme than any other in the G7. (As though to drive this point home, *The Cities We Need* was held during the coldest February ever on record in the city of Montreal.) This point was echoed by Norma Pressman, Professor Emeritus, Urban design at the University of Waterloo who emphasized that our cities must be innovative, adapt to and understand our environment. People need to be able to access and enjoy their urban spaces all year round; quality of life is directly linked to good infrastructure planning.

Do Canadian cities have what they need to meet these challenges? Short answer? No.

**Canada’s cities do not have the fiscal, political and constitutional power they need to meet the needs of their communities**

On the Mayor’s Perspective panel the mayors of Stratford, Ontario, Yellowknife, NWT, Chateauguay, Quebec, Halifax, Nova Scotia and Mississauga, Ontario all agreed that the current fiscal and constitutional arrangements act as brakes on their city’s means to respond effectively to needs of their communities.

Under the Canadian Constitution Act, cities are ‘creatures of the province’. Yet while cities in Canada remain under federal or provincial jurisdiction, the day-to-day challenges related to things like infrastructure and transportation, but also environmental sustainability, social and economic inequality, housing, employment, immigration and settlement (the vast majority of immigrants to Canada settle in our big cities) end up falling to municipal governments to solve.

Often unable or unwilling to wait for the federal and provincial governments to lead on these issues, municipal governments must find the means to solve these problems. Often, this involves identifying and supporting local visionaries (and assuming the risk that may involve), innovating and fostering creative partnerships.
with other citizen-led groups, community organizations and businesses to develop and proto-type social policy and other targeted solutions.

There was consensus among the mayors on the big policy and investment issues facing cities: infrastructure, housing and transit are priorities. Each stressed that cities – big or small - need to be able to plan for consistent and predictable funding. Many spoke of feeling “handcuffed by different orders of government”, of having to go “hands on knees” or “cap in hand” to the territorial or provincial governments. Indeed, it’s difficult to invent the future when, as Adam Vaughn, MP for Trinity-Spadina pointed out, “you’re bound to a piece of paper that was written before electricity was invented.”

4. Moving Toward The Cities We Need

Canada needs a national conversation on the state of our cities. Yellowknife Mayor Mark Heyck evoked a paradigm shift: Canadians need to move past the hierarchical idea of municipalities being on the lower rung of government. Heyck talked about rejecting the idea of 'levels' government, opting to call them 'orders' of government instead. Because of the critical role our cities play in ensuring Canada’s health and overall success at home and abroad, municipal governments must be at the table as equal partners when issues of concern to the people they represent are being discussed and decided upon.

Heyck offered an example of the need for coherence between municipal, provincial or territorial, and federal governments on a particular issue: arctic sovereignty. Arctic sovereignty has been a central plank in the policy initiatives of the current federal government. But while the federal government takes a militaristic approach to asserting arctic sovereignty, those who live in Yellowknife imagine it in terms of building healthy, viable communities, thereby expressing sovereignty in a much different way – one that is closer and more grounded to the people who live there.

Ultimately, the role of national and provincial governments is a strategic one is to provide the support, conditions, freedom and the dollars needed to ensure our cities and the people who live there have the tools they need to flourish. Canada’s prosperity is directly linked to its cities. As John Brodhead Executive Director Evergreen City Works in Toronto pointed out, if our cities go under, they’re taking 90 percent of Canadians down with them.

Urban Citizenship: Cities are for people

“You put up here “The Cities We Need”. The more I think about it, it’s actually the citizenry we need and finding ways to help citizens engage in these issues in meaningful ways that can help us clear that space for decision makers to make some of the truly challenging decisions they face right now.” John Brodhead, Executive Director Evergreen City Works, Toronto.

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If there was one central theme that wound its way through each of the panels at *The Cities We Need*, it was this: Cities are for people, and cities should be at the heart of city building, urban initiative and priorities. Cities exist to meet the needs of people, not the other way around. Cities for people are livable and equitable.

Urban citizenship is critical to the health and success of a city. Nicole Swerhun, Facilitation & Decision Support, Centre for Social Innovation Toronto, noted that urban citizenship is about participation and engagement, but also about conflict.

Too often engagement is out of sync with the decision-making at the highest level. How can cities foster a sense of ownership, identity, participation and belonging? What do these things look like?

Even as more and more people are identifying with their cities, many citizens feel disconnected from municipal politics. Many don’t vote, and often there are not enough candidates standing in elections. Using the example of Montreal, for example, Canadian municipal voting expert Sandra Breux noted that there has been very little research done into who is voting at the municipal level. We do know that voting participation at the municipal level in Montreal is weaker than participation in federal and provincial elections. Why, if cities matter more, is there more apathy in voting at the municipal level? What are the implications of this? How do we engage people? Or are people already engaged, but in ways that are not being appropriately acknowledged?

There is a marked difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches to fostering urban citizenship. For good citizenship to work, governments and other institutional bodies have to appreciate that people already understand the conditions of their lives. They don’t have to be told who they are, what they need, or what would make their lives better.

