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Urban Aboriginal Representation in Municipal Government in Canada
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Introduction

To what extent are Aboriginal peoples able to build and grow their communities in urban centres in Canada? Over half of all Aboriginal peoples in Canada live in urban centres and over half of this group live in Winnipeg, Edmonton and Toronto (Peters 2011, 26). While the federal and provincial governments devote most of their resources to First Nations who live on reserves, all levels of government in Canada have constitutional responsibilities for “the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada” (Canada 1982), including those residing in urban centres (RCAPv2Part1.1996, 85-86; Andersen and Denis 2003). And the recent federal court decision (*Daniels v Canada 2013*) confirmed federal responsibility for non-status Indians and Métis, most of whom reside in urban centres. Despite a growing middle class, most urban Aboriginal peoples “tend to be viewed solely as marginal populations in need of assistance, not as valued assets or productive contributors to urban localities” (Horak 2012, 148). Identifying their communities may present challenges, but it is crucial to their political representation to locate and analyze the extent to which this community is acknowledged and represented in local governing systems. One recent step toward Aboriginal representation in local government has been the establishment of Municipal Aboriginal Committees in City Hall in large urban centres. While these offices have various names that range from Aboriginal Relations Office in Edmonton (Edmonton 2013) to Aboriginal Affairs Community Advisory Committee in Toronto (Toronto 2013) they will be referred to as Municipal Aboriginal Committees (MAC) for the purposes of this research project. This acknowledges their location within municipal government, their Aboriginal mandate, and their organizational structure within the machinery of local government. This research has the following three objectives: First it will disclose the extent to which MAC are able to liaise within City Hall and with the broader community to assist Aboriginal peoples who are underrepresented in local government. Second, it will assess the capacity and feasibility of MAC to engage in policy processes whose outcomes directly impact on Aboriginal issues generally and programs and services for urban Aboriginal peoples specifically. Third it will provide a multilevel governance (MLG) assessment of provincial and federal government involvement in these policy processes. Ultimately this project plans to assess the extent of representation of Aboriginal peoples in building their urban communities in Canada.

The significance of this research is to determine the capacity of MAC, Aboriginal voluntary organizations, and municipal government to establish urban Aboriginal communities. It is crucial to assist these mostly marginalized urban communities (Lawrence 2004; Salée 2006; Sanderson and Howard-Bobiwash. 1997; Silver 2006; Warry 2007) in urban policy areas that include, but are not confined to education, employment, health, housing, justice and social services. This research will contribute to Aboriginal research by locating Municipal Aboriginal Committees as another facet of decision-making policy processes for urban Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The Federal Court in *Canada v. Misquadis* defined off-reserve Aboriginal peoples as

“self-organized, self-determining, and distinct communities” (Belanger 2013, 68). According to Belanger:

Canada v. Misquadis proclaims urban Aboriginal communities to be political communities and, in the process, establishes a legal framework to guide urban and First Nations community leaders, Canadian policy makers, and federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal officials to better determine what an urban Aboriginal community is and what it represents to the various agencies drawn into its orbit (2013, 85).

While there is a growing interest in Aboriginal peoples in Canada, urban Aboriginal political representation remains understudied (Adams and Gosnell-Myers 2013; Peters 2002, 14). A recent publication (Peters 2011) analyzed urban Aboriginal policy making in New Brunswick (Murray 2011), Ontario (Abele et al 2011), Alberta (Andersen and Strachan) and Manitoba (Walker et al 2011). These studies determined that while there is movement toward coproduction regarding the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in policy processes at the provincial level, the authors argue “that Aboriginal representatives should be involved at all stages of the policy-making process” (Young 2011, 222). This research proposes to scrutinize policy making as confined specifically to municipal government and determine the extent to which Aboriginal peoples or the organizations that represent them (Hasenfeld and Gidron 2005) are included in decision-making processes at the local level that impact on their well-being by addressing issues integral to their urban communities.

