



Re-defining the Urban Planning Agenda: A joint alternative community perspective

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What is the Alternative Planning Group (APG)?

The general framework of this work is a result of a unique combination of experiences of the organizations involved in a distinctive partnership in the City of Toronto. Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO), Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and Hispanic Development Council (HDC), recently joined by the African Canadian Social Development Council (ACSDC), have been working closely for several years for the purposes of creating and implementing collaborative strategies for inter-ethnic community planning and development, conducting integrative research and organizing joint community events. This partnership is inclusive of the diverse views of all involved. In addition, it seeks to maintain a perspective that could be applied to multi-sector, social, economic and cultural boundaries. And ultimately, encompasses a fundamental recognition of policy planning and development as a key tool for development and empowerment for diverse groups seeking an active role in the shaping of the communities we work and live in.

This work is also a response to the fact that in general from a planning perspective, ethno racial diversity, although a consideration in real practice, has yet to be entrenched in more advanced planning and development models. While true that current planning practices are framed by common law, legislation and established principles, the recognition of diversity and its impact in a contemporary urban setting such as Toronto remains to be explored.

Beyond the technical aspects of this practice and perceived incapacity of the diverse communities to participate, it is clear that “public interest” has to be equated with diverse communities in particular when diversity and immigration are the key driving forces of the City. Hence, coupled with the obvious interest of our partnership to participate in policy planning and development, there is the obvious **need** of APG performing a systemic and epistemological function in the traditional planning forums in the City in order to make those forums more “**relevant**”! (Ontario Planning Journal, March/April 2002, p.8 & 9).

What is Alternative Planning?

- ✚ In our framework, “**Engagement through Negotiation**” is part and parcel of constructing a City that is equitable. Given the reality of a City like Toronto, monolithic social planning, whether done by the state or community, is by definition “partial” and “fragmented”. To be truly democratic in a pluralistic setting requires holistic but diverse,

decentralized but equitable social planning based on principles of equity and shared vision through negotiation.

- ✚ Thus, membership of the APG collective is based on commonality of interest and ability to negotiate difference from an equitable position. Our very *raison d'être* is equity of power relations (not capacities or experience) between the partners. The process of working together enhances our individual and collective capacity but more importantly it engages diversity of population in decision-making and ultimately defining social goals and objectives regarding social policy and urban development. Thus, our role in City planning is both central and necessary if “pluralism & democracy” are to have any meaning in our society.
- ✚ From an alternative planning perspective, the action necessitated by the shifting demographic trend and growing needs of “racialized communities” means recognizing emerging stakeholders and their ability to negotiate and create requisite structural changes in society to accommodate their emerging and competing demands. That is, if the “public good” pursued by the planning discipline is to be responsive and accountable to its subject, that is, the citizenry, there is an absolute need for revamping traditional processes in the field of public policy to include the new actors in such process. The “public” is no longer homogenous or indeed monolithic. Alternative planning offers a unique and necessary perspective on **engaging and negotiating diversity through equity**.
- ✚ The recognition of alternative planning means social investment and economic growth. This is achieved by exploring the implications in the system regarding the shifts in population and also how that population is represented in the planning process itself. For a City as unique as Toronto this is an opportunity not only to tackle an issue of potential international dimensions in an ever globalizing environment, but also establishing leadership that may lead to new areas of work beyond social policy, impacting the economy of the city as well as its connections to the rest of the world. The latter, from the perspective of the APG is certainly value added in terms of building opportunities beyond and above the traditional impacts of local planning.
- ✚ Ultimately the APG’s commitment to enhance human services and environments is related to the notion of building a livable, healthy, equitable, accessible, safe, economically vibrant and sustainable urban region in which its citizens and institutions can partake in the sharing of the thinking and building of a common future responsive to the stated above principles.
- ✚ Within this context, not only the traditional physical spaces are part of the civic game, but also the logical-thinking structures (spaces) that shape human institutions and validate social and community life. Hence, to a great extent *planning*, alternative, innovative, diverse in its most equitable practice can be a tool for channeling new currents of ideas in this field as well as legitimizing and recognizing marginalized knowledge. ***And it is by documenting and practicing the latter (i.e. marginalized knowledge) that the Alternative Planning Group feels that its contribution to the City’s processes is highly beneficial and practical. The work of APG provides the recognition of alternative planning function as part of City process and thus a tool for “negotiating equitable civic engagement”.***

Why the APG?

