

**Leadership in Image-building Policy:  
Four Saskatchewan Cases**

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"It is impossible to understand Saskatchewan without understanding how the idea of Saskatchewan was created, shaped and sold."

Dale Eisler, *False Expectations: Politics and the Pursuit of the Saskatchewan Myth*, 2006, 1.

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Two events - Confederation and the National Policy - fundamentally influenced the development of what became the province of Saskatchewan in 1905. Directly and indirectly, both helped to establish large-scale agricultural settlement as the area's premier economic and societal objective (Stabler and Olfert, 2009). Toward populating the province quickly with immigrants from Europe and elsewhere the federal and provincial government, along with private entrepreneurs, land grant companies, the railways, religious groups and ethnic networks, worked to market the area's possibilities and resources while downplaying its deficiencies and limitations. These early efforts to attract people began a rich tradition of enthusiastic self-promotion that continues to mark this province's politics and policy.

Strikingly, image-building policy in Saskatchewan is focused overwhelmingly on retaining and attracting permanent residents, and this probably reflects the province's early history and population experience. Shortly after entering Confederation, the population increased precipitously before stabilizing in the range of 800,000 to 900,000 people for the next sixty years (Li 2009, 2). After early rapid growth the pressures of economic stagnation and depression, crop failure, urbanization and the decline of agriculture contributed to the "Saskatchewan Diaspora": the province began consistently to export people. This trend continued into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Between 1986 and 2001, for example, more than 100,000 residents left Saskatchewan (Abley 2009, 357).

Given this problem, preserving existing population levels clearly is a key objective in image-building policy and, as we discuss below, communities devote much time and effort promoting a positive image explicitly toward retaining their current residents. As well, projecting a

positive municipal image to external populaces helps attract potential new residents, as well as tourists. Today's generation has been called the most traveled one in human history, and this fact carries large economic implications: tourism directly employs over 21,000 people and contributes about \$1.3 billion annually to the provincial economy (Government of Saskatchewan, news release 2002). The concern to preserve existing population levels is apparent in most formal efforts to promote Saskatchewan communities, and it was a constant factor in our study.

To help focus the analysis, we approached image-building policy first by considering it as the product of a deliberate choice by public authorities. This contrasts with another approach, which considers governmental action or inaction to constitute a public policy (Pal 1992, 2). Second, we defined image-building policy as a course of action chosen to fostering a favourable perception or understanding of a community toward attracting or retaining human and capital resources. We employed this definition because it spans more classes of policies than those identified by similar but narrower definitions such as "place-based marketing" or "branding policy" (see for example Thode and Masulka 1998; Abimola 2001).<sup>2</sup>

Third, within the broad scope of image-building activities we identified three specific subcategories: events policy; branding policy; and economic development policy. The events policy category encompasses policies supporting ongoing events such as annual harvest or jazz festivals, as well as special spectacles such the Canada Winter Games. The branding policy category includes efforts to identify a place with a specific idea, image, theme, benefit or resource. For example, in the late 1960s Saskatoon was known as "The P.O.W City" to emphasize its resources; the acronym stands for potash, oil and wheat. Finally, the economic development policy category includes a variety of initiatives designed specifically to enhance a locale's attractiveness to business. For example, the Vancouver Green Capital initiative was launched as "part of a strategic effort for the City to leverage the once-in-a-lifetime economic development potential of the 2010 [Olympic] Games" through promoting its location and resource conservation culture (City of Vancouver 2009).

Working within the parameters established by our definition of image-building policy and its three subcategories of policy activity, we explored image-building within four local governments: the Waskesiu

community, and the cities of Humboldt, Swift Current and Saskatoon. This study reports our findings, which are organized within three main parts. In Part one we briefly summarize Saskatchewan's physical setting, population dispersion and main geographic subdivisions. Each of the four communities under study is introduced and described in terms of its history, demographics and economic profile. As well, here the recent image-building efforts of each community are reviewed.

The focus of Part two is on who makes image-building policy in each of the four locales under study. In this section we investigate what sorts of public and private actors do or do not contribute to making decisions in this policy area. In this section we consider also whether two specific factors - intergovernmental relations and social forces - have a significant influence on image-building policy making. Finally, based on the precedent material, an evaluation of each community's image-building policy is presented at the end of this section. Part Three summarizes our conclusions about the nature and quality of image-building policy in the communities under study. As discussed in more detail below, in Saskatchewan successful image-building policy hinges heavily, perhaps too heavily, on the will of local leaders and their political networks.

### **Part I: Physical Setting and Geographic Divisions**

Saskatchewan covers 651,900 square kilometers and features a variety of climates and topographies. As Figure 1 indicates, it may be roughly divided into five areas: the north, west central, east central, southwest and southeast regions (Government of Saskatchewan, Tourism Saskatchewan 2005, 53). The northern region may be further subdivided into two parts: the far north and the near north. In the far north, which borders the Northwest Territories, there is relatively little settlement, few roads and most areas are accessible mainly by airplane or wintertime skidoo travel. Beginning at the city of Prince Albert and extending northward to the southern shores of Lake Athabasca, the near north is heavily forested, features extensive lake and river systems, and benefits from a well dispersed system of roadways. Most of its populated areas are accessible by car.

The province's two central regions are marked by prairie topography in the west, and a band of boreal forest in the eastern region. The most common image of Saskatchewan - flat wheat fields as depicted in Figure 2 - reflects much

of this area's physical character. Many First Nations reserves are located in these areas, and the town of Batoche is a centre of Métis culture. Several small communities such as St. Isidore de Bellevue retain their identity developed when they were established as French settlements in the nineteenth century. As well, these regions are dotted with many small communities that arose from large scale European immigration in the early twentieth century, particularly German and Mennonite areas to the west and Ukrainian settlements in the east region.

To the south, the southwest region is "cowboy country." The topography is very hilly and it encompasses the Great Sand Hills, which are giant, active sand dunes (Government of Saskatchewan, Tourism Saskatchewan 2005, 75). Near the town of Eastend, in badland areas, there are several active archeological sites yielding dinosaur skeletons and fossils. In Saskatchewan's southeast quadrant the Qu'appelle Valley is a key geographic feature. Within it are several well developed lakes, and the area has rich deposits of oil and coal.

There are fifteen cities in the province; their populations range from 5000 people (e.g. the City of Meadow Lake) to more than 200,000 citizens in the cases of Regina and Saskatoon (CBC News 2009). For most of its history, much of the province's political character has been shaped by its population level. Currently it has approximately 996,000 residents, and the population level has not changed for more than twenty years as outmigration has served to offset any increases owing to the birthrate and immigration (Li 2009 2; 6-8). As the province's agricultural basis diminishes many small communities have faced sharp population reductions, or emptied completely, in the last two decades (Garcea and Gilchrist 2007, 347). This trend is a worrying one. The desire to maintain a provincial population of around one million people, and to retain younger and educated citizens within Saskatchewan's boundaries, have been key policy objectives widely shared by citizens and political leaders (see Li 2009; Eisler 2006; Waiser 2005). Community promotion efforts ought to be understood within the social context created by these two broad objectives.

To study how local governments make decisions about building their image, four communities were chosen as research sites. Ranked from least to most populous, we studied the Waskesiu community located in Prince Albert National Park (PANP), the City of Humboldt, the City of Swift Current and the City of Saskatoon. Each case

represents one region of the province, specifically the near north, east central, west central and southwest regions. As well, these cases were chosen because they are different from each other in several areas, such as their physical location, population, developmental trajectory, economic profile, and the scale of their governments. While these communities are distinct from each other in important ways they share many characteristics and so, considered as a group, represent key facets of the province's political and economic profile.

### **Waskesiu**

The first case lies within the boundaries of Prince Albert National Park, which is located in the near north and is the area's main tourism attraction. The Park was created by order-in-council on March 24, 1927, and was opened officially on August 10, 1928 by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. It spans nearly one million acres and is administered by the federal government through Parks Canada (Government of Canada, Parks Canada 2006b).

