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Indigenous Governance in Winnipeg and Ottawa: Making Space for Self-Determination

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Abstract

Despite the growth of urban Indigenous populations in Canada, the study of political arrangements that facilitate urban Indigenous self-government remains neglected as an area of analysis. In this paper, I argue that, while the recent proliferation of collaborative relationships between governments and Indigenous organizations has provided opportunities for self-determination, these initiatives have thus far failed to create sufficient space for Indigenous authority and decision-making power in cities. Drawing on data from Winnipeg and Ottawa, this paper examines how issues of jurisdiction, access, representation and funding constrain the ability of local and regional First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Aboriginal organizations to deliver culturally appropriate services, build community capacity and adequately address the social, economic, political and cultural priorities of their communities. This failure to enhance Indigenous self-government in urban settings continues to exacerbate the marginalization experienced by many Indigenous people. Reframing the issues so that urban Indigenous peoples are no longer seen as deficient and out of place, but rather as constituting legitimate communities and possessing inherent rights, will be part and parcel of making space for urban Indigenous self-determination.

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Indigenous Governance in Winnipeg and Ottawa: Making Space for Self-Determination

Introduction

In Canada, over half of all Indigenous¹ people live in urban areas.² Given the growth of Indigenous populations in cities, particularly in Western Canada, political arrangements that enhance Indigenous self-determination and facilitate self-government require significantly more attention. Currently, a highly uneven array of institutional actors and configurations constitute the terrain of urban Indigenous governance. Consequently, a major challenge for Indigenous peoples who reside in urban areas is the lack of clarity with regard to the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government, Aboriginal governments, and local institutions. This paper examines the dynamics of urban Indigenous governance in Winnipeg and Ottawa, discussing ways in which processes, relationships, and structures can be transformed to better reflect the needs, rights, and aspirations of urban Indigenous communities.

Following a brief description of the methodological choices informing this work in the first section (I), I discuss how public discourses have framed urban Indigenous communities (II). Settler notions of where Indigenous peoples belong continue to inform policies that deny urban Indigenous communities the necessary political space and adequate resources to be self-governing. The third section of this paper (III) outlines how urban Indigenous self-determination and self-government are conceptualized, and how inherent Indigenous rights provide the normative basis for transforming urban Aboriginal governance. The fourth section (IV) provides a brief demographic overview of Indigenous populations in Winnipeg and Ottawa and sketches the local contexts of Indigenous governance. In Section V, I examine three main constraints on urban Aboriginal self-determination that interview participants have identified around issues of funding, access, and representation. Finally, Section VI highlights how increased collaboration has been transforming the dynamics of urban Indigenous governance in Ottawa and Winnipeg.

However, I argue that these transformations converge more with larger processes around urban governance and neoliberal restructuring than with Indigenous struggles for self-determination. While the recent proliferation of partnerships has provided more opportunities for urban Indigenous self-determination, the collaborative paradigm that has emerged with respect to urban Aboriginal governance has failed to establish Indigenous control over how individuals and communities in cities are governed, including genuine decision-making power, adequate resources and culturally appropriate governing institutions. This paper asserts that a

¹ In this paper, “Indigenous” is used to refer to the descendants of the original inhabitants of what is now Canada. The usefulness of the term lies in its transcendence of localized colonial contexts, its anti-colonial trajectory and valorization of the collective struggles of colonized peoples, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London/ New York: Zed Books, 1999; see also Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism”, *Government and Opposition*, 40, no. 4 (2005): 597. The state-centered term “Aboriginal” is also used to denote First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, as defined in section 35(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982.

² Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census* (Catalogue no. 97-558-XIE). Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2008.

comprehensive rescaling of Aboriginal governance – including but not restricted to the urban scale – is required to address the collective rights of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples who live in cities. This also entails space for differentiated governing arrangements, as compositions, priorities, and aspirations of urban Indigenous communities vary both within and across cities in Canada.

I. Methodology

In addition to the research literature and policy documents, I draw on interviews with 31 key informants involved in urban Aboriginal governance in Winnipeg and Ottawa as the empirical basis of this paper. Given the dearth of research – particularly qualitative research – on urban Indigenous realities, expert interviews seem appropriate to examine the constraints on urban Indigenous self-government. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to shed light on complex institutional and policy environments, elucidate a range of opinions, and validate the knowledge of the individuals who provided the data.³ I used a core set of open-ended questions with additional questions tailored to the individual being interviewed. Among the core questions addressed in each of the interviews were: what do Indigenous self-determination and self-government mean in an urban context and what are the barriers to implementing Aboriginal self-government in your city?

The interview participants were selected based on their professional roles in Aboriginal service delivery agencies, community organizations, political advocacy bodies, and First Nation, federal, provincial and municipal governments. The individuals who made themselves available to be interviewed in person (24) or over the telephone (7) worked for local Aboriginal service agencies (12); local, regional, and national Aboriginal political organizations (8); a First Nation government (1); the City of Winnipeg (4); the City of Ottawa (1); Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Manitoba (1); and the federal government (4). The aim was not to work from a representative sample but to elicit a range of perspectives from the main actors involved in urban Indigenous governance and most importantly from Indigenous community leaders – many of whom have been working extensively with urban Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Ottawa and Winnipeg. The interviews ranged in duration from 16 to 87 minutes, with an average length of 53 minutes. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed and coded. Excerpts were then amalgamated according to a list of themes that emerged from the data.

The decision to compare Winnipeg and Ottawa forms part of a broader argument that I am making in relation to the limited analytical utility of “urban Aboriginal” as a category. Indigenous populations are heterogeneous across and within Canadian cities with respect to cultural specificity, class composition, legal status, level of services, and political representation. This renders the umbrella category and abstractions from local institutional contexts problematic. The ways in which the two sites included in this analysis differ will be discussed in more detail in Section IV. It is hoped that a comparative analysis can bring the complexities of urban Indigenous governance into sharper focus.

³ See Kevin Dunn, “Interviewing”, Iain Hay, ed. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000, 52.

II. Framing Urban Indigenous Communities

There has been relatively little research on urban Indigenous communities.⁴ To a large extent, this lack of engagement reflects dominant notions of how legitimate Aboriginal communities are constituted – and where.⁵ While urban Aboriginal populations have been growing steadily since the 1940s,⁶ the spatialization of Indigenous identities in academic and public policy discourses has firmly “placed” them in remote and rural areas.⁷ This is problematic given that the majority of Indigenous people live in urban areas⁸, that a number of reserves are adjacent to or within city limits, and that Canadian cities are located on traditional Indigenous territories, often in locations of pre-existing Indigenous settlements.