The political under representation of urban Aboriginal peoples in political processes poses challenges to their inclusion in policy processes that make decisions regarding their cultural needs and interests. One way to overcome these obstacles is to consult commissions and surveys that document urban Aboriginal issues, specifically, *Perspectives and Realities* Volume 4 of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)(1996) and the recently released Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (Environics 2010). These two resources, elaborated on below, allow for substantial scrutiny of the urban Aboriginal issues.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996) was instrumental in identifying four critical issues that are worth noting due to their continuing relevance for urban Aboriginal peoples in the present day. The first critical issue is “challenges to their cultural identity” (RCAPv4 1996, 520). This is more challenging in urban centres because “many of the sources of traditional Aboriginal culture, including contact with land, elders, Aboriginal languages and spiritual ceremonies, are not easily accessible” (RCAPv4 1996, 522). RCAP also explained that most Canadians do not understand the practice of traditional Aboriginal cultures in cities because they have been taught narrow and inaccurate stereotypes of their culture (RCAPv4 1996, 523). The second critical issue is “exclusion for opportunities for self-determination” (RCAPv4 1996, 520). RCAP reported that a large-scale survey found that “virtually all respondents (92 percent) either strongly (66 percent) or somewhat (26 percent) support this effort to have Aboriginal people in urban areas run their own affairs” (RCAPv4 1996, 584). The third critical issue is discrimination (RCAPv4 1996, 520). One of the most difficult aspects of urban life for Aboriginal peoples is coping with racism (RCAPv4 1996, 526): “Racism is experienced through discrimination, bias, exclusion, stereotypes, lack of support and recognition, negative attitudes, alienation in the workplace and lack of role models in management positions...It is unconscious, direct, individual, systemic and institutional” (Louise Chippeway Chair, Aboriginal Advisory Council)(RCAPv4 1996, 527). The fourth critical issue is “the difficulty of finding culturally appropriate services” (RCAPv4 1996, 520). The

Commission not only recommended culturally appropriate services, but also stated that Aboriginal peoples should be involved in their design (RCAP v4 1996, 554). These four critical issues of identity, self-determination, discrimination and cultural services provide the criteria for analysis to assess the extent to which Aboriginal peoples are building their communities in urban centres.

The recent *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study* (UAPS 2010) is helpful in assessing the extent to which the four critical issues discussed above remain relevant fifteen years after RCAP reported. Of its many findings, the UAS reported on issues that closely align with the critical issues reported in RCAP: Aboriginal identity; political representation; discrimination; and preference for traditional programs and services (UAPS 2010, 42-48). First, regarding identity urban Aboriginal peoples are more positive about their Aboriginal identity than at any time in the past (UAPS 2010, 42). However, two-thirds of those surveyed indicated that they themselves or a family member were a student at a residential school or a provincial day school and half indicated that the residential school experience has had some impact in shaping their lives today (UAPS 2010, 55). Second, regarding political engagement the UAPS asked two questions, neither of which addressed self-determination. The first asked about perceptions of Aboriginal political organizations with fewer than half of the respondents indicating that Aboriginal organizations represent them well. The second asked whether Aboriginal political organizations or Canadian political parties best represents them with just over one-quarter indicating national Aboriginal organizations, just over one-quarter indicating that national political parties and, just over one-quarter indicating that no one political organization best represents them (UAPS 2010, 95). Third, regarding discrimination, Aboriginal peoples still have negative experiences with non-Aboriginal services (financial institutions, schools, social assistance programs, employment services, social housing and child welfare system) that include racism or discrimination, disrespect, judgmental staff, rudeness and lack of empathy. Fourth, regarding culturally appropriate services, a large majority of Aboriginal peoples believe that it is very important to have Aboriginal services and that this is considered to be most important for addiction programs, child and family services and housing services (UAPS 2010, 81- 85). Support of traditional healing practices (which includes spirituality, relation to the land and strength of Aboriginal identity) were felt to be more important than access to mainstream medical care for the majority of Aboriginal participants (UAPS 2010, 116). In summary, the UAPS findings indicate that cultural identity is highly positive for Aboriginal peoples living in urban centres with a strong majority expressing pride in being indigenous. Some Aboriginal peoples rely on national Aboriginal organizations and political parties to represent them politically, but the UAPS does not inform us of actual Aboriginal political participation, which is crucial for assessing self-determination. The study reported on racism or discrimination a significant number of Aboriginal peoples experience with non-Aboriginal services. And the study also highlights a strong desire to incorporate Aboriginal cultural values in social, family, health and justice services. Assisted by input of urban Aboriginal peoples in RCAP and UAPS this research project will assess how critical issues of identity, self-determination, discrimination, and cultural services are addressed with municipal government.