Waskesiu is a summer resort community located within PANP. For many years the Waskesiu Chamber of Commerce acted as a town council of sorts, representing local interests to the Park Superintendent. In 1994, and partly owing to large cuts to its budget, Parks Canada initiated an operational review of communities located within the National Park system, including Waskesiu. Parks Canada appeared willing to devolve some of its management authority in return for increased financial participation by the community (Waskesiu Community Council, 2009c; 2009a). In 1997, a Memorandum of Understanding described a new quasi-municipal governing body that aimed to devolve some governance responsibilities to the local level. The local council, however, would lack taxation and levying powers normally included within the scope of local government (Waskesiu Community Council, 2009b). Shortly thereafter, the first elections to the new Waskesiu Community Council (WCC) were held.

However, the council's limited fiscal authority constrained its ability to address much needed infrastructural issues, and so mobilized interest in incorporating this community as a local government within the jurisdiction of the Saskatchewan government (Waskesiu Community Council, 2007a). By changing jurisdictions and expanding its authority, the council would be empowered to levy taxes and use these to upgrade local services. As well, it was anticipated that changing jurisdictions would

increase the town's capacity to promote itself to tourists through bypassing the extant constraints imposed by Parks Canada's policies.

The proposed change from federal to provincial control was controversial, and for several years the council explored this option by consulting with residents, Park officials and elected provincial representatives. In 2006 an agreement in principle for self-governance was reached between the WCC and the PANP. Parks Canada supported this development and viewed it as an extension of similar self-governance agreements in place in the Banff and Jasper national parks (Government of Canada, Parks Canada 2006a). A local ratification vote on the self-governance proposal passed easily that July. After extensive negotiations with federal and provincial officials, a bill establishing Waskesiu as a provincially administered municipality was presented to cabinet.

However, progress on this issue was stalled in 2007, when the cabinet chose not to present legislation to the legislature for consideration. This was viewed by the WCC as "a complete surprise" and a "major setback" (Waskesiu Community Council 2007a, 7). In 2009 the council withdrew its request for provincial incorporation because of a lack of clarity concerning the province's policy on levying education property taxes. At the time of writing the community remains in a difficult position: the WCC lacks the necessary authority to control key aspects of local administration owing to its location within a national park. Despite the Park's clear interest in helping the community secure provincial status as a recognized local government, negotiations with the Government of Saskatchewan have not been fruitful (Waskesiu Community Council 2008; 2009b, 3; Kiunga 2007).

#### Demographic and Economic Profile

Along with the difficult jurisdictional situation described above, this community's governance is additionally challenged by its unusual population basis. Owing to its heavy dependence on tourism, the town's population varies considerably: in the winter, about 250 people live there while the summer population swells to 2,500 residents or more.<sup>3</sup> In terms of future trends, Statistics Canada data suggest the number of year round residents steadily is increasing, as winter tourism activities expand and new retirement communities open (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada 2009c).

Tourism clearly is the main economic driver in the PANP region. An assortment of lodges, resorts, golf courses, campgrounds and cottage associations provide a strong service base for tourism focused on the area's lakes and forests. The emphasis on lakes and forests, rather than the wheat fields of the central regions, are apparent in the northern area's imagery, as depicted in Figure 3.

Within the Park, statistics from 2000 to 2006 report the number of annual visitors regularly exceeds 215,000 people, while revenues from park fees normally generate about \$2 million each year (Government of Canada, Parks Canada 2005; 2006c). Although located in the less populated northern region, Waskesiu's larger trading area supplies many visitors: within a 100 kilometer radius of PANP, more than 50,000 people reside within four cities and several smaller rural municipalities. As well, Saskatchewan's most populous city - Saskatoon - is approximately 320 kilometers away from the PANP.

#### Recent Image-Building Policy Initiatives

Concerning current image-building policies and new initiatives, as noted above the WCC devoted much effort towards changing from a federal to a provincial jurisdiction in part because its image-building goals have not always reflected Parks Canada's policies or mandate (Waskesiu Community Council, 2007b). Some community members have desired more effort from Park officials concerning promoting the town and enhancing its services, goals which Park officials historically have not considered the most pressing ones. In recent years, however, Park administrators have become more concerned with promotional activities. For example, in 2007 PANP officials initiated a set of "big picture" community discussions aimed at collecting feedback on Park stewardship and collaborative initiatives. A marketing report also was commissioned and released, and then a new logo was unveiled (Colour 2007). Such efforts have helped to moderate criticism that PANP administrators largely are uninterested in helping to promote this resort town.

At the same time, there are other sources of tension concerning the community's image-building policy. For example, there is a clear and longstanding division between two groups of people about how to market the community. On the one hand are those residents and businesspeople who perceive the community mainly as a lakefront extension of city life. So, this group tends to favour efforts to control local pests such as the budworm, and to develop the



community in terms of attracting new businesses, enhancing service provision and increasing the annual number of visitors. On the other hand, a significant group of people perceive Waskesiu as a unique ecology that merits preservation. Many of these people point to the presence of Grey Owl's cabin at Ajawan Lake as a symbol capturing Waskesiu's authentic image (Waiser 317). This group tends to oppose additional development and seeks to minimize human intervention in the Park's landscape and ecology.

This division is reflected in the content of the community's central website, [www.waskesiu.org](http://www.waskesiu.org). For example, in 2006 the WCC's main page displayed the motto "Environmental stewardship for our community and our park." Alongside images of Grey Owl's cabin and local wildlife were pictures of local businesses that communicated urban luxuries: one picture's caption advised "Lunch or supper at the club is always just right"; another caption told viewers that "A favourite pastime is the great shopping found in Waskesiu." The two different approaches to marketing the community compete with one another, and generate a moderate level of tension between their advocates.

Beyond Waskesiu's boundaries, several recent initiatives promise to enhance its efforts to build its image. For example, in 2007 the province of Saskatchewan announced an investment of \$16.1 million into the Prince Albert area for transportation projects. This project has been advanced by the Transportation for Economic Advantage Strategy, which will invest \$5 billion over ten years in the province. The Prince Albert region was chosen as an investment area specifically for the purpose of increasing tourism from beyond the province, as well as easing the commute for local residents traveling into the park region (Government of Saskatchewan, news release 2007). As well, Parks Canada announced in 2009 major improvements to visitor infrastructure: \$14.2 million was allocated to upgrading a sewage lagoon and repairing degraded local roads (Mississippi Broadcasting Corporation 2009). These investments were welcomed by the community's residents as improvements to basic local services that were overdue, as well as necessary for increasing tourism activity.

### **Humboldt**

In contrast to the case of Waskesiu, which is a resort community under federal jurisdiction, the municipality of Humboldt typifies the normal administrative arrangement where responsibility for the municipality lies within

provincial jurisdiction. Located in east central Saskatchewan, Humboldt is a rural agricultural community whose founding originated with the building of a nearby telegraph station in 1878. In the early 1900s a marketing campaign by the German American Land Company attracted many German Catholics to the area, and in 1903 a group of Benedictine monks arrived from Minnesota and established St. Peter's colony. A new Canadian Northern railway line further helped to attract businesses and settlers, and on April 7, 1907, Humboldt was declared a town. As with many prairie settlements, the railways and agriculture were key sources of economic growth in its first century. On November 7, 2000, Humboldt became the thirteenth city in Saskatchewan (City of Humboldt 2009c).

#### Demographic and Economic Profile

As its ascension to city status suggests, Humboldt has experienced a modest but steady population increase. The 2006 census reported there were 4,998 people residing in the community (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada 2009a). In 2008, health records were used to estimate that 5,765 people were resident, and this is an enviable increase given the ongoing problem of rural depopulation (City of Humboldt, 2009a). The most common ethnic identities of its residents are Canadian, German and Ukrainian. Also, a small Aboriginal population is present. Immigrants account for only a small portion of the population increase as most residents - 86.4% - were born within the province (City of Humboldt, 2007b).

Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting are the main economic activities, employing 22.5% of the population, followed by retail, health care/social assistance, manufacturing and construction (Government of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics 2006). While the local economy largely is based on mixed farm agriculture, there is a diverse manufacturing sector and a robust service sector. Potash mining also plays a fairly large role in the city's economy. The Humboldt economy also benefits from its wider trading area: 29,500 people live within an 80 kilometer radius, and the province's largest city - Saskatoon- lies approximately 110 kilometers to the west (City of Humboldt 2007f; Government of Canada, Statistics Canada 2009b). Owing in part to these neighbouring communities, tourism is a significant economic driver. In 2007, for example, it accounted for \$13.8 million in local economic activity (City of Humboldt, 2007e).

### Recent Image-Building Policy Initiatives

Partly out of concern to increase tourism activity, over the last several years the city has been reviewing its image-building policies and, in 2008, it adopted a new community tourism plan. One key debate has centered on whether the city should retain its brand as "A little bit of Germany in the heart of prairies" (City of Humboldt 2008, 11). In the 1980s the city chose to project its image as a quaint German settlement akin to a Bavarian town. To help communicate the image, the municipality offers businesses small grants in the range of \$10,000 to \$15,000 if they adopt Bavarian-themed building facades. The image also is communicated by facilities such as a donated building housing a "mini German museum," and events such as an annual polka festival (City of Humboldt 2008, 19; 2009b). At the same time, however, a number of competing brands and slogans exist. As examples, it has been advertised as "Canada's Mustard Capital", as well as the "Heart of the Sure Crop District," the "Iron Triangle," and the "Home of Action Humboldt" (City of Humboldt 2008, 11). For a city of merely 5,000 people, quite a few images of Humboldt have been actively promoted.

The 2008 tourism plan notes this identity confusion, and generally aims to rebrand the city through focusing on its natural and urban amenities. It seems clear, however, that the community has a longstanding investment in its German village image that many people are reluctant to abandon. As well, the issue of brand confusion is proving difficult to resolve. Longstanding images continue to be utilized despite a consensus that the community is to focus on using only the updated image.<sup>4</sup>

Recently the city developed a "Relocation Package," and this exemplifies a successful economic development strategy where advertising competitive tax rates, affordable housing and low utility rates has enticed people to relocate there (City of Humboldt, 2007c; 2007d). The council also has allocated several thousand dollars in loans to attract new small businesses to the area (City of Humboldt 2007e). Growth and development are central tenets of Humboldt's three key pro-business organizations: Sagehill Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, and Action Humboldt. Action Humboldt in particular has been very active in helping to formulate a new city image (City of Humboldt 2007a).

### Swift Current

Approximately 280 kilometers southwest of Humboldt lies the city of Swift Current, a modern transportation hub servicing agriculture and the oil and natural gas industry. The area originally was called "kisiskâciwan" by the Cree and "Rivière au Courant" by fur traders to describe its major creek which stretches across a hundred miles of windswept prairie before emptying into the South Saskatchewan River system. In 1882 a town site was reserved, and a CP rail line followed. For many years the settlement was the freight terminus for Western Canada. On September 21, 1903, Swift Current became a village and eleven years later it was declared a city (Tourism Swift Current 2007).

### Demographic and Economic Profile

Swift Current is Saskatchewan's sixth largest city; the 2006 census reported there were 14,946 residents (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada 2009e). Over the past ten years, Swift Current has had a relatively stagnant population level, with a negligible population change from 1998 to 2008 (City of Swift Current 2009, 6). For several years, the proportion of senior citizens has been increasing while the proportion of children has been decreasing.<sup>5</sup> The largest segment of Swift Current's population is aged 40-54 years, and there is a "hollowing out" of the 20-39 age cohort typical of most rural Saskatchewan communities (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada 2009e). Its people predominantly are Caucasian; specifically German, Canadian, British and Ukrainian and most were born within the province. There is also a small Aboriginal population (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada 2009e).

As with most prairie communities, the Great Depression of the 1930s devastated Swift Current's economy. Massive out-migration followed as many people abandoned the area seeking increased prosperity elsewhere. A boom period began in the 1950s when oil and gas reserves were discovered nearby (Tourism Swift Current 2007). Oil and gas remains a staple of Swift Current's economy as companies continue to explore the area: well drilling records were set in 2003 and 2004 (Action Swift Current 2005, 5).<sup>6</sup>

Swift Current's role as a major transportation hub intensified in the 1960s with the expansion of the Trans Canada Highway adjacent to the community. Along with manufacturing, the tourism and retail sectors benefit from the city's transportation linkages: visitors and travelers

spent an estimated \$23.9 million dollars in 2003 alone (Action Swift Current 2005). In the near future, planners have oriented the city's growth strategy toward expanding its reach into regional and international markets, in part to take advantage of its southerly location and proximity to Alberta's oil fields.<sup>7</sup>

The local economy also is fueled by a strong agricultural sector, featuring both cereals and livestock farming. It is home to three inland grain terminals and the Semi-Arid Prairie Agricultural Research Centre. As well, with over 1,000 licensed businesses, manufacturers, and professional offices, the city clearly values its diverse business sector as a key component of growth (City of Swift Current 2007b; 2009).

#### Recent Image-Building Policy Initiatives

In the last several years, the city's image-building policy has changed markedly. Swift Current's old brand depicted it as a "Frontier City", but the attractiveness of this image was criticized after fifteen years without population growth raised local concerns. As a result, in 2002 Action Swift Current (ACS) was founded as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to encouraging the "business sector to become the catalyst for growth and lead in economic development" (Action Swift Current 2009a).<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, preliminary studies reported Swift Current was perceived quite negatively by many people outside of its borders. Image consultants found it was widely viewed as a "red neck" city, marked by racial intolerance and hostility toward newcomers, and this report surprised the community (Smith 2003). So, this community faced two image-building challenges: updating its brand; and countering a widely held negative image.

In response, in 2005 the ACS group developed a new brand and a new slogan - "Where life makes sense"- to help focus the city's new image-building strategy on increasing tourism, business development and population growth through advertising its quality of life (City of Swift Current 2007a; Action Swift Current 2007). The new branding strategy was funded heavily by Western Economic Development (the federal government's regional development agency), and the city also received significant funds for image-building activities from a few federal programs.<sup>9</sup> As well, community leaders actively sought to leverage their resources towards directly supporting local development. For example, the council implemented new business tax incentives, and moved to price industrial land for sale competitively. These

initiatives and others helped increase construction activity significantly: an estimated \$100 million was invested in local construction projects from 2005 to 2008 (Government of Saskatchewan, Enterprise Saskatchewan 2009).

### **Saskatoon**

Whereas Swift Current represents a medium sized rural city, the last case concern the most populous city in the province. Located in the province's west central region and situated on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, Saskatoon is a commercial and agricultural center, and a gateway to the north. This city hosts the University of Saskatchewan and so benefits from a large number of related facilities such as the Canadian Light Source and a major research park (Klein 2004). The area has been inhabited for about 6000 years by First Nations peoples; European settlers did not arrive until the 1880s. Saskatoon's name derives from the Cree word for a local berry, and its origins are found in two failed social experiments.

The first experiment began with the temperance movement. In 1881 the federal government of Sir John A. Macdonald allotted 313,000 acres to the Temperance Colony Society, and many Toronto Methodists moved west to found an alcohol-free community (City of Saskatoon 2007). The second experiment, initiated by two enterprising clergymen, aimed to establish Britannia, a territory filled with exclusively British settlers in northwest Canada. Known as the Barr colonists, in 1903 more than 2,700 British residents arrived in Saskatchewan and settled in what are now the cities of Saskatoon and Lloydminster (Government of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Archives Board 2005). Although each experiment failed to achieve its utopian goal, both groups helped to found and sustain the community of Saskatoon (O'Brien, Millar and Delainey 2006, 1).

Despite the promotional activities of several large colonization companies, Saskatoon's early development was slow. Stagnant growth owed to the river's difficult navigation, and political conflicts such as the North-West Rebellion of 1885 which discouraged settlement. In 1890, railway companies bridged the river and this encouraged three new settlements on the west bank, which amalgamated to form the city of Saskatoon on May 26, 1906 (O'Brien, Millar and Delainey 2006, 5-7.) For many years the city's growth rate lagged that of similar communities such as Regina and Moose Jaw. In the postwar era, however, population growth increased significantly and, in 1985,

Saskatoon became the most populous city in the province (Coneghan 2005, 829).

