PRÉCIS

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES AND THE ROLE OF STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

According to a May 2003 report by Peter Clutterbuck and Marvyn Novick for the Canadian Federation of Municipalities and the Laidlaw Foundation on *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada Perspectives and Strategies*, a new role is emerging for municipalities in the development of social infrastructure and, more generally, in ensuring the combined quality of both their physical and social infrastructure.[1] The authors attribute the new role to several different forces: the rising value of human resources in new economy production; the growing concentration of these resources in urban centres; the increasing diversity (socio-economically, racially, culturally and religiously) of these urban populations; and the fact that responsibility for accommodating and welcoming this diversity have fallen largely to local governments. The report stresses, moreover, that the financial resources required to fulfill this responsibility have not followed.

Social infrastructure is itself an important new concept for developing more systematic and holistic public policy. Clutterbuck and Novick contend, however, that it is not in itself sufficient for building inclusiveness and innovation in a community. Instead, changing governance and fiscal conditions call for the use of a "social inclusion" framework to guide policies and relationships between levels of government as they address municipal infrastructure needs. Social inclusion is described as a feeling of belonging, acceptance and recognition and is intertwined with issues of diversity, equality, opportunity, and democratic participation. In the report, inclusiveness is linked with social health and quality of life, and these in turn are closely linked with economic prosperity. Inclusive communities incorporate diversity into their structures, functions and processes, value equity and provide accessible and culturally sensitive services.

The study examines the results of consultations held in ten urban communities[2] which explored public opinion on various aspects of social inclusion, such as socially vulnerable groups[3], causes of vulnerability, possible municipal funding sources, and perceived capacity and responsibility for addressing social needs. With respect to vulnerabilities, similar issues were raised across the country, but priorities varied according to the social and demographic composition of the community.[4] Respondents

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[1] Peter Clutterbuck and Marvyn Novick. *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada Perspectives and Strategies*., a report prepared for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Laidlaw Foundation, 2003. Clutterbuck is the Coordinator of the Social Planning Network of Ontario's Closing the Distance Initiative. Novick is a professor of social policy and community practice at the School of Social Work, Ryerson University.

[2] In groups of 17-34 people, more than 240 people in all participated in sessions held in Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon/Regina, Winnipeg, Burlington, Ottawa, Montreal, St. John, Halifax, and Toronto (two sessions).

[3] Identified vulnerable groups included poor families and children, economically marginalized persons, urban Aboriginals, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, seniors, racial and cultural minorities, and people with illnesses.

[4] For example, respondents in the Prairie provinces were more likely to identify Aboriginals as a vulnerable group whereas respondents in Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal would be more likely to identify other racial minorities and immigrants.

identified municipal governments first in terms of understanding the social needs of the community but recognized that cities have neither the authority nor the financial resources to assume leadership of local social priorities. To help communities address their distinct needs, participants favoured direct funding from the federal government, followed by provincial funding as the most desirable sources.

Clutterbuck and Novick advocate increased participatory governance through citizen and community engagement in the planning and decision-making processes. Efforts to include vulnerable community members and to strengthen their political voice through the voluntary sector are critical to building strong physical and social infrastructure and, in turn, inclusive communities.

The authors recommend developing a process for creating and supporting cross-Canada civic panels to conduct community social audits. The panels would help establish horizontal networks with hubs of communication located outside of Ottawa, grounding perspectives in the individual communities themselves. They would address local issues of inclusion as well as common areas of concern, and they would provide a forum for sharing knowledge and experience on how to best respond to the challenges of diversity and inclusiveness. A primary objective would be to ensure that diversity is recognized in the development of policies and practices for social inclusion.

<u>Highlights for Infrastructure Canada</u>

The social infrastructure of Canada's urban communities is described as the "new frontier" of federal responsibility that at once reflects and yet extends the idea that federal investments in human and civil assets are essential for the economic and social well-being of the country. As Clutterbuck and Novick suggest, building a community's inclusiveness for increasingly diverse populations through a focus on strengthening the combined quality of that community's physical and social infrastructure implies a strategy that goes well beyond traditional pipe and concrete conceptions of infrastructure.

Clutterbuck and Novick emphasize that due to the varied nature of urban communities across the country, highly structured programs and uniform policies related to physical and social infrastructure will fail to meet the needs of individual communities. Policies and programs should therefore be developed, at least in part, at the grass roots level and through mechanisms that enable and encourage local citizen participation.