In contrast, conceptualizations of Indigeneity that transcend the boundaries of the reserve geography reclaim cities as Indigenous places.⁹ As one community worker in Ottawa pointed out, “the irony is that [...] major cities, towns, villages in this country were urban areas for Aboriginal peoples for thousands of years. I mean Ottawa, this was a major trading intersection, because of the rivers. And Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, all the major cities, they were all urban areas that you know – it’s like we’re coming home. And we just don’t have a tendency to necessarily think that way, but again, they were our urban areas and they still are”.¹⁰ In addition to reclaiming cities discursively, Indigenous groups are also reasserting city space through the transformation of governing institutions. Moreover, both Ottawa and Winnipeg are subject to land claims. Indigenous nations have thus problematized the false dichotomy between Aboriginal and urban. This binary is also rendered misleading by current mobility patterns which show the actual fluidity of these socio-spatial boundaries.¹¹ In fact, Indigenous peoples in Canada are “stretching out social relations and identities across urban and rural space”.¹² This notion is reflected in the Supreme Court’s *Corbiere* decision, which recognizes the rights of off-reserve

⁴ David Newhouse, “The Invisible Infrastructure: Urban Aboriginal Institutions and Organizations”. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, eds. *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2003, 247.

⁵ Chris Andersen and Claude Denis, “Urban Natives and the Nation: Before and After the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples”. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 40, no. 4 (2003): 385.

⁶ Evelyn Peters, “Geographies of Urban Aboriginal People in Canada: Implications for Urban Self-Government”. Michael Murphy, ed. *Canada: The State of the Federation. Reconfiguring Aboriginal-State Relations*. Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003, 42.

⁷ Evelyn Peters, “‘Urban’ and ‘Aboriginal’: An Impossible Contradiction?” Jon Caulfield and Linda Peake, eds. *City Lives and City Forms: Critical Research and Canadian Urbanism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. 47-62; see also Belanger, Yale et al. *Urban Aboriginal Youth in Winnipeg: Culture and Identity Formation in Cities*. Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 2003.

⁸ Statistics Canada. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006*.

⁹ John Borrows, “‘Landed’ Citizenship: An Indigenous Declaration of Interdependence”. *Recovering Canada. The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 141; Evelyn Peters, “[W]e do not lose our treaty rights outside the... reserve”: challenging the scales of social service provision for First Nations women in Canadian cities. *GeoJournal*. 65 (2006): 324.

¹⁰ Interview, October 3, 2008. In this paper, the names of participants will not be used.

¹¹ Nathan Cardinal, “The Exclusive City: Identifying, Measuring, and Drawing Attention to Aboriginal and Indigenous Experiences in an Urban Context.” *Cities*, 23, no. 3 (2006): 217-228; Mary Jane Norris and Stewart Clatworthy, “Aboriginal Mobility and Migration Within Urban Canada: Outcomes, Factors and Implications”. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, eds. *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2003. 51-78.

¹² Evelyn Peters, “Suzanne MacKenzie Memorial Lecture: Conceptually Unclad: Feminist Geography and Aboriginal Peoples”. *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien*, 48, no. 3 (2004): 256.

band members to participate in the political life of their communities. Here “Aboriginality-residence” was established as a ground of discrimination analogous to those listed in section 15(1) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.¹³ The implications for the public policy community are evident in that “[...] it is crucial that we recognize that the urban Aboriginal population in Canada is not distinct from the “non-urban”. They are interconnected in terms of mobility, culture and politics”.¹⁴ Giving meaningful expression to this interconnectedness however, remains a challenge.

Furthermore, community is a more complex reality in urban settings because of the dispersed and diverse nature of local Aboriginal populations. It cannot be taken for granted as a geographical reality but is rather created – and constantly in the making – through social relationships, networks and shared activities that typically center on Aboriginal agencies.¹⁵ Urban Aboriginal communities are, thus, multi-sited and often imagined in contested ways. In addition, external definitions imposed by the settler state continue to pervade Indigenous governance.¹⁶ This is not to say, however, that “there really is no such thing as an urban Aboriginal community”.¹⁷ On the contrary, several authors stress the ways in which urban Aboriginal service agencies, most notably Friendship Centres, have been instrumental in generating a sense of belonging.¹⁸ Although they are often perceived through a “lens of deficiency and erosion”,¹⁹ urban Aboriginal agencies have been important catalysts for community-building. However, an exclusive focus on service providers in defining urban Indigenous communities can be problematic insofar as many object to an implicit association of urban Indigeneity with dysfunction.²⁰ Clearly, Indigenous people who reside in cities are not homogeneously disadvantaged.²¹ But individual and collective positions of Indigenous peoples are significantly shaped by restrictive state policies related to the access to land, rights, and resources.²² Thus, the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous peoples and, therefore, the higher demand for social services are a direct result of colonization.²³ In this sense, “[t]he social

¹³ *Corbiere v. Canada (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs)*. 2 SCR 203, 1999.

¹⁴ Katherine Graham and Evelyn Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2002, 23.

¹⁵ Susan Lobo, “Is Urban a Person or a Place? Characteristics of Urban Indian Country.” Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters, eds. *American Indians and the Urban Experience*. New York: Altamira Press, 2001, 75; Craig Proulx, *Reclaiming Aboriginal Justice, Identity, and Community*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2003.

¹⁶ Craig Proulx, *Reclaiming Aboriginal Justice, Identity, and Community*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2003, 153.

¹⁷ Calvin Hanselmann, *Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies*. Calgary: Canada West Foundation, 2001, 20.

¹⁸ Newhouse, “The Invisible Infrastructure”; Proulx, *Reclaiming Aboriginal Justice, Identity, and Community*; Lobo, “Is Urban a Person or a Place?”.

¹⁹ Newhouse, “The Invisible Infrastructure”, 251.

²⁰ Proulx, *Reclaiming Aboriginal Justice, Identity, and Community*, 166-167.

²¹ Terry Wotherspoon, “Prospects for a New Middle Class Among Urban Aboriginal People”. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, eds. *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2003. 147-165.

²² The gendered dimensions of urban Indigeneity cannot be explored in this paper, but is certainly a topic for further investigation, particularly given the prominent role of Indigenous women in urban community building.