#### Demographic and Economic Profile

The 2006 census reported there were 202,340 residents; the city has experienced a steady annual population growth rate of about 2.8% over the last five years (Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Association 2007).<sup>10</sup> Economic restructuring and declining agricultural income have produced a rural exodus to urban centers like Saskatoon, which is a leading destination for rural migrants and young people relocating from First Nations reserves (Stabler and Olfert 2009, 141). Close to 85% of Saskatoon's population is Caucasian, and most of these residents identify their ancestry as German, English, Canadian, Scottish, Irish or Ukrainian. A further 10% of residents affiliate themselves with at least one Aboriginal identity group (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2009d). Beyond the city limits, Saskatoon also benefits from a populous trading area encompassing 550,000 people.

There are six dominant industrial sectors within the local economy: mining and energy; manufacturing; transportation; life sciences; construction; and agriculture (Saskatoon Regional Development Authority 2009a). Of the 139,700 people employed in all industries in 2008, about 30,000 were in goods-producing industries while 109,400 worked in service fields (Saskatoon Regional Development Authority 2009b, 5). Saskatoon accounts for about one-third of the total provincial manufacturing value, and tourism is a significant revenue source.

As regards its image-building efforts, the city has a long history of promoting itself to different clienteles. As mentioned above, the early temperance and Barr colony leaders advertised the settlement's image as that of a "good society," unspoiled by alcohol consumption or non-British residents. Saskatoon's next image reflected the sudden deluge of immigrants whose startling numbers, from 1908 to 1913, helped to promote it as the "Fastest Growing City in the British Empire" for a few years (O'Brien, Millar and Delainey 2006, 20). In the postwar era, the city advertised its central location and transportation linkages with the slogan "The Hub City," and its resources via the "POW City" moniker.

#### Recent Image-Building Policy Initiatives

The most recent major change in Saskatoon's image-building policy occurred in 2001 when a municipal agency,

Tourism Saskatoon, adopted a new slogan and a strategic plan. The "Saskatoon Shines" slogan refers not only to the generic bright and glowing connotation of the term, but also to the Canadian Light Source facility at the University of Saskatchewan and goals of establishing Saskatoon as a "science city" (The Marketing Den/Fast Consulting 2001, 2-7). As well, the city recently developed a marketing strategy to target local, regional and interprovincial tourism markets (Tourism Saskatoon 2007).

Although it is relatively small when compared to other regional centres such as Calgary and Winnipeg, Saskatoon has an impressive record of hosting so-called "mega" or "marquee" events such as the Jeux Canada Games, the Vanier Cup, the Juno awards, the Special Olympic Games, and international amateur games for soccer, rugby, hockey and figure skating. Within the last five years Saskatoon Sports Tourism, a non-profit organization promoting local tourism, was launched along with a new website (Saskatoon Sport Tourism, 2009). Municipal leaders also have undertaken several large scale infrastructural development projects focused on increasing the city's capacity and attractiveness for hosting mega-events and large conferences, such as adding 52,000 square feet to the main convention center (City of Saskatoon 2005).

Without a doubt, the main focus of municipal attention recently has been on resolving a thirty-year old riverbank development conundrum. Since the 1970s, community leaders had struggled to establish and then pursue a plan to revitalize a large area of the south downtown core. Owing to its excellent riverbank location, this area offered many possibilities for business, cultural and tourism investments. However, three problems perennially challenged progress on this issue. First, there were large costs involved in preparing the site for development. Some citizens wanted old buildings removed while others wanted them refurbished. As several decrepit industrial buildings required demolition and the removal of hazardous materials, local politicians balked at the large costs required to clean up brown field areas and remodel existing buildings.

Second, some key lots were held by private interests, and it took time for the city to acquire these properties (City of Saskatoon, River Landing Project 2009a). Third, there was little agreement on who should develop the parcels of land in question. Should it be a purely public investment, a purely private one, or a mixture of public and private participation?



Community leaders in 2000 began to agitate for resolution to this longstanding issue, and that December a call for expressions of interest was issued for the redevelopment of a key building. This signaled the beginning of rapid progress toward resolving the development conundrum. In 2004 city council adopted the *South Downtown Concept Plan*, which was a cornerstone for the River Landing Project (CBC News 2007; City of Saskatoon, River Landing Project 2004). The River Landing Project is divided into two parts: Phase I concerns developing eastern land parcels, and Phase II concerns western parcels (City of Saskatoon, River Landing project 2007).<sup>11</sup> By adopting a mix of private and public sector investment, along with a thorough marketing strategy, careful land use planning and a consistent concern to ensure the development's physical attractiveness, River Landing is well positioned to promote the city's image as a modern community with superior lifestyle amenities.

A combination of public and private investment has helped to realize the development plan's goals. By 2004, funding for Phase II totaled over \$29.3 million as a result of a joint investment from the federal, provincial and local levels of government (Government of Saskatchewan, news release 2004). Then Finance Minister Ralph Goodale commented the project represented the federal government's commitment to the *New Deal for Cities* policy, which had been a key element within Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin's 2005 federal budget (Government of Canada, Department of Finance 2005). On April 3, 2009, the Art Gallery of Saskatchewan publicly announced its intent to construct a new art gallery at the River Landing Destination Centre, and that September the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan each contributed \$13.02 million towards the new plans. At the time of writing, the area's development continues with the support of four key public bodies: the City of Saskatoon; the Meewasin Valley Authority; the Government of Saskatchewan, and the federal government (City of Saskatoon 2009b). In total, public investment in both phases of the project currently stands at \$112 million (Schultz 2009).

Similar to the River Landing Project, there are several other initiatives related to image-building policy that involve the City of Saskatoon with one or more senior governments. For example, a new *Urban Development Agreement* was announced in Saskatoon in May of 2005. The federal, provincial and municipal governments agreed to partner and invest \$10 million to revitalize Saskatoon's

older neighbourhoods, encourage artistic, recreational, and cultural activities, and promote its positive business climate (Government of Canada, Western Economic Diversification 2005). As well, in March of 2006 the *Capital City Legacy Projects* were announced, where four local facilities received funding of \$10.5 million in total from Western Economic Diversification to increase local tourism (Government of Canada, Western Economic Diversification 2006b). These funds flowed from the federal government's \$24 million "Canada Celebrates Saskatchewan" centennial initiative (Government of Canada, Western Economic Diversification 2006a).

In summary, these four communities represent important aspects of municipal government in Saskatchewan, and the differences between them lends us the opportunity to search for characteristics of image-building policy that are common in all these communities, and so perhaps typical of this policy field generally within the province. Having introduced each of our four cases as above, in the next section we move on to explore how policy is formulated and influenced within each community.

**Figure 1: Summary of the Four Communities Under Study**

	Waskesiu	Humboldt	Swift Current	Saskatoon
<b>Location:</b>	Near north	Central east region	South west region	Central west region
<b>Population:</b> (2006 census data)	205 (winter) 2,500- 8000 (summer) *	4,998	14,946	202,340
Community type:	Small resort community	Small rural city	Medium rural transportation hub	Largest city in the province
<b>Senior level of authority</b>	Government of Canada	Government of Saskatchewan	Government of Saskatchewan	Government of Saskatchewan
<b>Date of most recent branding exercise:</b>	2007	2009	2005	2001

\*= estimated population

## Part II: Who Makes Policy?

To investigate how local governments undertake image-building policy and who is empowered to make decisions, we consulted published documents such as annual city reports, organization charts and marketing studies, in order to understand the formal roles and responsibilities of public and private actors. To help us understand the informal pressures and the *realpolitik* of decision-making in this area, we interviewed several people in each community, and identified potential interviewees through a variety of methods.

Mayors, council members, administrative personnel and journalists were located through searching organizational information provided on municipal websites and telephone directories. We located representatives of various community groups and social forces by several means. We asked politicians and administrators about which main organizations they interact with in the area of image-building policy, and located some representatives through media accounts of particular events and controversies. Also, we relied on our own accumulated knowledge of local politics in Saskatoon, Waskesiu and Humboldt to locate people who were active, or who ought to have particular interests, in image-building initiatives.