“The whole idea of disengagement is a little bit condescending because people are participating in their communities every single day[...]. Who is not participating in capital P politics? Well, people who are poor and renters and young people. And I think all the barriers are pretty obvious. So why are people disengaged? Because they’re busy, because they have other things to do, because they think other things are more important and maybe those things actually do build the city in good ways and so we should appreciate that and incorporate that if being part of Capital P politics or Capital P public life is what we’d like to see.” (Denise Balkissoon, Journalist, Editor-in-Chief of TheEthnicAisle.com)

Good urban citizenship means meeting people where they are, and trusting what they bring to the conversation.
From fixity to mobility: A paradigm shift
Canadian cities today are developing in two directions.

On the one hand, they are becoming more decentralized, pulled apart by the processes of globalization. New information technologies have challenged our fixed concepts of time and space, blurred the boundaries of day and night and challenged traditional paradigms of labour and commerce. As Dan Mathieson, Mayor of Stratford Ontario noted: “People with the internet today can do business anywhere. You can study in Yellowknife at McGill, you can do business with somebody in Europe, and you can talk to your friends in Japan.”

On the other hand, cities are trying to distinguish themselves, increasingly drawing on their history, memories and territories to do so. Urban spaces must connect people to their future, but also their history and heritage.

Many of the discussions evoked the need to shift the way we think about our cities and the people who live there as predetermined, fixed and unchangeable to mobile, in flux and in constant transformation. Put differently, we need cities that are willing to transform and evolve, but that also connect us to our history, memory and territories. This means being willing to change our institutions, infrastructure and physical spaces to respond to the needs of people, not the other way around.

For example, Talia Dorsey, Architect and founding principal, The Commons Inc. talked about the civic assets project. The civic assets project rethinks the ways in which we start to repurpose strategic civic assets - things like post offices, social clubs, churches, libraries, schools, etc. entities that have contributed to building cities, but that are now falling apart and up for sale. We need to think about how we preserve these assets, not simply in terms of bricks and mortar or for nostalgic purposes, but for social purposes. How do these strategic assets contribute to the life and health of our cities?

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie offered another example of the opportunities and challenges of trying to a city trying to reconcile these tensions and opportunities: Crombie took over as Mayor of Mississauga from the iconic “Hurricane” Hazel McCallion who governed for 36 years. Originally designed as a bedroom community to Toronto, Mississauga grew under McCallion’s vision and leadership to become the 6th largest city in Canada. Now 41 years old, the city is experiencing growing pains. “In the 70s and 80s, we were subject to urban sprawl,” Crombie explained, “But of course we were; it was the architectural design of the day. We had cheap land and oil was cheap so we built a community around the car.”

Cities like Mississauga are leveraging their networks, cultural and linguistic diversity to build the intellectual and economic corridors that connect Canada to the rest of the world. Crombie emphasized Mississauga’s multilingualism and diversity as key assets: 56% of population was born somewhere outside of North America;
the city's highly educated workforce speaks over 200 languages with the top five languages being Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) Urdu, Punjabi, Polish and Arabic. But how do you build a liveable, walk-able city that was originally designed for sprawl? How does a city like Mississauga retain its history and identity as an amalgamation of small towns and villages while simultaneously urbanizing, intensifying and evolving?

**Smart cities**

Often thrown around as a buzzword, *The Cities we Need* aimed to think more critically about the concept of a ‘smart city’. In sum, smart cities are environmentally sustainable cities, digital cities and creative cities. Smart cities are also just cities, where infrastructure and policy are specifically designed to combat inequality and social exclusion.

The digital issue gives us a good example of how these things intersect. Technology brings about great opportunities, but there is also evidence to suggest that technology is increasing the inequality gap. Not everyone has access to certain kinds of technology. The city of Stratford built this into their planning; they put a Wi-Fi net over the entire city to ensure that everyone has digital access, because they understood digital inclusion is an important factor for their community to develop.

A smart city is one that promotes equality, justice and security. “We need a city that is an inclusive whole where people are equal,” said Dr. Myrna Lashley Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry at McGill University. But, she asked, what do we mean by inclusion and who is included? Who determines that?

For example, Canada’s urban shift is having an impact on Aboriginal populations. 50 years ago, Aboriginal populations were only 10% of urbanites. Today, Canada’s urban Aboriginal population is growing at almost five times the rate of its non-Aboriginal population. In cities, the legacy of colonialism becomes more concentrated and visible. Abysmal state of housing on reserves, for example, is directly related to urban aboriginal homelessness. Evelyn Peters, Author *Indigenous in the City*; Professor, Canada Research Chair in Inner City Issues, Community Learning and Engagement at the University of Winnipeg suggested that one way to promote justice and equality would be to embed urban aboriginal consultation bodies in municipal decision-making. Cities were encouraged to invest in approaches to education, employment, health and social services that address colonialism and value aboriginal cultures and knowledge.

**Urban culture**

Finally, what does it mean to live and create in cities? How do urban aesthetics and culture help to create the cities we need? How do architecture, art, public politics, social practices help to shape our physical spaces? How do citizens create the
narratives that tell the stories of their cities? How are those narratives imagined and made visible? And why does it matter?