²³ Jim Silver, *In Their Own Voices. Building Urban Aboriginal Communities*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2006; Evelyn Peters and Ryan Walker, “Indigeneity and marginalisation: Planning for and with urban Aboriginal communities in Canada”. *Progress in Planning*, 63 (2005): 327–404.

disadvantages and marginalization facing many Aboriginal people in urban areas is not, of course, unique to urban areas or uniquely caused by urbanity”.²⁴

Advances in the political and legal arenas have largely bypassed urban Indigenous peoples, who are generally forced to look to state recognized land-based communities as the source of their rights.²⁵ The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) represents a turning point insofar as it identified an acute “information and policy vacuum” with respect to urban Aboriginal peoples.²⁶ Although duly criticized for its narrow conceptualization of Aboriginal identity and nationhood as tied to a land base,²⁷ RCAP put urban Aboriginal issues on the agenda for policy makers.²⁸ This is reflected in the federal government’s official policy response, *Gathering Strength: Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan*, which proposed to broaden the scope of federal policy to include urban Aboriginal peoples. Together with initiatives, such as the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS), which was announced in 1998,²⁹ this indicates a shift in federal policy towards a greater recognition of urban Aboriginal peoples and a concomitant redistribution of resources to urban Aboriginal communities. This shift has been significantly reinforced by Indigenous activism and a range of strategies employed to effect change in this regard, perhaps one of the most effective being litigation, as the *Corbiere* and *Misquadis* cases illustrate.³⁰ But state policies and governance practices concerning urban Indigenous communities to date have not incorporated and given expression to inherent Indigenous rights. The concepts of self-determination and self-government are largely missing from dominant discourses on urban Indigenous governance, as will be discussed in the next section.

III. Urban Aboriginal Governance, Self-Determination and Self-Government

Self-determination, self-government, and – to a more limited extent self-governance – appear to be used interchangeably, but it is important to distinguish between these concepts and to note the implications that each has for urban Indigenous communities. While government is generally understood to be an institutional entity, governance is defined as a process of decision-making and “the art of steering societies and organizations” involving various actors, including but not restricted to governments.³¹ The shift from government to governance under neo-liberalism has

²⁴ Robert Groves, *Urban Aboriginal Governance in Canada: Re-Fashioning the Dialogue*. Ottawa: National Association of Friendship Centres, 1999, 29-30.

²⁵ Ryan Walker, “Aboriginal Self-determination and Social Housing in Urban Canada: A Story of Convergence and Divergence”. *Urban Studies*, 45, no. 1 (2008a): 185-205; Proulx, *Reclaiming Aboriginal Justice, Identity, and Community*.

²⁶ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. “Chapter 7: Urban Perspectives”. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Perspectives and Realities (Vol. 4)*. Ottawa: Canada Communications Group-Publishing, 1996, 519.

²⁷ Andersen and Denis, “Urban Natives and the Nation”; Belanger et al, *Urban Aboriginal Youth in Winnipeg*.

²⁸ Graham, “Urban Aboriginal Governance in Canada”.

²⁹ The UAS received funding in 2003 (\$50 million). It was renewed, as the enhanced UAS, in 2007 (\$68.5 million). Winnipeg was one of the original eight target cities. Ottawa was the latest of now 13 cities to be included under the UAS in 2007.

³⁰ *Corbiere v. Canada (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs)*. 2 SCR 203, 1999; *Ardoch Algonquin First Nation v. Canada (Attorney General)* 2 F.C. 350, 2003.

³¹ Tim Plumptre and John Graham, *Governance and Good Governance: International and Aboriginal Perspectives*. Ottawa: Institute On Governance, 1999, 2-3.

provided local actors with a greater role in the design and delivery of services, most notably through public-private partnerships.³² Governments remain key players, but partnerships, to a great extent, have shifted leadership roles and investments to both the local level and non-state actors.³³ The recalibration of governing responsibilities among different sectors has expanded the spheres of the private and voluntary sectors, opening up space for greater Aboriginal community involvement. In this sense, the downloading of services to lower levels of government and civil society appears to converge with Indigenous struggles for control over the administration of programs and services based on constitutional rights. However, neo-liberal urban governance practices have not provided urban Aboriginal community organizations with a meaningful degree of decision-making power, autonomy, and resources.³⁴ These processes can therefore be highly problematic “when responsibility is transferred without resources”.³⁵

Urban Aboriginal governance can be understood to include the “institutions, services and political arrangements dedicated to meeting and representing the needs and interests of the urban Aboriginal population”.³⁶ However, the data presented in this paper raise serious doubts concerning the degree to which current governance practices actually meet and represent these needs and interests. Since urban Aboriginal governance includes an array of state and non-state actors, collaborative relationships are of central importance. But, as numerous authors have noted, it is crucial for the well-being of urban Aboriginal communities to reshape the relationships with municipal, provincial, federal and Aboriginal governments and to clearly define their roles and responsibilities.³⁷ How these relationships, roles, and responsibilities are to be reshaped, however, remains open to contestation.

The principle of Indigenous self-determination provides a normative basis for how the rescaling of urban Indigenous governance is to proceed, calling for significantly more jurisdictional space for Indigenous governing institutions. The right to self-determination entails a transformative agenda “that sharply curtail[s] the legitimacy and jurisdiction of the state while bolstering

³² While a more in depth discussion cannot be pursued here, this shift is generally characterized by “new forms of political-economic governance premised on the extension of market relationships” (Larner, 5), that is, welfare state retrenchment through privatization and deregulation. Entailing a composite logic of rule and contingent set of governing practices, the core values underpinning neoliberal projects are individual self-sufficiency, freedom of choice, and minimal government. See Wendy Larner, “Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality”. *Studies in Political Economy*, 63 (2000): 5-25.

³³ Walker, “Aboriginal Self-determination and Social Housing in Urban Canada”.

³⁴ Walker, “Aboriginal Self-determination and Social Housing in Urban Canada”; Ryan Walker, “Searching for Aboriginal/ Indigenous Self-Determination: Urban Citizenship in the Winnipeg Low-Cost Housing Sector, Canada”. *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (2006): 2345-2363; Douglas Durst, *It's not What, But How! Social Service Issues Affecting Aboriginal Peoples: A Review of Projects*. Regina: Social Policy Research Unit, 2000.

³⁵ Walker, “Aboriginal Self-determination and Social Housing in Urban Canada”, 192. Walker also suggests that, “[b]y controlling financial resources, policy/ programme parameters and centrally designed accountability frameworks that can significantly constrain local diversity and innovation [...], the state maintains its ability to guide and reward collective organization at the local level at its discretion”, Walker, “Aboriginal Self-determination and Social Housing in Urban Canada”, 190.

³⁶ Graham, “Urban Aboriginal Governance in Canada”, 378.

³⁷ Cardinal, “The Exclusive City”; Walker, “Searching for Aboriginal/ Indigenous Self-Determination”; Graham and Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*.