We completed interviews with 28 people located in the four communities under study. Most of these were conducted in person, with five completed via telephone. On average we spent ninety minutes speaking with the respondents.<sup>12</sup> The interview group represents a wide variety of perspectives, experiences and organizations. One unexpected but helpful characteristic of the interview group was role multiplicity, where respondents had experience participating in image-building policymaking in more than capacity. As a hypothetical example, a respondent may have served as a past council member and so participated as governmental representative, and now currently contributes to policy-making through leading the local chamber of commerce in advocating for a new local branding policy.

About seventy-five percent of our interview pool held such multiple roles, while the remaining twenty-five percent can be assigned to a single role, such as "politician," "social force representative" or "public administrator." Owing to the extensive role multiplicity marking our respondent group, the information we collected is particularly rich, insightful and helpful in understanding the context and process of image-building policy.

Before discussing specifically how intergovernmental relations and social forces affect policy-making, it is worth communicating a few general observations about who makes policy in the communities under study. First, policy-making in Saskatoon fundamentally is different than in the three smaller communities under examination. Owing to its size and resources, the City of Saskatoon delegates much control over tourism development and promotion to tourism businesses, and allocates economic development policy to economic development organizations and business improvement districts. Only events policy remains within the city's direct control. In the other three communities, the local government retains control of all three subcategories of policy activity: events, branding and economic development policy.

A second point is that in all four locales under study, surprisingly a small number of people contribute to making image-building policy. This is true even in the most populous case: despite Saskatoon's size, policy is controlled normally by a very small group. For all the cases, we note that the key players are leaders from government, the business sector or the community. As discussed in more detail below, local elites exercise much power and command an impressive array of resources in this policy field.

### **Intergovernmental Relations**

To study how image-building policy is created, in our interviews we investigated the effects of intergovernmental relations within each of the four locales under study. We studied what sorts of resources were available within each local government and at the provincial and federal levels, probed the nature of local-provincial-federal relationships, and also examined the presence or absence of horizontal collaboration among local governments. We considered whether (and if so, how) partisan and ideological differences among governments facilitate or retard intergovernmental relations, and whether the change from Liberal majority to Conservative minority governments has affected this policy area.

### **Waskesiu**

In comparison to many other Saskatchewan resort communities, Waskesiu is distinct because of the numerous business, government and academic leaders who summer there. For well over sixty years it has been a favourite playground for Saskatchewan's elite; a longstanding

nickname, "Whisky Slough," refers to the lively social climate. Intergovernmental relations have to be understood in reference to the summer community's wealthy and socially privileged composition. For example, a former Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament - Don Ravis - has served also as chairman of the WCC (Waskesiu Community Council 2009a). Two former provincial finance ministers, Janice MacKinnon and Eric Cline, own cabins and are regular summer residents. Janice MacKinnon recently was elected as a WCC councilor, and she is married to the president of the University of Saskatchewan, Peter MacKinnon. Many of the province's wealthiest families maintain cottages here, as do many former mayors, city council members and public administrators. As a result of this elite concentration, intergovernmental relationships, particularly among politicians and officials active at the municipal and provincial levels, frequently are facilitated through informal personal contact at barbeques, parties and summer leisure activities.

In terms of formal intergovernmental relations, the main exchange occurs between the WCC and Parks Canada representatives. Alan Fehr, currently the Field Unit Superintendent, Northern Prairies, and a handful of staff officials administer the park, and co-ordinate and consult with the WCC. Relations between these two bodies have changed substantially over the last fifteen years, generally for the better.

There are four main factors that have worked to change the structure of relations between Parks Canada staff and the WCC: 1) the expanding size of the community's off season population; 2) deteriorating infrastructure along with demands for new and upgraded infrastructure; 3) Parks Canada's recent effort to increase international tourism; and 4) the entry of new businesses to Waskesiu and the PANP area. One respondent who has been in business in the area since 2003 summarized the change in intergovernmental relations in this way: "Parks Canada's attitude used to be that 'we deal with squirrels and deer but as far as people, we don't want them [here].' That attitude has really changed now" (Interview 4). One Parks official commented that the administration's attitude for many years was "we know best" rather than "we consult" the community (Interview 10).

A cabin owner who has been active on the WCC stated that Parks Canada's decision to hire a communications officer made a huge difference. The new officer then hired a marketing professional on a three year contract to help

advertise the Park and its amenities, started issuing regular media advisories and began engaging in public consultations. These efforts have increased the Park's visibility, smoothed relations with community members, and also generated some partnerships between the Park and WCC to set up new attractions.

We encountered much evidence that Parks officials have become more responsive to local concerns. For example, one respondent told us that three years ago the Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, Alan Latourelle, visited Waskesiu. Local residents complained about the many infrastructure issues to him, and he was visibly embarrassed by the poor condition of the roads, beaches and water treatment facility. Shortly thereafter the Park Superintendent indicated he was willing to discuss some infrastructural upgrades with WCC, and the Park did shoulder some infrastructural and maintenance costs.<sup>13</sup>

The Park administration clearly has been quite supportive of the WCC's efforts to alter the form of local government in place. One WCC member told us Parks Canada has worked closely with the WCC to specify how resources and personnel would be transferred to the new municipality and which governmental organization would bear responsibility for particular costs and duties. This person commented that Park officials recognized they could not satisfactorily administer the Waskesiu community and its needs, in part because administration's organizational structure is not designed to serve as a local government.

A Park official told us that in the past couple of years there has been more effort devoted to consulting the WCC as well as the adjacent rural municipalities of Lakeland and Christopher Lake. The stakeholders have responded with different levels of enthusiasm. Some have welcomed closer collaboration. Others have not, such as the local council of Christopher Lake. We were told by one local businessperson that the Christopher Lake council was taken over in a recent election by cottage owners opposed to additional tourism and so this body has not been receptive to new partnership proposals.

The role of the provincial tourism office, Tourism Saskatchewan, generally was described in negative terms by most of our interview subjects. One experienced resort owner observed that Tourism Saskatchewan was solely concerned with promoting a single Saskatchewan image- that of flat wheat fields - and largely ignored the different image of the near north. She said: "Eighty-five percent of Saskatchewan's imagery is prairie fields. . . but sixty

percent of our territory is woods and water. Europeans love woods and water. But Saskatchewan's image is not being sold as it ought to be. Saskatchewan is not just farming, not just agriculture" (Interview 11). In contrast, beyond Parks Canada the most important federal partner for the WCC and the larger PANP area is Western Economic Diversification (WED). Many people told us WED was responsive to their needs and, in some cases, actively sought out specific businesses to help them apply for particular federal programs. In general, federal government has a large role while the provincial government seems to play a small role in PANP image-building policy.

### **Humboldt**

Concerning Humboldt, respondents indicated that they have little contact with elected federal or provincial politicians representing the Humboldt area. The Humboldt council does have some interaction with provincial agencies and departments, mainly Tourism Saskatchewan and the Department of Agriculture and Food. However, the province tends to deal with Humboldt's Regional Economic Development Agency (REDA) rather than the council because the REDA "can move things ahead a lot faster" (Interview 21). Ms. Kerri Martin, Humboldt's Director of Tourism and Economic Development, spends most of her time working with community members, groups such as the German Heritage Society and the Junior Chamber, rather than liaising with other governments. Several respondents commented that there were few formal linkages between Humboldt and other councils (except for weak linkages through the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, or SUMA). The few linkages that do exist are personal ones between Humboldt politicians or administrators and their counterparts in other areas. These linkages are held to be valuable and critical to success: one person summarized it as "leadership at the top is the key to success" (Interview 19). At the same time, the perception that Humboldt is in active competition with some other nearby local governments, particularly Saskatoon, for tourism spending and manufacturing businesses clearly diminishes the will to secure bilateral co-operation.

When asked which governments supplied resources to Humboldt for image-building purposes, the federal government was mentioned frequently and two agencies - the Rural Secretariat and WED - are key actors and funding sources. A representative from Action Humboldt told us his organization has revitalized interest in, and capacity to



undertake, economic development in Humboldt with the help of federal programs and funding (Interview 20).