My doctoral research (Heritz 2012) started from the premise that the inclusion of atypical minorities (urban Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Travellers in Ireland defined as indigenous groups whose lifeways are recognized by the state, yet their needs and interests to maintain these lifeways are not always accommodated due to domination by mainstream society) in policy processes is a crucial step in facilitating their needs and interests. Interviews were conducted

with policy actors that included Aboriginal and Traveller voluntary organization representatives and government officials. Interviews with voluntary organization representations elicited their account of their organization's operations, their staffing role and the extent of their strategies, successes and setbacks in inclusion in policy processes. Interviews with government officials elicited their department's role in programs and services for urban Aboriginal peoples and Travellers and their relationship with representatives of these groups. An analysis of these interviews disclosed that policy outcomes favourable to atypical groups are most likely when the following criteria are met. First, the needs and interests of the atypical group must be recognized by government and incorporated in the institutional machinery of the state. Second, there is substantial representation by voluntary organization leaders and government officials who identify as members of the atypical group. And third, some forms of collaboration are in place in the policy network. Findings of this research discovered that urban Aboriginal peoples in Canada are moving closer to meeting the criteria of incorporation, representation and collaboration than are Travellers in Ireland.

I plan to build on the findings of my doctoral research by investigating the extent of representation of urban Aboriginal peoples in policy processes in two new directions. First I will expand the initial research sites from Toronto and Thunder Bay Ontario and include three more urban centres in three additional provinces with significant Aboriginal identity populations. This will allow an analysis of representation beyond Ontario and will assess the strengths of Aboriginal representation in urban centres where a majority of urban Aboriginal peoples reside. The second direction will investigate their actual representation in policy processes within City Hall in urban centres as they relate to MAC. While these Aboriginal committees are recent additions to the administration of local government within the past ten years, they have existed long enough to conduct an assessment of their viability and capacity to address urban Aboriginal issues. They will also provide prescriptive cases for policy learning for all urban centers in Canada with significant Aboriginal populations.

Managing difference at City Hall involves overcoming the fear associated in co-existing with strangers in the city in processes that are ultimately considered transformative rather than repressive. The role of planning at City Hall is defined as "managing our co-existence in shared space" (Sandercock 2000, 13). Informed by a land-use conflict in inner Sydney between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents, Sandercock analyzed what happens when indigenous peoples "from significantly different cultures begin to make their presence felt in streets and neighbourhoods which had hitherto perceived themselves as relatively homogeneous, and how this becomes a problem in and for the planning system" (Sandercock 2000, 14). Since the mid 1980s planning processes emphasized dialogical planning in which the stakeholders engaged in negotiation requiring experience, communication skills, and cross-cultural understanding. Sandercock's analysis of this collaborative model found two differences. The first difference is that the planning model assumes that 'rational discourse' among stakeholders is both "appropriate and achievable." The second difference is that even when there is consensus it may not have intended to be, or actually is, 'transformative' (Sandercock 2000, 23-24). In other words, planning processes for difference must work in a transformative model in which the stakeholders are able to move toward achieving mutual outcomes and that these processes actually address and negotiate fear and difference over time.