Indigenous jurisdiction over land, identity and political voice”.³⁸ The internationally recognized Indigenous right to self-determination is not restricted to remote or rural areas.³⁹ In fact, self-determination has been central to the philosophies of Aboriginal organizations in cities. Several interview participants commented that self-determination is a reality in the sense that “we started these institutions, government hasn’t. Friendship Centres are the grandfathers of many, particularly in Winnipeg, probably in Ottawa as well, really started the other institutions. They started small projects in the Friendship Centres and then they got too big and moved on their own. And that’s good. That’s healthy, right. And for us that is self-determination.”⁴⁰

In Article 4, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifies that “Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions”.⁴¹ In 1995, self-government was recognized by the federal government as an existing Aboriginal right under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.⁴² A clear-cut definition of self-government, however, appears to be lacking. As Belanger and Newhouse attest: “in the year 2004 we seem no closer to defining what self-government is let alone what its place within the Canadian political super-structures is”.⁴³ This lack of clarity has contributed to the contestations around the notion of self-government. Contemporary arrangements have been described as a form of “self-administration” at best, because the ability to implement policies that fundamentally challenge the status quo continues to be severely restricted, given that the parameters of governance continue to be imposed by the settler state.⁴⁴ However, it is argued here that self-government is not inevitably complicit in subverting self-determination. As the UN Declaration illustrates, the two can go hand in hand, self-government denoting the institutional arrangement through which the right to self-determination can be exercised.

The public policy community in Canada has not developed the institutional configurations required to make urban Indigenous self-government a reality. This leads Peters to note that “in light of the increased interest in urban Aboriginal people, the absence of any contemporary focus

³⁸ Maaka, Roger and Augie Fleras. “Engaging with Indigeneity: Tino Rangatiratanga in Aotearoa”. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton and Will Saunders, eds. *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 89

³⁹ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007, against the votes of Canada and three other settler states. Article 3 of the UN Declaration states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”, United Nations. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. New York: United Nations, 2007, 4.

⁴⁰ Interview, October 23, 2008.

⁴¹ United Nations. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. New York: United Nations, 2007, 4.

⁴² Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. *Federal Policy Guide: Aboriginal Self-Government. The Government of Canada’s Approach to Implementation of the Inherent Right and the Negotiation of Aboriginal Self-Government*. Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services, 1995.

⁴³ Yale Belanger and David Newhouse. “Emerging From the Shadows: The Pursuit of Aboriginal Self-Government to Promote Aboriginal Well-Being”. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 24, no. 1 (2004): 133-134.

⁴⁴ Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasàse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005; Joyce Green, “Decolonization and Recolonization in Canada”. Wallace Clement and Leah Vosko, eds. *Changing Canada. Political Economy as Transformation*. Montreal/ Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003, 51-78.

on Aboriginal self-government is puzzling and somewhat worrisome”.⁴⁵ A reason for the absence of sustained engagement with the notion of urban Aboriginal self-government is that it challenges the dominant political imaginary. As we shall see below, urban Aboriginal self-government is considered a relatively unwieldy political arrangement due to 1) the heterogeneity of urban Indigenous populations; 2) its association with land-based governance; and 3) issues of jurisdiction and the related matter of financial responsibility.

First, urban Indigenous populations are heterogeneous and the “urban Aboriginal” category as the basis for defining community for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who reside in urban areas is therefore limited. The multi-national composition of urban Aboriginal communities has made claiming collective Indigenous rights more challenging.⁴⁶ In addition, different legal categorizations imposed and normalized by the Canadian state continue to complicate the notion of urban Indigenous citizenship.⁴⁷ First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Aboriginal communities interface with governments in different ways, yet are often forced to compete for the same pool of resources. At present, access to self-government is tightly circumscribed by state practices related to legal status, geographical location, and resourcing.

Second, the lack of a land base⁴⁸ has been used as a key argument to refute the application of the concept of self-government to Indigenous communities in cities. Furthermore, land-based Indigenous communities are increasingly assuming responsibility for off-reserve or out of territory citizens. While the small but growing literature on urban Aboriginal realities appears to suggest that there is consensus among practitioners that urban Aboriginal self-government will likely be urban-focused and pan-Aboriginal,⁴⁹ this is in fact highly contested. Different notions of self-government and different definitions of community coexist in Winnipeg and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in Ottawa. These in turn reflect differences around goals of Indigenous nation-building on the one hand and community-building on the other.

Third, jurisdictional boundaries and uncertainties pose a major challenge. As one interview participant pointed out, “so when we’re trying to organize the types of programs our clients require, we have to deal with multiple jurisdictions”.⁵⁰ The federal government has generally interpreted section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867 to narrowly apply to First Nation peoples on reserve. Inuit are also recognized as a federal responsibility as a result of a 1939

⁴⁵ Peters, “Geographies of Urban Aboriginal People in Canada”, 40.

⁴⁶ Robert Groves, *Urban Aboriginal Governance in Canada: Re-Fashioning the Dialogue*, 1999.

⁴⁷ Bonita Lawrence, “Real” *Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

⁴⁸ Apart from reserves located within cities and newly created urban reserves which are generally not residential, see Laurie F. Barron and Joseph Garcea, eds. *Urban Indian Reserves. Forging New Relationships in Saskatchewan*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 1999.

⁴⁹ Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, Institute on Governance and Centre for Municipal-Aboriginal Relations. *Aboriginal Governance in Urban Settings: Completing the Circle. Conference Summary and Conclusions*. Ottawa: Institute on Governance, 1998; Peters, “Geographies of Urban Aboriginal People in Canada”; Jill Wherrett and Douglas Brown, *Self-Government for Aboriginal Peoples Living in Urban Areas*. Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations/ Queen’s University, 1992.

⁵⁰ Interview, October 23, 2008.

Supreme Court ruling.⁵¹ There has been an assumption that urban Aboriginal people are “ordinary citizens” – meaning without Aboriginal rights. And the provinces have generally been reluctant to assume responsibility for Aboriginal-specific programming. In this sense, “to the extent that urban Aboriginal people have been thought of in public policy, they have largely been the ball in a game of jurisdictional ping pong”.⁵² While there has been some movement, more clarity in this regard would aid in fostering coherence around policy and programming issues. But, as has been suggested elsewhere, section 91(24) itself may not be the issue so much as the question of financial liability.⁵³

Although self-government seems to be associated almost exclusively with First Nations on reserve, it is important to think beyond these settler state boundaries in order to find ways in which the Indigenous right to self-determination can be more fully actualized in urban settings. Several participants pointed out that urban Aboriginal self-governance may be a more appropriate concept, noting that “self-governance, it is bigger than just the political [...] because it’s not self-government, that’s a difference. [...] Self-governance to me is the right to determine your own destiny, in a way that works for you and the people that you’re serving. It doesn’t necessarily mean government bureaucracies and that. I mean to the politicians it does, but down at the street level it’s our right to have services that meet our needs, that are operated from a philosophy that works with the people that we work with.”⁵⁴ However, to keep the discussion focused, I will use the term self-government to talk about institutional arrangements that give expression to the right of self-determination.⁵⁵