### **Swift Current**

In comparison with the Waskesiu community and Humboldt, for Swift Current we found more contact generally with other levels of government and other local governments. At the political level, then Mayor Sandy Larson was very active within some larger umbrella groups, such as SUMA and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). Interestingly, a large portion of her interactions with the Saskatchewan government depended heavily on personal relationships she built with provincial politicians. For example, she relied heavily on MLA Clay Serby for help with many projects and initiatives. She "would go to him for informal co-ordination on image-building policy, especially concerning economic development" (Interview 18). At the federal level, under Paul Martin's Liberal she met often with federal politicians, particularly concerning the 2005 New Deal for Cities. She commented, however, that generally "the feds are very aloof" and there is no real mechanism in place for receiving input from municipal politicians concerning image-building policy. With the arrival of the Harper government into office, she told us her interactions with federal politicians are less frequent, in part because "Harper is a one man show" (Interview 18).

At the administrative level, Swift Current representatives have some contact with their provincial and federal counterparts, but these tend generally to be limited and to focus on specific projects such as annual festivals. An exception is the Chief Administrative Officer, Matt Noble, who is in fairly regular contact with provincial officials representing rural development and aboriginal affairs, and with WED officials (Interview 23). His interactions with the province lately, over the new *Cities Act*, have been frustrating. He suggests the new act gave cities more authority and responsibility, but not more fiscal capacity. So, in many areas, cities lack the fiscal capacity to undertake key projects and administer areas for which they are responsible (Interview 22).

So far as Swift Current's politicians and administrators are concerned, the most significant, accessible and reliable governmental partner in image-building policy is WED. The Mayor told us she rarely interacts with federal or provincial administrators, with the exception of WED, because she says politicians tend to

interact with politicians while administrators tend to interact with administrators. Here she heavily values, and relies on, personal relationships with key WED administrators, particularly with regard to navigating the grant submission process. The linkages with this federal agency clearly have been beneficial, as several people noted the city has been exceptionally successful at securing WED project funding.

### **Saskatoon**

In the case of Saskatoon we found the same sort of relationship "layering" evident in Swift Current: politicians tend to interact with politicians and administrators tend to interact with administrators. Saskatoon's Mayor, Don Atchison, told us he has much contact with federal politicians, and moreover "we go to great lengths to ensure [visiting] federal ministers have a very positive experience [when they're in Saskatoon]" (Interview 1). He said also he ensures federal politicians are given a lot of credit for their involvement in programs. He notes "Saskatoon is the only city in Canada that has a GST project—phase II of River Landing," and affirms working as a team with his federal political counterparts is important (Interview 1). He does not interact with WED; this occurs at the administrative level.

As Mayor he has worked closely with Liberal Minister Ralph Goodale and Conservative MP Carol Skelton, both of whom acted as the provincial "go to" person for their parties. When asked about proximity to politicians, he argued local politicians in Regina were better at accessing the Liberal government when the Liberals were in government, but is pleased that several Saskatoon-area MPs are influential in the Conservative government of Stephen Harper. Beyond the mayor, other council members do interact with federal politicians, but often these relationships are personal, and cultivated over a significant period of time. Interestingly, as in the case of Waskesiu, many of the relationships originate though informal contact at events such as facility launches or community awards dinners. Members of Saskatoon's council regularly interact with the surrounding rural municipalities, particularly Corman Park.

At the administrative level, senior administrators have contact with their federal counterparts mainly on a project basis. There are no mechanisms regularly linking federal and municipal administrators. However, one senior administrator told us his department (Communications) has quite a lot of interaction with WED, and this is his

impression concerning other city departments as well. He added that under the new *Urban Development Agreement* and in view of the new provincial *Cities Act*, currently there is much interaction between city administrators and those at the other levels as details are finalized and "tinkering" occurs (Interview 7).

In summary, we discern a few commonalities across these four cases concerning intergovernmental relations. First, there is less interaction between the local and provincial levels than we expected, especially in the smaller communities. While the absence of the provincial government in the PANP region's image-building policy-making may be explained by the fact of federal jurisdiction, this does not account for the smaller communities of Humboldt and Swift Current.

Second, we were surprised by the scope of Western Economic Diversification's presence and activity within this policy field. In all four communities respondents reported that WED was a valuable partner. This agency consistently is the main representative of, and connection to, the federal government for local governments. This connection may be more valued since the federal Liberals were replaced with the Conservatives in 2006 because generally respondents perceived federal-municipal relations in this policy area had weakened in the early years of the Harper government.

Another commonality we noted is that, with the exception of linkages created through umbrella organizations such as SUMA, or those established briefly to address a specific project, intergovernmental linking mechanisms in this policy field largely are absent. We found little evidence of positive and consistent interactions between local governments or between the province and municipalities. Intergovernmental relationships are not regular or institutionalized. It seems clear that when relationships are created, they depend heavily on political or administrative leaders, and so any change in the leadership threatens to terminate such connections. Similarly, and perhaps because of the lack of intergovernmental linking mechanisms, in all the cases there was a consistent emphasis on the important role played by personal relationships between political and bureaucratic actors to secure image-building objectives.

### **Social Forces**

In this section we move from examining how governmental relationships affect image-building policy to

analyzing which social forces influence policy making. The term "social forces" is meant to indicate the broad array of organized, non-governmental interests and here we subdivide this category into two parts. The first group encompasses business and business-related groups. The second grouping contains all other non-business groups, such as trade unions, conservation societies, amateur sports clubs and anti-poverty groups. The social force category was divided in this way to allow us to examine a maxim common within the local government literature: business groups are dominant within local politics and therefore have much policy influence (see for example Fainstain and Fainstain, 1986; Peterson 1981). So, we are interested particularly in comparing the influence of business and non-business groups, which below we refer to as "business" and "community" groups.

### **Waskesiu**

In the case of Waskesiu, there are several longstanding community groups with interests in image-building policy, such as the Waskesiu Foundation, as well as groups with a broader mandate that includes the PANP area such as the Saskatchewan Environmental Society. Clearly, most businesses in this resort community depend heavily on tourism. In answering our queries about group activity and influence, one respondent suggested that while the local chamber of commerce enjoyed much access to key decision-makers, other groups had just as much access and so business and community interests were evenly balanced.

Our findings, however, suggest business interests clearly dominate Waskesiu's image-building policy agenda. Several people commented that community groups are unimportant in making key decisions. As well, it is widely perceived that there is a policy bias favouring business, especially larger businesses. As an example of this bias, several respondents pointed out that a large lodge received lucrative tax concessions that were unavailable to smaller businesses. The influence of business upon government is perceived to extend beyond the local council and include Parks Canada. Relations between Park administrators and the business community have become more cordial in the last few years, and the Park has received much credit for being aware of local business concerns, and responding to specific infrastructural needs and marketing opportunities.

### **Humboldt**

As regards the relative policy influence of business and community groups in Humboldt, this case is similar to Waskesiu's situation. Business interests seem dominant. Humboldt faces the same economic challenges confronting many other small rural communities, and so residents perceive their community to be in a serious "race to attract business" (Interview 28). Several respondents suggested the main purpose of image-building policy was to help existing businesses and attract new ones. There was a clear consensus that the current city government was making policy explicitly to spur economic development, and this was a positive change. Five years earlier, elected officials were unconcerned with economic development, the Chamber of Commerce was "dead" and the regional economic development association (REDA) was heavily in debt (Interview 20). So, the council's new, pro-business orientation was necessary, legitimate and highly desired.

Within this context, our research found community groups play a small role in image-building policy. This is not to say they are excluded from the process, as community groups are considered to possess appropriate policy influence if they choose to exercise it. In the words of one respondent, such groups can become involved in decision-making "if they pick up the phone" (Interview 13). At the same time, we did not find much emphasis on the virtues of undertaking formal or informal consultations beyond the business community. One view we encountered holds that because many local businesspeople also are members of community groups, there is little necessity to consult community groups formally owing to these overlapping memberships. Because local business leaders are linked to community groups, they are aware of the community's needs and concerns.

