

GOOD CITY OR GREAT CITY?

CHARLES KELLY

Commissioner General of the Third Session of the World Urban Forum



People often ask me "What makes a Great City?" It's a tough question to answer. Some define a city's 'greatness' in terms of size, or economic activity, or its history and cultural wealth. From this perspective, there is no simple answer. Not all cities are large, economically active, culturally vibrant or old. But that doesn't mean they are not great places in which to live.

I think a better question is "What makes a Good City?" This is easier to answer – at least from my perspective as Commissioner General for the UN-HABITAT World Urban Forum 3 (WUF3) taking place in Vancouver June 19-23, 2006.

A Good City is one that meets the needs of its citizens for clean air and water, adequate housing, safe streets, secure public places, ease of movement, jobs and economic opportunity, and basic services such as education, health care and sanitation. Another mark of a Good City is the degree to which its citizens

engage in decision making on matters affecting their well-being.

These standards seem simple enough, but in many cities around the world, rapid urbanization has resulted in a frightening array of hazards from infectious disease, inadequate sanitation, little or no clean water, no waste services and excessive urban poverty. These do not make for greatness.

Cities are the focal points of civilization. They consume the most resources; they produce the most waste; but they also create the most wealth for our societies. They provide the ideal template to define and to change the way human activity interacts with the Earth's natural environment.

Globally, the challenges of urbanization are enormous. If current trends continue to 2050, virtually all of the world's population growth will be in urban areas. We

will have to build the equivalent of a city of more than one million people each week for the next 45 years. This trend is simply not sustainable. We have to build better cities and make them more livable for present and future generations.

Just as the challenges of urbanization are great, so too are the opportunities. Half the urban infrastructure that will exist in the world of 2050 must be built in the next 45 years. This represents an enormous opportunity to design, construct, operate and maintain new cities better than old ones.

But building new, more sustainable cities involves more than the physical infrastructure of roads, buildings and sewers. It involves human and social dimensions as well, including the need for citizen engagement and the elimination of urban poverty, one of the most pressing of all human problems

affecting the world today.

Habitat, the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements that took place in Vancouver in 1976, established a unified concept of human settlements, bringing together many elements previously considered separately – housing, building and planning.

The Vancouver Declaration that concluded the conference defined human settlements in the totality of the human community – whether city, town or village – with all the social, material, organizational, spiritual and cultural elements that sustain it.

Now, 30 years later, urban leaders from around the world again will gather in Vancouver to revisit these issues and to chart a course for tomorrow's cities – to make them better able to meet the needs of their citizens in terms of housing, safety, transportation, jobs, education,

health care and sanitation services.

As host to WUF3, Vancouver has much to offer. Internationally recognized as one of the best places in the world in which to live, Vancouver has received global acclaim for excellence in long-range planning and urban design. The region's singular focus on sustainability and the provision of physical and social infrastructure essential to quality of life makes it not just a Good City but also a Great City.

What the World Urban Forum 3 will do is to provide practical solutions and new approaches to allow cities and towns around the world to build on their assets to also become great places in which to live. The simple truth is the Great Cities don't just happen. We have to work hard to create them, and WUF3 will give us the tools to do just that.

If this is not a path to greatness, I don't know what else is! ■



PHOTOS: IDRC

Canada's International Development Research Centre matches Canadian expertise with research capacity from the developing world to enhance the social, economic and environmental health of communities worldwide.

Canadian efforts at work

CHANGING HOW THE WORLD THINKS ABOUT CITIES

BY ADAM PELLIZZARI

At the height of Argentina's financial crisis in the late '90s, poverty became rampant. In the city of Rosario, the

upheaval forced people to look at their urban landscape in a new way: with the help of the local government, citizens cultivated vacant urban land, which provided employment and sustenance for

masses of urban poor.

Inspired by the Rosario experience, Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) – a Crown corporation working in close collaboration with researchers from

the developing world – is funding the Making the Edible Landscape Project, an international research initiative now operating in Argentina, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Canada. Working in partnership with the McGill University School of Architecture, the project seeks to demonstrate how well-planned urban agriculture can enhance social, economic and environmental health.

"We are proposing to formalize this practice and make it a permanent feature of a city; not to treat it as an anti-poverty measure to be tolerated temporarily," says Vikram Bhatt, a McGill architecture professor and director of the Minimum Cost Housing Group. Unlike in Rosario, the practice of urban agriculture in Africa and Asia is more informal, so urban design becomes an important issue, where urban planners, architects and engineers have to recognize this as a [legiti-

mate] urban activity."

Mr. Bhatt is currently involved in developing a site for 150 families in Kamapala, Uganda. "From the outset, the new development will use land, not only for housing, but for growing food, livestock and cash crops, generating revenue to pay for land leases."

IDRC is also active in Kampala through its Focus Cities Program, which works closely with local municipal governments, NGOs, indigenous experts and the poor in selected urban centres to find local solutions for the problems endemic to urban growth.

"Poor people tend to settle in marginal urban sites, in flood-prone areas without clean water and sewers, and often in the midst of pollution," says Naser Faruqi, the team leader for IDRC's Urban Poverty and Environment Program. "Our program is about helping local communities and local governments work together to improve the environment and reduce poverty in these neighbourhoods."