Clearly, an urban context necessitates a form of governance with multiple institutional actors involved, both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal. While self-government is conventionally associated with separate institutions, self-government in cities would require some degree of participation and collaboration. As discussed above, needs-based claims and partnerships appear to be attractive vehicles of Indigenous self-determination because they mesh with dominant urban governance and social investment paradigms, but opportunities for urban Aboriginal self-government are not necessarily enhanced.⁵⁶ Aboriginal organizations have been asserting their right to self-determination in cities, but are faced with severe constraints that negatively affect their capacities to be self-governing. Some of the major challenges relate to funding arrangements, financial sustainability, capacity-building, priority-setting, access, political representation, institutional completeness, and coordination. These will be discussed further after a brief description of the local demographic and institutional contexts in Winnipeg and Ottawa in the next section.

⁵¹ Constance Backhouse, “‘Race’ definition run amuck: ‘Slaying the Dragon of Eskimo Status’ Before the Supreme Court of Canada, 1939.” Diane Kirkby and Catherine Coleborne, eds. *Law, History, Colonialism. The Reach of Empire*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001. 65-77.

⁵² Graham and Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*, 12.

⁵³ Institute on Governance. *Roundtable on Urban Aboriginal Governance*. Ottawa: Institute on Governance, 2005, 16.

⁵⁴ Interview, May 29, 2008.

⁵⁵ I am indebted to one of the reviewers for pointing out the potential pitfalls of introducing a new and somewhat redundant term into the debate.

⁵⁶ Walker, “Aboriginal Self-determination and Social Housing in Urban Canada”.

IV. Indigenous Communities in Winnipeg and Ottawa: A Brief Overview

In this section, I sketch the compositions of the Aboriginal populations in Winnipeg and Ottawa and then briefly describe the institutional arrangements of Indigenous governance in each of the two cities.

Although Aboriginal populations differ significantly in Winnipeg and Ottawa, particularly in terms of their cultural composition and socio-economic status, there are commonalities as well. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of Aboriginal people living in Winnipeg and Ottawa in 2001 and 2006, based on Census data. In light of the under-coverage of urban Aboriginal populations, these are conservative estimates at best.⁵⁷ Aboriginal populations in both cities have grown significantly between 2001 and 2006, almost doubling in Ottawa. Winnipeg has the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada, with 68,380 Aboriginal persons representing 10 percent of the city's population. In Western Canada, the urban Aboriginal presence is more pronounced and the larger Aboriginal service infrastructures speak to this fact.⁵⁸ But given the growing and young population in Winnipeg, programs and services delivered by Aboriginal agencies will need to expand further.⁵⁹ 59.9 percent of Winnipeg's Aboriginal population are Métis, 37.9 percent are First Nations, and 0.5 percent are Inuit. While the Inuit population in Winnipeg is fairly small, Ottawa has the largest Inuit community in Southern Canada with an estimated 1,500 Inuit living in the capital.⁶⁰ According to the Census, 52.4 percent of Aboriginal people in Ottawa are First Nations and 38.8 percent identify as Métis. It should be noted, however, that considerable heterogeneity exists within these larger Census categories. For instance, First Nations peoples who reside in Ottawa come from a large number of different nations and communities across Canada.

⁵⁷ Rather than presenting a detailed statistical profile, my aim here is to selectively depict broader trends. Available demographic data on Aboriginal peoples suffer serious problems, such as chronic under-coverage. Aboriginal organizations have consistently come up with higher numbers of their constituencies than Statistics Canada, see Urban Aboriginal Task Force. *Ottawa Final Report*. Ottawa: The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2007, 33.

⁵⁸ Silver, *In their Own Voices*.

⁵⁹ Jino Distasio, *First Nations/ Métis/ Inuit Mobility Study. Final Report*. Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg/ Institute of Urban Studies, 2004.

⁶⁰ Tungasuvvingat Inuit, *National Urban Inuit One Voice Workshop, Ottawa, October 26-27, 2005* (Report). Ottawa: Tungasuvvingat Inuit, 2005.

Table 1: Aboriginal Population in Ottawa-Gatineau and Winnipeg (2001, 2006)⁶¹

	Aboriginal identity population, 2001	Percentage of Aboriginal people in the city's population	Aboriginal identity population, 2006	Percentage of Aboriginal people in the city's population
Ottawa-Gatineau	13,695	1.2	20,590	2
Winnipeg	55,970	8.2	68,380	10

While I am not suggesting that these two cities represent distinct types across the spectrum of urban Indigeneity in Canada, they can, as Evelyn Peters suggests, be seen as representative of larger groupings on the continuum of social indicators.⁶² Aboriginal residents in Winnipeg and Ottawa, generally, live in conditions significantly worse than non-Aboriginal residents, with higher unemployment, lower income, poorer health status, poorer housing, higher rates of homelessness, lower levels of education, and greater dependence on government support.⁶³ But there are also significant differences in terms of the degree of social disparities, as Table 2 demonstrates.

Table 2: Characteristics of Aboriginal-Identity Population in Ottawa-Gatineau and Winnipeg, 2006⁶⁴

	Aged 15 and over %	Without grade 12 %	Unemployment rates %	Average earnings \$
Ottawa-Gatineau	79.8	27.7	8.8	35,508
Winnipeg	69.6	39.5	11.3	25,379

In Winnipeg, unemployment and poverty rates are higher and the average earnings are considerably lower than in Ottawa. A look at the median incomes in these two cities further illustrates this point, with \$18,620 in Winnipeg and \$25,838 in Ottawa. Furthermore, Winnipeg has the highest degree of residential concentration, or segregation, among Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs).⁶⁵ There is a distinct division between a strong Aboriginal presence in the downtown core and North end and largely non-Aboriginal suburban and ex-urban parts.⁶⁶ This is

⁶¹ Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006*.

⁶² Peters, "Geographies of Urban Aboriginal People in Canada".

⁶³ Andrew Siggner, "The Challenge of Measuring the Demographic and Socio-Economic Conditions of the Urban Aboriginal Population". David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, eds. *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2003. 119-130.

⁶⁴ Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Population Profile, Census Metropolitan Area/ Census Agglomeration*, 2008.

⁶⁵ Graham and Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*, 13.