### **Swift Current**

In the third case as well, it seems clear that business interests dominate image-building policy in Swift Current. In part because citizens view themselves as being in a situation where the city must "grow or die," there appeared to be a consensus supporting the local business sector and its policy dominance (Interview 18). In the words of one respondent, "Swift Current is not apologetic about having a strong business approach," and several respondents underscored the city is very responsive to business (Interview 25). The city aims deliberately to create policy that businesses will find helpful and

enticing: in the words of one senior administrator, the city deliberately "sells a responsive government" to help attract new businesses (Interview 23).

At the same time, there was recognition that community groups have an important role to play, and several people told us that local policy-making about image-building is very open and inclusive. The Mayor assured us that "input is sought from all groups" and that the process does "not exclude any sectors of the community" (Interview 18). This city's unusually strong commitment to using planning tools to guide the search for growth may contribute to efforts to formally consult community groups. Yet there are real limits on community group power. We were told that in the event of conflict between business groups and community group goals, business goals clearly would prevail.

Some respondents pointed out that community groups are included in the policy process mainly through interlocking elites. There is "not a community board that does not have a council member on it. These memberships serve as a conduit for social forces to influence governmental policy" (Interview 22). As well, government leaders rely on the local media to communicate policy issues and debates to social forces as a means to include them in the process. One respondent told us more effort was necessary to include marginalized groups in key image-building decisions, particularly concerning events policy. However, past efforts to consult some community groups were met with apathy, and this experience probably had diminished the leadership's enthusiasm for community consultation exercises.

### **Saskatoon**

As discussed above in the introduction to Part II of this study, Saskatoon differs from the other cases owing to its size, and this was apparent in examining who participates in image-building policymaking. Saskatoon has several established formal consultation mechanisms which draw social forces into image-building policy to a greater extent than in the smaller communities we studied. For example, a city administrator reported that, "at the administrative level, there is a double or quadruple level of contact. It used to be that elected politicians and [administrative] departments would each seek out public input. Now there is a new set of guidelines on seeking public input. [There is] a constant interconnection" (Interview 5).

It appears that such consultation takes place very late in the process. A prominent member of the local media told us that generally "people are afraid to debate ideas until they are featured in the newspaper. Some [of the explanation] is street-level - politicians don't want to distract the process [so] they won't take the [consultation] initiative until it is presented publicly" (Interview 4). Other respondents suggested much more effort could be devoted to including community groups in decision-making. One former city councilor observed "there is not nearly the kind of consultation there should be. Lots of decisions are made in camera" (Interview 3). Several people held up the "Saskatoon Shines" image policy as an example of how public consultations actually occur: key decisions were made early on by political leaders and the marketing firm; there was little debate about the goals of the new policy, and in the end the community was asked mainly to decide which was the best among marginally different logos.

As in the other three cases, in Saskatoon the business community was perceived to exercise real influence on image-building policy. Several past councilors told us business lobbying clearly influences local policy, and this was echoed by community group representatives who commented business groups were the most influential ones. In part, this was because "personal relationships with politicians really count" if one hopes to influence policy (Interview 6). As well, we were told business exercised much influence specifically because city politicians and administrators trusted a group of prominent citizens who actively sought out mega-event opportunities for Saskatoon. When one of these promoters presented an events policy proposal, it was then routinely referred to administration for further consideration. However, if a group of people who are not known to council were to propose an event, then "council is very wary" (Interview 3).

While business groups tend to communicate with city government at the "executive to executive level," there was relatively little contact between senior administrators and community group representatives. From the perspective of the city, one difficulty with the inclusion of non-business social forces is that they "have less knowledge of the workings of municipal government than business groups" (Interview 5). In the past, the city tried to remedy this problem. For example, on one occasion administrators tried to organize and co-ordinate the city's various social groups, and then meet with them informally in council

chambers to receive their views, but this initiative failed (Interview 6).

As with the other communities we studied, we encountered the argument that the presence of interlocking elites helped ensure community groups interests were communicated to political elites. This is established partly through formal means. A city administrator explained that "the Council's committees along with fifty community associations are the eyes and ears of Council. City administrative staff [are members of] these associations. So in this way there can be constant contact" with community groups (Interview 5). As well, the interlocking leadership groups are a product of a relatively compact city with a small, stable elite. It is common that a single person may be at the top of several distinct groups. For example, she may be a well known businessperson, an elected ward councilor and also serve as a director on a local reparatory theatre's board.

In summary, across the cities examined, the needs of business appeared to dominate image-building policy while community groups generally possess little influence. In large part, this was not problematic for local leaders because of the presence of interlocking elites. As key local government and business people who make policy decisions also belong to community groups, the elites are aware of the interests of the broader community. Given this pervasive level of trust we encountered in this system's capacity to accommodate the polity's needs, it is unsurprising that formal public consultation exercises were generally considered unnecessary. It seems that actual consultation that could influence policy at various points in the policy process was undertaken rarely and reluctantly.

It is also clear that resources matter. Business groups used their resources to gain access to the policy process. Other groups, however, were left out. For example, aboriginal groups and groups representing poor people generally appeared to be left out of the decision-making process across all the cases we studied. It may be logical to expect that in such circumstances, community groups will band together when seeking to influence public policy. However, we found little evidence of such coalition formation, with the notable exception of an example in Saskatoon. A coalition of community groups was opposed to the South Downtown development plan, and engaged in a fairly well organized, well publicized battle with the pro-development side. In the end, however, they lost the



riverbank development debate and their representative on city council lost her seat to a pro-business candidate.

Clearly, local business interests exercised much influence in image-building policy. This is not because business groups successfully competed for influence with active community groups on a level playing field, as pluralists might argue. Rather, it was because business groups largely have the field to themselves. Their interests were given priority by politicians, administrators and citizens, while community groups largely remained content to depend on interlocking elites to represent them. In view of the province's difficult economic condition for the last fifty years or so, there was a consensus that image-building policy should serve the needs of business.

The widespread concern about Saskatchewan's long term growth coalesces around the issue of young people who leave in search of better economic opportunity. As discussed earlier in this essay, the desire to maintain a robust population level is deeply rooted in the province's culture. This helps to explain, in terms of image-building policy, why the interests of business are dominant, and why this dominance is considered legitimate. Business growth is viewed as the main driver of community growth and well-being, and so what serves business also serves the community.

### **Part III: Conclusions<sup>14</sup>**

In view of the detailed discussion of each community's particular characteristics and recent approach to image-building policy as located above in Parts 1 and 2, the task of this last section of the analysis is to summarize our main findings and recommendations for each community, as well as across the cases. So, below we briefly evaluate each community's image-building policy, and then move on to summarize some general patterns and issues common to all the cases.

In the case of Waskesiu, image-building policy is constrained by the incongruence between the needs and objectives of the WCC, and its means and authority to secure these ends. Clearly the community council should move, and should be allowed to move, towards becoming a regular municipality with normal powers over taxation, expenditure and land planning. While Park administrators and WED have aided local efforts to establish and pursue some key policy objectives, these actions are episodic

initiatives that do not address the core problem. As a result, the policy output is small in scale, serves a small part of the community, and may be offset or undercut by other policies enacted by other governments.

Given that image-building policy in Humboldt was, to quote one respondent, "dead" only a few years ago, the community has made good progress in revitalizing this policy area and devoting resources to it. It remains to be seen whether the new tourism and economic development plans are effective in guiding action and allocating resources to priority areas. Because this community has a long history of image-building initiatives, and because it has sought to learn from the experiences of some similar communities with relatively successful image-building policies, there is much potential for success. We believe policy outcomes here may well be improved with more intergovernmental collaboration and co-operation, particularly with nearby Saskatoon.

Image-building policy in Swift Current is successful in several respects. There are sustainable and well researched plans in place that have addressed some key image problems and limitations with resolve and focus. The speed of policy making in recent years has been quite impressive, and the scale of many of the policies are large enough to secure positive results. As in other cases, we believe Swift Current would benefit from more intergovernmental collaboration, especially through an established, institutionalized mechanism. The Mayor recognized the limitation of her personal approach when she commented it was very difficult when the partisan complexion of governments changed because many of her contacts no longer were useful.