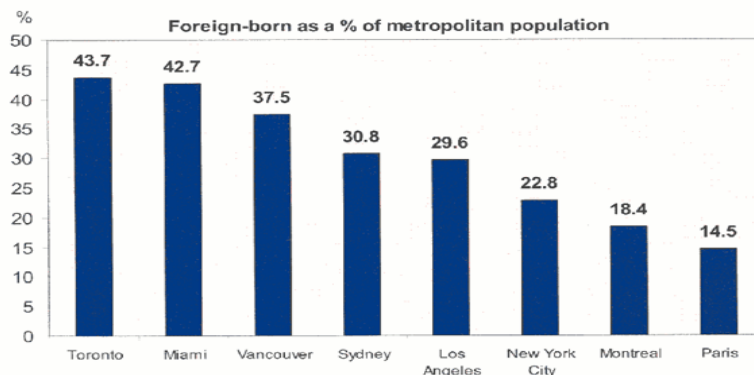
- Our work is grounded in the current context and degree/content of settlement in the partnership communities in Toronto

- The participating organizations have done previous research work and have developed community profiles, statistical packages and different mapping tools that assist them in the identification of policy as a priority
- Some common values across communities have been identified (2000-2003) i.e. unemployment rates, socio economic conditions among selected cohorts etc. Expanding from this early exercise we intend to develop a group of variables to be studied over a period of time and shall include statistical trends and comparative analysis over a period of time. In addition, markers and benchmarks must be included to underline evaluation parameters around goals and objectives.
- The process of working jointly, as part of APG, is shifting the paradigm of social planning and creating new conceptual tools based on innovative means of giving meaning to diversity and genuinely creating participatory methodology
- Emerging themes from our work include topics such as levels of marginalization, economic participation, settlement deficit, degree of social capital amongst communities, meaning of pluralism etc.
- We have a joint interest in participating in exercises that look at integral community development through the use of new technical tools and methodologies.
- Our conceptual framework acknowledges that our city has potentialities that will only be realized if its decision-making processes include communities that are “*significant*” both in numbers and capacities thus creating a more effective social decision making process.

What is the statistical relevance of Alternative Planning?

Toronto, a city of 2.6 million people, is made up of the most diverse population in Canada. In the projection for 2026, the population of 2.9 m. will owe 70% of its increase to international immigration. Furthermore, it is projected that already by 2011 almost 100% of the net new entrants to the labour force will be immigrants (Naomi Alboim, Caledon Paper, April 2002). According to our projections this trend will continue to expand in the foreseeable future, and in different models we can see that the diversity of the City, and by extension the country, will continue to outpace the traditional population growth.

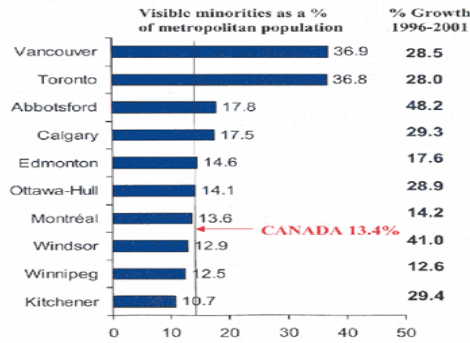
How do Canadian cities compare with other major cities?



Source: Statistics Canada 2001 Census; U.S. Census Bureau; Australian Bureau of Statistics; INSEE

In Toronto and Vancouver, 37% of the population belongs to a visible minority group.

- ◆ Growth of the visible minority population has been high in all metropolitan areas.
- ◆ Projections suggest that if current trends continue, over 50% of both Toronto and Vancouver would be visible minority by 2016.
- ◆ 30% of all visible minorities are born in Canada.