⁶⁶ Silver, *In Their Own Voices*.

problematic due to the simultaneous concentration of poverty in the core area and the North End.⁶⁷

In Ottawa, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in terms of income and education levels is the smallest among CMAs, largely due to a high number of professionals working for national Aboriginal organizations and the federal government. While the gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population in socioeconomic characteristics is smaller, the Aboriginal population is more polarized along class lines. Seen in this way, these statistics hide a significant and increasing need for Aboriginal-specific, especially Inuit-specific, social services.⁶⁸ This is confirmed by a community worker in Ottawa who asserts that “there are very real issues and needs specific to Inuit and then specific again to urban Inuit”.⁶⁹

Political arrangements in Winnipeg and Ottawa differ particularly with respect to multilateral processes insofar as there has been a more sustained effort on the part of the state to create collaborative or multi-level initiatives in Winnipeg. This is clearly driven by the practical imperative to address the scalar void that has existed with respect to urban Indigenous peoples, given the high proportion of Indigenous peoples in the city’s population, the socio-economic indicators, and strong political representation, particularly from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) and the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), as well as the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg (ACW). In 2004, the City of Winnipeg, Manitoba’s provincial government, and the Government of Canada signed the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement for Community and Economic Development (WPA). The WPA identified Aboriginal participation as one of its core components. The subsequent creation of the Aboriginal Partnership Committee (APC) has brought all levels of government and Aboriginal organizations together, formalizing collaborative relationships and increased coordination, both vertically and horizontally. When the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) was rolled out and a RFP process was initiated to distribute the UAS funding (\$1 million annually) in Winnipeg, the APC became its governance body within a shared delivery model. Also, Aboriginal Single Window Service Canada represents an important initiative to address issues around coordination. It is a joint undertaking of the Government of Canada, the Province of Manitoba, and the City of Winnipeg and is intended as a “one-stop-shop” for Aboriginal individuals and organizations who seek access to programs.⁷⁰

In Ottawa, relationship-building with different levels of government appears to have proceeded in a more incremental fashion, primarily on the initiative of the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition (OAC), formed in 2001 to represent the major Aboriginal service providers in the city. The OAC is made up of representatives from Gignul Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Minwaashin Lodge Aboriginal Women’s Support Centre, Odawa Native Friendship Centre, Tewegan Transition House, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, and the Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre. Its goal was “to provide a more unified or collective voice in representing the Aboriginal community to

⁶⁷ Residential concentration in itself can have positive outcomes, fostering cohesion and facilitating capacity building and more efficient service delivery, see Groves, *Urban Aboriginal Governance in Canada*, 33.

⁶⁸ Urban Aboriginal Task Force. *Ottawa Final Report*.

⁶⁹ Interview, August 20, 2008.

⁷⁰ Aboriginal Single Window, Retrieved February 8, 2009 from <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/cgi-bin/hr-display.cgi?rc=4015&ln=e>.

the City of Ottawa that had SCPI [Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative] funding that was dealing specifically with homelessness. Out of that, there was a recognition, a realization that we might have more impact if we do things as a collective in terms of approaching the city”.⁷¹ Initially, efforts focused on the City of Ottawa and culminated in the creation of the City of Ottawa Aboriginal Working Committee in 2007. Relationships were also established with the United Way, the federal government, and, most recently, Ontario’s Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs which was created as a stand alone Ministry in 2007. The OAC’s multi-scalar strategy led to the inclusion of Ottawa as a UAS site in October of 2007 which meant that federal capacity building funds and programming dollars became available.⁷² While Aboriginal communities in Ottawa and Winnipeg have different trajectories and are embedded in different political configurations, similar constraints on self-determination and self-government were identified in both cities, as the next section will illustrate.

V. Constraints on Urban Indigenous Self-Determination

In this section, I highlight constraints that interview participants identified with respect to urban Aboriginal self-government. Although the local contexts are different, Indigenous communities in Winnipeg and Ottawa face common challenges around intertwined issues related to 1) funding; 2) access; and 3) representation.

First, the level and stability of funding for Aboriginal services, as well as reporting requirements constrain the ability of Aboriginal agencies to design and implement programming that reflects the needs and priorities of their communities. In the absence of core funding, many agencies have to rely on project-based funding which is not secure. In some instances, successful projects could not be continued after pilot funding ran out.⁷³ Also, scarce resources are spent on accountability and reporting requirements, as well as on securing continued funding. A community worker in Ottawa explained that “everyone has different funding requirements, everybody has different reports, and so you’re asked to look for different funding sources, then you’re spending all this time writing reports”.⁷⁴ This puts additional strain on staff. The provision of core funding would alleviate some of the stress on community-based service providers. Currently, however, Aboriginal agencies have to “project chase” and apply for program dollars as they become available.⁷⁵ As one interview respondent argued, “we chase the funding and we modify whatever needs we have to see if they can fit into whatever criteria that funding has identified. So we chase the money basically”.⁷⁶ The priorities are thus set by funders, but in light of the specific circumstances of different Aboriginal communities, the identification and prioritization of needs is a crucial aspect of self-determination. The Urban Aboriginal Strategy in Winnipeg is addressing this issue through different community

⁷¹ Interview, October 3, 2008.

⁷² Dan Kohoko, *Moving Forward: Report on Community Consultation for the Urban Aboriginal Strategy*. Ottawa, 2006. The UAS model is premised on the idea that additional funding from other federal departments, as well as the provincial and municipal governments and other sources is leveraged in the process of building partnerships. Overall, between 2003-2006, additional funds leveraged through the UAS process by far outweighed the contributions provided directly by OFI, see Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Urban Aboriginal Strategy – Background*, Retrieved January 30, 2008 from <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/of/ufi/uas/bkg-eng.asp>.

⁷³ Interviews, May 22, 2008; May 29, 2008; September 5, 2008; October 27, 2008.

⁷⁴ Interview, August 20, 2008.

⁷⁵ Interviews, August 20, 2008; September 5, 2008.

⁷⁶ Interview, September 5, 2008.

consultation modules.⁷⁷ But, as a participant in Winnipeg pointed out, consensus is often difficult to achieve; “then you have a meeting to identify what the priorities are and whoever the most people that are there are, that’s what you identify as the priority [...] and it has to do with who’s there and it has to do with the fact that they decide themselves. They decided who is going to be on there. So it’s more or less the provincial and federal government.”⁷⁸ There is a perception that governments continue to direct the decision-making process by virtue of selecting who is at funding tables and who is consulted.

The climate of inter-agency competition was seen as a major obstacle by all Aboriginal participants. Some referred to it as an adversarial system, noting that current funding practices are divisive and hinder much needed coordination and collaboration among Aboriginal agencies,⁷⁹ because “there’s only a limited number of dollars to go around and everyone fights for that same pot all the time”.⁸⁰ These dynamics appear to be more pronounced in Winnipeg, where a larger number of organizations, including political organizations, are located. This competitive framework which has been normalized by the state pertains to the third sector, more generally. Aboriginal organizations also find themselves in competition with non-Aboriginal service providers for program dollars. Making core and block funding available, harmonizing terms and conditions across government departments, and allocating Aboriginal-specific dollars to urban Aboriginal agencies rather than mainstream agencies, would constitute more sustainable approaches to urban Aboriginal self-determination.