Multilevel governance accentuates the minimalist role of local government in contrast to other levels of government that may reduce its ability to manage difference. While there is increasing acknowledgement of community difference in national policy, policy processes in

local government focus on “services to property” while “services to people” are left to senior governments (Leo et al 300-301). Therefore, boundaries are placed on local government in managing difference as a junior stakeholder, up against other more powerful levels of government and social forces dictated by strong business interests.

Methodology

This project incorporates a comparative (Ragin 1987) qualitative case-study research of urban Aboriginal peoples in Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg and Toronto with an innovative analysis of the capacity for MAC for policy formulation and implementation. A case study approach (Yin 2008, 18) locates the dynamics between urban Aboriginal peoples and local government actors. This information is crucial to trace the extent that Municipal Aboriginal Committees are instrumental in policy processes where policy that addresses urban Aboriginal issues is actually implemented over time. Case selection involves choosing four urban centres in four provinces in Canada with significant Aboriginal populations. Sites chosen for this research represent urban centres with the greatest number of urban Aboriginal peoples in Canada. While the urban Aboriginal Identity Population (individuals who identify as Aboriginal in census) of fourteen urban centres in Canada is 258,275, the Aboriginal identity population of the selected urban centres of Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg and Toronto is 164,170 which is almost two-thirds the total urban Aboriginal identity population. While Winnipeg, Edmonton and Toronto are provincial capitals and highly populated urban centres they also have the highest Aboriginal identity populations of urban centres in Canada. Regina, also a provincial capital ranks sixth in Aboriginal identity population (Peters 2011, 20). While this project will focus on the engagement of Municipal Aboriginal Committees in local government, it will also investigate policy development within and between federal, provincial and local governments in regards to the extent of their involvement in Aboriginal representation and inclusion in policy processes in the selected urban centres

This research project utilizes a theoretical approach which is specifically designed for the analysis of collaboration between organizations that represent marginalized groups and local government. The place-based policy approach (Bradford and Chouinard 2010; Bradford 2005; Cantin 2010) bridges the physical and power infrastructures at a specific geographical scale with social infrastructures and community networks characterized by the following four elements. First, it acknowledges that local knowledge is key to effective problem-solving. Second, it locates the desired policy mix by balancing targeted measures for spatial locations and “aspatial” policies for housing and education, for example. Third, it emphasizes collaboration among government and civil society, and across and between varying levels of government. And finally, it acknowledges local governments as crucial actors in the governance of the place-based policy framework supported with recognition and capacity (Bradford 2005, v). The anticipated significance of this approach is to bring awareness to a broader policy community and enable dialogues that can best address the critical issues of identity, self-determination, discrimination and cultural services. Achieving their cultural, political and social needs and interests would assist in reducing the marginalization that most of them experience in urban centers.

Information will be gathered by conducting open-ended interviews to elicit input from participants regarding their awareness of and the inclusion of Municipal Aboriginal Committees in local government. Participants selected for interviews will include Municipal Aboriginal Committee staff, City Hall staff from various departments, elected municipal officials, provincial

government staff responsible for urban affairs and members of voluntary organization and social services whose mandate includes urban Aboriginal peoples. Confidential interviews will be conducted at a venue of their choosing, that will most likely be at their work place, or they may be conducted by telephone.

The gathered information will incorporate a place-based analysis based on the following criteria. First, background will describe each Municipal Aboriginal Committee, when it was established, its staff compliment, whether staff identify as Aboriginal, and its function within City Hall. Second, the relationship between Municipal Aboriginal Committees and City Hall will be assessed to determine the extent of their accomplishments in bringing awareness and policy development that achieves outcomes that address issues specific to urban Aboriginal peoples. It will also assess areas where policy may have been developed but not implemented, policy outcomes have been realized or policy development is still struggling. Third, an assessment will be undertaken to report on the role of federal and provincial governments in assisting municipalities generally or Municipal Aboriginal Committees specifically regarding Aboriginal peoples. Fourth, policy documents and reports generated by Municipal Aboriginal Committees and/or other departments in City Hall will be analyzed to determine the representation of Aboriginal peoples in local government. And fifth, information will be aggregated for these four urban centres to assess cases that have achieved success in representing urban Aboriginal peoples through Municipal Aboriginal Committees that may be prescriptive as policy learning for other urban centres in Canada.