While Toronto is becoming more diverse racially, culturally, linguistically it is also beginning to exhibit some disturbing trends. In 1999 Michael Ornstein showed in his report *“Ethno-racial inequality in the City of Toronto”* not only that poverty was growing in the City but that it also had a “color” to it. In other words, many more immigrants and refugees considered “racialized”, as underscored by Grace Edward Galabuzzi’s study entitled: *“Canada’s creeping economic apartheid”*, were also living below the Low Income Cut-off Point in the City. This fact had been highlighted by the Alternative Planning Group at its forum *“Beyond Dialogue: Strategies for economic participation”*, 2000 where compelling inter-ethnic data on South Asian, Chinese and Latin American communities in Toronto showed a distinct growth in poverty and levels of marginalization facing these communities in general and women in those communities in particular. This situation is developing a graver dimension as new findings are showing a continuing growth in impoverization being experienced by immigrant families and, therefore, children. According to Statistics Canada report *“2001 Census analysis series: Income of Canadian Families”*, May 13, 2003:

Census earnings data reveal that despite the fact that immigrants of the 1990s were more educated, they have had more difficulty matching the earnings of their Canadian-born counterparts than did immigrants of the 1970s and 1980s.

Children living in low income¹, by their parents' immigration status, Canada², 1980, 1990 and 2000

Immigration status	Children					
	Number in low income ¹			Percentage in low income ¹		
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000
Neither parent is an immigrant	905,380	810,370	750,155	18.8	16.8	15.5
Immigrant parent(s) in Canada less than 10 years ^{3,4}	105,490	122,960	230,880	20.2	27.0	32.7
Immigrant parent(s) in Canada 10 years or more ^{3,5}	142,375	139,195	162,060	12.8	12.6	15.0
1. Children under 18 years living in a census family, the income of which falls below the low-income cut-offs (see the explanation in the methodology).						
2. All children except those living in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, on Indian reserves, in institutions and non-permanent residents.						
3. The year of immigration of the parent who immigrated most recently is used.						
4. Includes only those immigrants who arrived, respectively, from 1970 to 1979, 1980 to 1989 and 1990 to 1999.						

What is the “Alternative” learning for City development and administration?

To traditional administrators the case for alternative planning is as formidable as it should be familiar in a City like Toronto. The idea of trying to influence present government-community relations in order to make the future different from what it otherwise might be should not be difficult to accept. ***However, from an alternative policy and planning framework the question that arises is what will be the value added to the current structure of planning by including the APG at the City level as an integral partner?***

A fundamental function of the local government is defining social goals and objectives regarding social policy and urban development. In order to accomplish its goals and objectives the Municipal Government engages in research, mostly quantitative and then moves to do planning and implementation based on that research.

In this particular process, the APG is a logical partner from the City of Toronto perspective. What APG brings to the table in terms of experience and capability is:

- ❖ Knowledge production through community based research by community partners involved in the APG in the last twenty years
- ❖ Qualitative analytical skills developed by community stakeholders
- ❖ History of organizing community consultations
- ❖ Development of individual and integrated information networks both virtual and traditional
- ❖ APG has pioneered cross-cultural/multi-sectoral, anti-racist, inclusive research, to inform policy analysis and development
- ❖ Four APG partners have a collective network of close to 200 agencies plus national and international partnerships
- ❖ Individual and collective experience of participation in City process for the last 25 years
- ❖ Demonstrated commitment to enhancing and developing inclusive city systems of participation, problem solving and capacity building through participation in City’s task forces, working groups, committees and general City initiated processes
- ❖ Individual partners of APG also have additional provincial, federal and international experience in the field of research, policy and community development

These factors enhance the ability of alternative planning to ground local government’s definition of social goals and objectives regarding social policy and urban development in structures of equity and ultimately grass roots democracy.

“If you build democracy they will participate” – Duberlis Ramos

“The process is the product” – Uzma Shakir