Second, individual and collective access to programs and services can be difficult. A community worker in Winnipeg explains that “people seem to think, because Aboriginal people live in an urban setting that they have all of this access to all of these services. Well, proximity doesn’t lead to access. [...] I mean just because they live here doesn’t mean that, for example, they have five bucks for a bus, 2.50 to get there and 2.50 to get back. Most of the resources are not located where the majority of Aboriginal people live”.⁸¹ Social positionalities and geographical location thus greatly affect Aboriginal people’s access to culturally relevant services.

Also, issues of legal status and jurisdiction which have created complex configurations of inequality for urban Aboriginal peoples can hinder access to culturally specific services. The majority of Aboriginal service providers in Winnipeg and Ottawa operate under an inclusive, status-blind mandate, but tensions exist with respect to the degree of inclusiveness of the Aboriginal category. As a participant working for a Métis organization in Winnipeg pointed out, “in most people’s minds, Aboriginal means First Nations”.⁸² Inuit and Métis organizations, such as the Inuit Tapriit Kanatami (ITK), Tungasuvvingat Inuit,⁸³ the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), and the MMF, have argued for separate funding streams in order to deliver identity-specific services, based on constitutional rights. While the status-blind approach is promoted as

⁷⁷ Interview, January 9, 2009.

⁷⁸ Interview, May 29, 2008.

⁷⁹ Interviews, May 15, 2008; May 22, 2008; May 28, 2008; September 11, 2008; September 25, 2008.

⁸⁰ Interview, May 22, 2008.

⁸¹ Interview, May 29, 2008.

⁸² Interview, May 14, 2008.

⁸³ See Tungasuvvingat Inuit. *National Urban Inuit One Voice Workshop, Ottawa, October 26-27, 2005* (Report). Ottawa: Tungasuvvingat Inuit, 2005.

the most cost-effective mode of service delivery for Indigenous peoples in cities,⁸⁴ it does not address the actual diversity of Indigenous identities and cultural specificities. Therefore, the notion of equitable access, as suggested by Graham and Peters, is much better suited to take actual differences into account without reproducing historical inequalities among Indigenous groups.⁸⁵ The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy (AHRDS) in Winnipeg is an example of how equitable access can be implemented. Three separate Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement holders – the AMC through a service agency, the MMF, and the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD) – deliver programming that reflects the unique needs of their communities, First Nations, Métis, and urban Aboriginal peoples, respectively.⁸⁶

Third – and connected to issues of funding and access – is the issue of representation. As a participant in Ottawa noted, “we haven’t had the same political representation in urban areas”, but this appears to be changing, “because we are now developing a critical mass, an economy of scale where you have a number of people that might want their rights politically expressed”.⁸⁷ The diversity of groups and interests, however, may preclude a unified political voice at the local level and, especially, at the national level.

In Winnipeg, the issue of representation appears to have at times rendered decision-making contentious, as rights-based approaches do not always mesh smoothly with the prevalent pan-Aboriginal RFP processes. For instance, the MMF has one seat on the 18-member APC. There is thus a perception that Métis-specific issues and initiatives are marginalized, given that 60 percent of Indigenous people in Winnipeg are Métis.⁸⁸ This has also intensified the artificial distinction between political advocacy and service delivery. As one participant working for an Aboriginal agency in Winnipeg noted, “so there’s a lot of tension over who represents who in the city [...] I mean because I’m a service provider, so as much as possible I stay out of the political end of it, because if you get involved in the political end, then your organization is going to feel the flak out there. So you’re better off to stay out of the politics, because you can’t mix the two”.⁸⁹

Rights-based discourses have been criticized as exclusionary, as illustrated in the following quote. “NAFC [National Association of Friendship Centres] would prefer that the discussion centred more around ‘needs’. This may not be as politically exciting or as persuasive as the rights-based approach, but it is what is needed to ensure that all are included [...] there is tremendous need for homeless services, and to deal with kids who have dropped out of school. Talk about ‘rights’ will not solve these problems”.⁹⁰ Several interviewees voiced similar concerns. But while the recognition of Aboriginal rights is often framed as a zero-sum game, an

⁸⁴ Calvin Hanselmann, *Shared Responsibility: Final Report and Recommendations of the Urban Aboriginal Initiative. A Western Cities Project Report*. Calgary: Canada West Foundation, 2003; RCAP, “Chapter 7: Urban Perspectives”; Canada. House of Commons. *Building a Brighter Future for Urban Aboriginal Children*; Canada. Senate of Canada. *Urban Aboriginal Youth*.

⁸⁵ Graham and Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*, 26.

⁸⁶ Interviews, May 15, 2008; May 26, 2008; May 27, 2008.

⁸⁷ Interview, October 3, 2008.

⁸⁸ Interviews, May 14, 2008; May 27, 2008. For Inuit perspectives, see Tungasuvvingat Inuit, *National Urban Inuit One Voice Workshop, Ottawa, October 26-27, 2005* (Report). Ottawa: Tungasuvvingat Inuit, 2005.

⁸⁹ Interview, May 29, 2008.

⁹⁰ IOG, *Roundtable on Urban Aboriginal Governance*, 9.

expansion of Aboriginal rights discourses is also conceivable. A barrier, however, is that, “it’s just that with rights go money, right. Rights factor down into how much it’s going to cost governments”, as one participant described it.⁹¹

In Ottawa, six of the seven members of the OAC are representatives of service providers and one member represents the Métis community. A founding member explains the decision not to include political organizations; the members of the OAC “to the best of our abilities have tried to keep the big P politics off the table. What are the community priorities? Put them on the middle of the table and we focus on those”.⁹² It should be noted that even though the national Aboriginal organizations are headquartered in Ottawa, they are often not perceived to represent the interests of local Aboriginal communities.⁹³ Similarly, despite the presence of the federal government in Ottawa, “you could really sense disappointment among Aboriginal members in Ottawa, because here they were located in the capital city with the Government of Canada, yet they felt that there was this great distance between the Government of Canada and the Aboriginal community. And the same was true for community members and the national Aboriginal organizations. They just felt that there was a disconnect, yet everyone was located in the city and yet the Aboriginal community within the city seemed to be forgotten”.⁹⁴ Addressing the lack of inter-scalar engagement, a collaborative urban Aboriginal governance paradigm has emerged, but a comprehensive and inclusive convergence around urban Aboriginal self-government has not occurred, as will be discussed in the next section.