Image-building policy in Saskatoon seems successful, and many respondents spoke with pride about Saskatoon's positive image and ability to "fight above its weight" when hosting mega events. We think there are some problems, however, in the contracting out of tourism-related initiatives to private business. Politicians and administrators affirmed this has been common practice for many years, and that the other aspects of image-building policy (business communication and communications with citizens) are done "in house" because of their clear importance. We believe this practice somewhat hinders the potential for positive collaboration with other municipalities. It also undercuts policy equity and stakeholder involvement, and has some potential to weaken the coherence of policies taken *in toto*.

Across the cases we located many examples of good public policy in the area of image-building. This is to say we encountered several examples of coherent, well designed, well resourced initiatives supported by intergovernmental co-operation. In general, these examples tend to be found in the larger cities. We found little evidence of long term feedback or formal evaluation mechanisms, even for some of the largest, most expensive initiatives such as Saskatoon's River landing project. We were struck by the high degree of fragmentation, by which we mean the common pattern of small scale, short term policies undertaken without intergovernmental collaboration or consultation. Along with this pattern we note that this policy area, at least in Saskatchewan, relies heavily on the actions of "policy entrepreneurs". There is little long term planning by groups of politicians, citizens or administrators. So, we believe policymaking tends to be episodic and heavily reliant on personalities rather than processes.

In summary, we note the following patterns as regards image-building policy in the four cases under study. First, image-building policies are heavily dependent on policy entrepreneurs. This may benefit policymaking in terms of enhancing its speed and responsiveness, but there are large costs if entrepreneurs fail to take act when opportunity presents itself. Second, the policy environment is highly fragmented. There is relatively little long term planning. Many policies are formed in isolation, without collaboration among governments. There is a paucity of formal intergovernmental linking mechanisms. Change in the partisan complexion of government, whether at the federal or provincial level, exacerbates this problem as new governments bring in new programs while old ones may be left to wither despite their clear utility. Third, we note political and business elites dominate the policymaking process. There are few means for citizen interests to be represented in the process of decision-making and, if such opportunities appear, normally the agenda already has been established.

A fourth conclusion is that senior levels of governments unusually are distant from municipal image-building policy. Unlike some other public policy areas such as education, health care or immigration, where municipalities often complain senior governments are far too involved in local concerns, in the case of image-building local governments enjoy unusual freedom to pursue their goals. In the communities we studied, the provincial

government normally was regarded at best as a neutral influence, neither helping nor hindering local initiatives. In the case of Waskesiu, however, the province's tourism policy was considered to be unhelpful to the community's image-building efforts.

The main method of federal intervention in local image-building policy is via WED, and this agency's personnel and programs generally were widely respected and appreciated. Beyond this agency, the federal government generally is perceived to become involved only on a project specific basis, and only when it suits federal interests. There is some evidence federal-municipal relations are somewhat more distant and less co-ordinated since the Conservative party took power in 2006.

A fifth finding is that there are few opponents to activity in this policy area. Image-building policy serves two audiences: citizens already resident in the community; and those whom the community seeks to attract. In all the cases politicians and city administrators listed many benefits of such policies, such as generating votes for incumbent leaders, affirming a positive community self-image, and increasing tourism revenues, but few detriments. In view of the many benefits image-building initiatives can supply for a community and its leadership, and the absence of constraints presented by senior government activity in this area, it seems to us there is much future potential for local governments to be far more active, and innovative, in making policy in this field.

**Interviews**

INTERVIEW #	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME
1	Atchinson	Don
2	Bonesky	Karen
3	Brant	Todd
4	Buerkert	Gord
5	Bunko	Lorrie
6	Dalman	Kerri
7	Dekker	Chris
8	Dodds	Tim
9	Faulkner	Vern
10	Flaman	Carla
11	Greening	Deb
12	Haverstock	Lynda
13	Hergott	Dean
14	Hyshka	John
15	James	David
16	Klein	Gerry
17	Langlois	Hervé
18	Larson	Sandy
19	Lees	Gord
20	Lessmeister	Scott
21	Martin	Kerri
22	Migneault	Alan
23	Noble	Matt
24	Paulsen	Tiffany
25	Richmond	Karen
26	Roe	Patricia
27	Sanderson	Audrey
28	Switzon	Ryan

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## Endnotes

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1 We greatly appreciate the help and co-operation provided by many politicians, public administrators, community activists, media representatives, and officials at the local, provincial and federal levels. Of course, these people bear no responsibility for our findings and conclusions.

2 As well, the "image-building" rubric includes room for examining a relatively new dynamic of inter-urban reputational competition that seems to have arisen in response to technological change and globalization (Whitson 2004).

3 This population figure does not include campers. The Park population can reach 8,000 during summer months.

4 For example, the City of Humboldt's 2009 *Community Profile* document bears a standardized image as recommended by the *Community Tourism Plan*, but also bears this slogan on its cover: "Heart of the Sure Crop District" (City of Humboldt 2009a). This is a longstanding but perhaps outdated image reference.

5 In 1981, the senior population comprised 14.9 % of the total while children represented 22.0%; in 2006 seniors reached 21.1% and children were 16.7% of the total population.

6 It is estimated 85% of the Swift Current areas oil reservoirs have not yet been tapped.

7 The immediate market area serves approximately 55,000 people but an 800 km radius contains approximately 6 million people (Action Swift Current 2005, 4).

8 It is useful to note ACS undertook its activities within the parameters of a formal business retention and expansion program. According to ACS, "Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) is an economic development philosophy and process that focuses on the support and enhancement of existing business opportunities and infrastructure (as opposed to a development model that seeks to attract new business to the jurisdiction in question). The initial goal of a BR&E initiative is to identify and address the community's needs, concerns and business opportunities. It is an effective means of gathering business input for the purposes of creating and implementing a strategic community economic development plan" (Action Swift Current 2009b).

9 The city received \$99,000 for its branding strategy from WED. The ACS organization also benefited from a \$600,000 Government of Canada initiative in May of 2004, delivered by WED to develop plans for core industry sectors in co-

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operation with neighbouring communities and businesses (Government of Canada, Western Economic Diversification 2004). Swift Current also received federal funding from the "Canada Celebrates Saskatchewan" initiative: it received \$296,420, while its surrounding rural area received \$34,120 (Government of Canada, Western Economic Diversification 2006a).

10 Note population figures recorded for Saskatoon vary depending upon the classification of the Saskatoon as a census metropolitan area, or a city. These figures represent the city population, for the CMA population statistics.

11 In more detail, "For construction purposes, River Landing is divided into two phases. In River Landing Phase I, the City will be developing the former Gathercole site and area east of the Senator Sid Buckwold Bridge and south of 19th Street. The parcels of land that include the riverbank bounded by the Senator Sid Buckwold Bridge to the east and Victoria Park to the west, the former A.L. Cole Power site, and a number of old City electrical buildings and adjacent properties form River Landing Phase II. Overlooking the river in Saskatoon's vibrant downtown, these parcels represent the most significant undeveloped real estate opportunities in the province." From the River Landing Project website at [http://www.riverlanding.ca/project\\_update/index.html](http://www.riverlanding.ca/project_update/index.html) .

12 In a handful of cases we contacted people who then declined to be interviewed. These people represented social force groups, and declined to be interviewed on grounds that their group did not have a role in image-building policy and/or were not supposed to engage in political activities such as lobbying government or advocating for specific policies.

14 The Parks Canada Agency was established in December 1998 as a "departmental corporation" under Schedule II of the *Financial Administration Act*. This means Parks Canada is a separate legal entity, dedicated to delivering the programs set out within the Agency's legislation and policy authorities. The Minister of Canadian Heritage is responsible for the overall direction of the Agency and accountable to Parliament for all Parks Canada activities (Government of Canada, Parks Canada 2003).

15 We note our study took place in a period of extended but unusual (by Saskatchewan standards) economic expansion. So, we caution that some of the "success" we report in image-building policy may owe to general economic health,

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as opposed to effective policy decision-making. This may be particularly true for the economic development policy, as it probably is the sub-category of image-building policy that is most sensitive to the health of the economy.