It matters because, as Armando Silva reminded us, citizen urbanism is the basis of imaginaries. The question – and this was, in many ways, a theme that circulated throughout the conference discussion and debates - was how to connect the physical city (our infrastructure needs, housing, transportation, green spaces and so forth) with the city we imagine for ourselves, one that manifests our human passions, memories, desires, needs and ideas.

Because in the end, what are cities, really, but what we imagine them to be?

5. Conclusion

Truly, Canadian cities are reinventing themselves and, in turn, re-defining what it means to be Canadian. The 2015 MISC Conference *The Cities We Need* offered up a snapshot of this important conversation, one that has only just begun.

We were reminded that Canada’s urban shift isn’t happening in a vacuum – rather, it is situated within larger global processes of urbanization. As a result, our highly diverse and multi-lingual cities have emerged as international brokers for cultural and social translation, hubs of economic interaction, incubators for innovative policy and laboratories for social change. At the same time, our cities bring disparities between prosperity and inequality into sharper contrast. These are the challenges and opportunities Canada faces in imagining and building the cities we need.

5.1 Key take-away messages from the conference:

- Canada’s cities do not have the fiscal, political and constitutional power they need to meet the needs of their communities.
- Canada needs a national conversation on the state of our cities
- Cities are for people
- We need cities willing to transform and evolve, but that also connect us to our history, memory and territories
- Smart cities are environmentally sustainable cities, digital cities and creative cities. A smart city is one that promotes equality, justice and security
- The physical city should correspond with our imagined city
- A strong Canada means strong Canadian cities
“Cities [are where] real ideas can be discussed. It’s not easy. It was never meant to be easy. It’s tough. But if we build the cities that we need we’ll build the country that we need, and we’ll do it democratically.” (Mike Savage, Mayor of Halifax)
APPENDIX 1 - Conference Panels and Presentations

FEBRUARY 19, 2015

**City Governance – The Mayor's Perspective**
Moderated by the Honourable Marlene Jennings, PC, MP
Panelists: Mayor Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga), Mayor Mark Heyck (Yellowknife), Mayor Dan Mathieson (Stratford), Mayor Mike Savage (Halifax), Mayor Nathalie Simon (Chateauguay)

**Special Presentations - Digital Issues**
Hosted by Damien Silès, Executive Director, Quartier de l’Innovation
Presenters: Jessie Adcock, Chief Digital Officer, City of Vancouver; Harout Chitilian, Vice-Chair, City Council Executive Committee, Montreal; Stéphane Guidoin, Director, Products and Services, OpenNorth.ca

**Special Presentation - Focusing on Urban Culture: Urban Imaginaries in the World**
Hosted By William Straw, Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, Professor, Department of Art History and Communication Studies; Armando Silva, International Project Manager, Urban Imaginary, Professor External University of Columbia Bogota, Columbia

**The Urban Night**
Hosted by William Straw, Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, Professor, Department of Art History and Communication Studies
Presenters : Luc Gwiazdzinski, Masters in Urban Innovation, Université Joseph Fourier, France; Diane Poitras, Filmmaker, Professor Faculté de communication, Université du Québec à Montréal; Andreina Seijas, Urban Night researcher

FEBRUARY 20, 2015

**The Infrastructures We Need**
Panelists: Talia Dorsey, Architect and founding principal, The Commons Inc.; Ilan Gewurz, Urban planner; Norman Pressman, Professor Emeritus, Urban Design, University of Waterloo; Adam Vaughan, MP, Trinity-Spadina, former Toronto City Councillor, former municipal affairs journalist

**Special Presentation - Municipal electoral participation in Quebec: Who votes? For whom? And why?**
Introduction by Ruth Kircher, Eakin Fellow, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada; Linguist, Liverpool Hope University
Presentation by Sandra Breux, Canadian Municipal Voting Expert Institut national de recherche scientifique

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Urban Citizenship
Moderated by Sharon Jeannotte, Senior Fellow, University of Ottawa Centre on Governance
Panelists: Denise Balkissoon, Journalist, Editor-in-Chief, TheEthnicAisle.com; The Honourable Larry Campbell, Senator, The Senate of Canada; former Mayor (Vancouver, B.C.); Jayne Engle, National Curator; Nicole Swerhun, Founding Principal

Special Presentation - MIMO BIMAADIZIWÁ: Aboriginal People and the Good Life in Cities
Introduction by Kakwiranó:ron Cook, McGill University Aboriginal Outreach Administrator
Presentation by Evelyn Peters, Author, Indigenous in the City; Professor, Canada Research Chair in Inner City Issues, Community Learning and Engagement, University of Winnipeg

Cities, Territories, Worlds
Panelists: John Brodhead, Executive Director Evergreen City Works, (Toronto); Gorka Espiau, Director of Innovation for Cities and Regions, The Young Foundation, (UK); Louise Guay, Living Lab (Montréal)

Special Presentation - Justice, Equality and the City
Introduction by The Honourable Joan Fraser, Senator, Chair and Deputy Chair of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, The Senate of Canada; Dr. Myrna Lashley, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, McGill University

Special Presentation - The Research Centre We Need for the City We Need
Pascal Brissette, Director, Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Montreal