The outcomes for this research are to determine the extent to which urban Aboriginal peoples are represented in political systems and policy processes at the local level of government. Their representation and success in achieving policy outcomes that address urban Aboriginal issues impacts on broad state and societal principles and structures that have a fiduciary responsibility to assist and collaborate with these marginalized communities (Graham and Peters 2002).

The goal of this research is to shed more light on the actual inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in policy processes, specifically the extent of their political representation in MAC and the engagement of Aboriginal communities within large urban centres in Canada.

Municipal Aboriginal Committees

This preliminary section will introduce MAC in Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg and Toronto by describing its mandate, formal agreements, and location within City Hall. This will disclose the extent to which MAC are formally incorporated within City Hall. By doing so, it will facilitate further investigation into MAC and their impact on representation of urban Aboriginal peoples in local government.

Edmonton

The Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO) describes itself as a place where Aboriginal peoples and organizations make contact with the City of Edmonton, and are linked to appropriate City departments and access information (ARO 2013). The ARO specifically works to: build relations between the City of Edmonton, Aboriginal peoples and the organizations that serve them; provide services address their needs; coordinate City participation in Aboriginal community initiatives; assist the City in fulfilling their Aboriginal Declaration and the Urban

Aboriginal Accord; and support the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Affairs Committee (ARO 2013). *The Bridge* Newsletter is published by the ARO once a year and the past five publications are accessible by links from its website.

The Aboriginal Declaration (2005) is a one page document titled “Declaration: Strengthening Relationships Between the City of Edmonton and Urban Aboriginal People,” structured by the headings: “Celebrating Past Aboriginal Contributions”; “Recognizing That Past Injustices Have Impacted Aboriginal Society”; “Acknowledging The Unique Challenges Facing Aboriginal People”; “Valuing Aboriginal Contributions Today”; “Appreciating The Legitimacy of Aboriginal Autonomy”; and “Aboriginal People In Our City’s Future” (ARO 2013). The Urban Aboriginal Accord is a one page principle-based relationship agreement between the Aboriginal communities in Edmonton and the City of Edmonton Administration that puts into action commitments established in the Aboriginal Declaration, based on the guiding principles of: relationships; agreements; celebrations; and renewal (ARO 2013).

Regina

Formal agreements with the City of Regina and Aboriginal peoples focuses on agreements entered with First Nations groups that include File Hills Qu’Appelle Tribal Council, Piapot First Nation, and Star Blanket Cree Nation. The city also provides information regarding: specialized Aboriginal Sport, Culture & Recreation Programs; a scholarship program; and the Urban Aboriginal Community Grant Program.

Winnipeg

First Steps: Municipal Aboriginal Pathways (MAP) outlines a long term planning process between Winnipeg’s urban Aboriginal peoples and Council’s commitment to increasing Aboriginal awareness and access to civic services. It is intended “to be utilized to increase awareness about civic services and to assist new Aboriginal residents in their transition to City life in Winnipeg” (Winnipeg 2013). In addition to MAP, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Winnipeg and the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) formalizes the commitment of the three stakeholders to participate, “in developing strategies regarding training, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal employees at the City of Winnipeg” (Winnipeg 2013). Winnipeg’s long term planning document, *Plan Winnipeg 2020 Vision* acknowledges increased Aboriginal participation in city affairs under the heading, “Promote Self-Reliant Aboriginal Communities” (Winnipeg n.d., 20).