In early 2006, IDRC selected four Focus Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia; four additional Focus Cities in the Middle East,

North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean will be announced this month. Pilot projects submitted by local people in each city are selected and managed through the program.

Dakar's Focus City Team is focusing on how an urban landfill can create local employment while reducing health impacts from pollution. Through these efforts, an innovative economy has emerged around this landfill: metals are gathered and recycled, toys and dolls are collected, rebuilt and resold, and even hair is gathered to make wigs. In Kampala, the team is working to enhance nutrient reuse and contamination risk reduction in urban farming, which dovetails with the work of Mr. Bhatt and Making the Edible Landscape.

"I think cities could become much more integrated and turn into places of production as well as consumption, and in the developed world as well," says Mr. Bhatt, who will be in Vancouver this month to share his experiences at the World Urban Forum. "What we are trying to do is change the impact we urbanites have on our environment." ■

A lot of things are growing in cities. Including hope.



By supporting innovative researchers from developing countries, Canada's IDRC is bringing more liveable cities within reach.

More and better food. Safer water. New jobs. Less solid waste. Better protection from floods and other natural disasters. These are some of the ways that Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is helping to bring opportunity and hope to rapidly growing cities. Since 1970, IDRC has funded and supported hundreds of urban research projects that often have a big impact. And we're coming to the World Urban Forum to share this wealth of knowledge and expertise with cities worldwide.

To learn more about IDRC's long-term strategy for addressing poverty and many other urban issues in developing countries, visit www.idrc.ca/wuf.

**IDRC at the World Urban Forum
Vancouver, June 19-21**

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CALGARY PURSUES PATH OF SUSTAINABILITY

BY LORI BAMBER

ImagineCalgary has created a bold 100-year vision for a sustainable city – with measurable 30-year targets – through a community-owned initiative.

In 2004, Calgary was one of the first cities in Canada to join the Sustainable Cities: PLUS Network. Part of that commitment required the creation of a long-term sustainability plan using a multi-stakeholder approach.

There was no blueprint for this type of planning, says Patricia Gordon, ImagineCalgary project manager. "But we found an organization in Vermont, run by Gwendolyn Hallsmith, which had put together a systemic process for looking at sustainability in communities. It looked at the city as a whole system. If you are bold enough to plan a city or talk about a future, you should talk about all the big systems that make a city."

Calgary's economic, social, natural environment, infrastructure, built-environment and governance systems were all examined during the process. "The focus was on the institutions we have that work well," says Ms. Gordon, "and how to make them sustainable within the framework of human needs.

"Human needs don't change over time – our grandparents and their grandparents needed clean air and clean water – but the way we meet those needs may change. The big question is whether we are meeting them sustainably. Are we going to be able to meet our needs for fresh water, clean air, equity and social well being if we continue down the path we're on now?"

At various points, the project

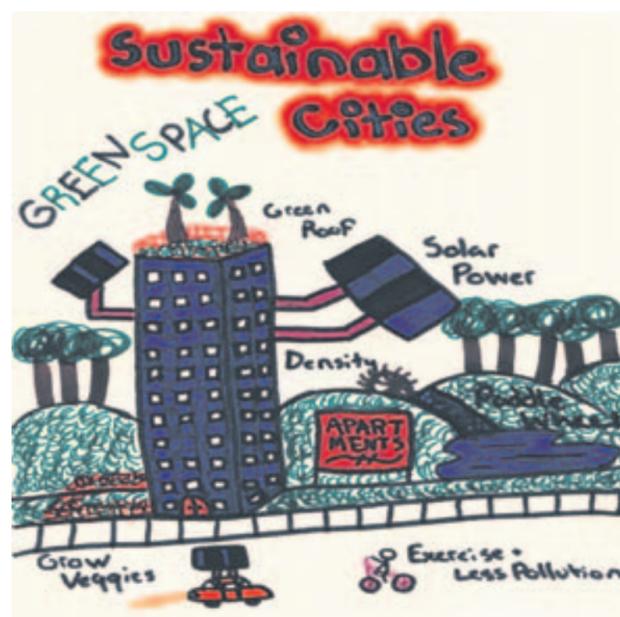


PHOTO: IMAGINECALGARY

Calgary's sustainability movement began with broad community engagement that has helped determine ways to achieve collective goals. Hillhurst Community School Grade 6 students in Calgary studied sustainability and contributed this vision of a better future.

had over 125 very active stakeholders including the Calgary Board of Education, the Calgary Health Region, and post-secondary institutions such as Mount Royal College and the University of Calgary. Key stakeholders participated in a roundtable with co-chairs Ruth Ramsdon-Wood, president of Calgary United Way, and Michael Robinson, president of the Glenbow Museum.

"This was an attempt to convene and interest as many people as pos-

sible in the future of our city and the way we're going to achieve collective goals," says Ms. Ramsdon-Wood. "We heard from 18,000 people, which was no small feat.

"Some of (the goals and vision) might look like motherhood statements," she says, "but it was all subjected to rigorous debate and stimulating and provocative thought by very spirited experts. We have 150 people (on the roundtable) who are thoroughly engaged in the outcome." ■