Toronto

Within the Office of Equity, Diversity and Human Rights, the Aboriginal Advisory Committee (AAC) was founded in 1999 to advise Toronto City Council on Aboriginal affairs in addition to acting as a liaison between the Aboriginal community and City Council. In July 2010 city council adopted a Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal communities in Toronto titled, *Towards a Framework for Urban Aboriginal Relations in Toronto*.

The recently published *Toronto Aboriginal Research Project Report* (McCaskill et al, 2011), informed by surveying over 1,000 individuals, will assist in gaining insight to the “aspirations and challenges facing Aboriginal peoples in the Greater Toronto Area” (TASSC 2013).

Next Steps

Having established formal agreements, next steps involve investigating the extent to which these selected municipalities are actually assisting and working with urban Aboriginal peoples to build their communities. First, background information gathering will locate each MAC within the organizational framework of municipal government. Second, horizontal and vertical links between MAC and City Hall departments and officials will be analyzed to determine the extent of their accomplishments and obstacles in bringing awareness and addressing Aboriginal policy issues. Third, an assessment will be undertaken to report on the role of federal and provincial governments in assisting municipalities generally or MAC specifically, regarding Aboriginal issues. Fourth, policy documents and reports generated by MAC and/or other related departments will be scrutinized to determine the representation of Aboriginal peoples in local government. Finally, information will be aggregated from the four urban centres to assess cases that have achieved success in representing urban Aboriginal peoples through MAC that may be prescriptive as policy learning for urban centres in Canada with significant Aboriginal populations.

Municipal Documents

Edmonton

Edmonton City Hall – Aboriginal Relations Office

www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/aboriginal-relations-office.aspx

Urban Aboriginal Accord Declaration (2005)

www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/EdmontonUrbanAboriginalAccordDeclaration.pdf

Urban Aboriginal Accord

www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/UrbanAboriginalAccord.pdf

Regina

City & First Nation Agreements

www.regina.ca/residents/social-grants-programs/aboriginal-program-agreements/city-first-nation-agreements/

City of Regina and File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council (2007)

www.regina.ca/opencms/export/sites/regina.ca/residents/social-grants-programs/.media/pdf/city-of-regina-and-file-hills-quappelle-tribal-council.pdf

City of Regina and Piapot First Nation (2007)

www.regina.ca/opencms/export/sites/regina.ca/residents/social-grants-programs/.media/pdf/city-of-regina-and-piapot-first-nation.pdf

City of Regina and Star Blanket Cree Nation, First Nations University and Regina Police Service (2007)

www.regina.ca/opencms/export/sites/regina.ca/residents/social-grants-programs/.media/pdf/city-of-regina-and-star-blanket-cree-first-nations-university-and-regina-police-service.pdf

Aboriginal Employment Development Program Partnership Agreement (2008)

www.regina.ca/opencms/export/sites/regina.ca/residents/social-grants-programs/.media/pdf/aboriginal-employment-development-program.pdf

Winnipeg

Aboriginal Information Package

www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/guide/map/

First Steps: Municipal Aboriginal Pathways (2003)

www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/pdfs/highlights/firststepsmunicipalaboriginalpathways.pdf

Plan Winnipeg 2020 Vision: A Long Range Policy Plan for City Council

winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/plan_2020.pdf

Toronto

Toronto – Aboriginal Affairs Committee (2010-2014)

app.toronto.ca/tmmis/decisionBodyProfile.do?function=doPrepare&meetingId=7446#Meeting-2013.AA11

Development of an Urban Aboriginal Framework (UAF) for the City of Toronto (2010)

www.toronto.ca/civic-engagement/council-briefing/pdf/1-1-16.pdf

Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal Communities in Toronto (2010)

www.trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/File/CityofToronto.pdf

Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (2011)

<http://www.councilfire.ca/Acrobat/tarp-final-report2011.pdf>

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