VI. Increasing Collaboration: Towards Urban Indigenous Self-Government?

All of the interviewees agreed that a more holistic understanding of and approach to urban Aboriginal governance are needed.⁹⁵ Among the examples provided by interview participants were: policies that address issues at a systemic level, conceptualizations of needs that consider every stage of a person’s life cycle, more comprehensive approaches to policies that move beyond narrow silos, and self-government as a means to enable Aboriginal institutions to look after their constituents.⁹⁶ Interview participants seemed to agree that there is an urgent need for urban Aboriginal policy development, particularly in the areas of education, health, employment, childcare, youths, and seniors. In order to dismantle the “urban Aboriginal public policy maze”,⁹⁷ initiatives would need to reflect that 1) in light of the heterogeneity of urban Indigenous communities, a uniform approach is not appropriate, and 2) given the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples, policies cannot be unilaterally imposed. Municipal, provincial, and federal governments as well as First Nations governments, First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Aboriginal political organizations and community-based service providers must have an opportunity to participate in these processes as equal partners. This requires formal structures that foster more

⁹¹ Interview, May 29, 2008.

⁹² Interview, October 3, 2008.

⁹³ Urban Aboriginal Task Force. *Ottawa Final Report*, 53.

⁹⁴ Interview, October 22, 2008.

⁹⁵ In Winnipeg, the Comprehensive Community Initiative (CCI) initiated by the Aboriginal Partnership Committee is intended to address issues more holistically, within a more inclusive and open planning process, interview, January 9, 2009.

⁹⁶ Interviews, May 20, 2008; May 30, 2008; October 29, 2008; January 9, 2009.

⁹⁷ Graham and Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*, 5.

collaboration around issues of services, priority setting, community development, social planning and place-making.

On the community side, improving coordination and collaboration among Aboriginal service providers, non-Aboriginal service providers, and Aboriginal political organizations can be challenging in an environment of inter-agency competition. There appears to be a perception that it is easier for service providers to build horizontal relationships while it is seen as more complicated when it comes to governments. However, partnering with other Aboriginal organizations and different levels of government, especially in the absence of formalized structures of multilateral engagement, can put enormous strain on Aboriginal organizations. As a community worker in Ottawa noted, “that’s really a role that is falling on the shoulders of some of our organizations. So I find we’re getting stretched, because before when we dealt federally, we dealt federally. Now we’re being called upon to deal federally, municipal and provincial. Yet there is no core funding to support that. So we want to work with them. We know it’s important. They want to engage. But I find it’s really stretching all of us in the community”.⁹⁸ Larger Aboriginal organizations with more capacity are better positioned to absorb these additional demands, but without core funding the task of increasing collaboration remains difficult.

Federal, provincial and municipal governments need to create greater internal coherence of policies, as a precondition for more effective collaboration across scales. Within the federal government, horizontal integration is being addressed as one of the goals of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy.⁹⁹ And as a community worker in Ottawa commented, “the silos that we have been working in are starting to break down”.¹⁰⁰ Given the challenging task of reconciling horizontality with requirements for vertical accountability, progress appears to be rather slow though.¹⁰¹

Until recently municipal governments have not substantially engaged urban Aboriginal communities.¹⁰² One of the barriers with respect to stronger municipal-Aboriginal relations has been that, in terms of the rights-based arguments, local governments are at a greater political distance from Indigenous groups. This creates a paradoxical situation in the sense that “Canada’s urban governments are simultaneously closest to and farthest away from jurisdictional potency on urban Aboriginal matters”.¹⁰³ However, this appears to be changing. In Ottawa, an Aboriginal Working Committee was created in 2007 which formalized working relationships between the City of Ottawa’s Community and Protective Services Department, the OAC and other stakeholders. The Aboriginal Working Committee is not an advisory committee; it does not report directly to Council, but works with the Community and Protective Services Department which oversees the services felt to be most pertinent to the Aboriginal community. This was

⁹⁸ Interview, August 20, 2008.

⁹⁹ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Urban Aboriginal Strategy – Background. Retrieved January 30, 2008 from <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/ofi/uas/bkg-eng.asp>.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, August 20, 2008.

¹⁰¹ Interview, October 22, 2008.

¹⁰² Terry Mountjoy, “Municipal Government Perspectives on Aboriginal Self-Government”. John Hylton, ed. *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada. Current Trends and Issues*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 1999. 310-328; Peters and Walker, “Indigeneity and marginalization”; Ryan Walker, “Improving the Interface between Urban Municipalities and Aboriginal Communities”. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 17, no. 1 (2008b): 20-36.

¹⁰³ Graham and Peters, *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*, 9.

considered a more productive route in moving initiatives forward.¹⁰⁴ In Winnipeg, a number of initiatives, including “First Steps: Municipal Aboriginal Pathways” in 2003, the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement in 2004, Memoranda of Understanding with the Manitoba Métis Federation and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) in 2005, and the Aboriginal Youth Strategy in 2008, are indicative of a stronger municipal engagement.¹⁰⁵ However, it should be noted that Municipal Aboriginal Pathways came into existence on the initiative of the former mayor of Winnipeg, Glen Murray, and does not seem to provide the blueprint for the present city government’s urban Aboriginal strategy. Currently, much of the emphasis of municipal (as well as provincial) engagement in Winnipeg appears to be on employment and training because of how important young Aboriginal people will be to the city’s labour force in the future.¹⁰⁶ Marginalized within these debates, in both cities it appears, are Indigenous discourses that assert rights to self-determination and self-government.

Conclusion

In 1999, Katherine Graham noted that “Canada is now at a moment of opportunity with respect to urban Aboriginal governance”.¹⁰⁷ However, this opportunity has not been seized to sufficiently enhance urban Aboriginal self-determination. Constructive processes and shifts in policy at multiple scales have occurred – particularly with the Urban Aboriginal Strategy – but a more coherent policy framework, more adequate funding arrangements and principled commitments to the implementation of urban Aboriginal self-government are lacking. Reframing the issues so that urban Indigenous peoples and communities are no longer seen as illegitimate, deficient and out of place will be part and parcel of actualizing “the city as an opportunity and renewal”.¹⁰⁸

Different notions of self-government and definitions of community co-exist, and at times compete, in Winnipeg and to a lesser extent in Ottawa. Therefore, it is important to make substantial political space to accommodate the full range of Indigenous community- and nation-building projects in and beyond cities. Making more space for urban Aboriginal self-determination would require significant long-term investments, as well as structural and processual changes, to enhance the capacities of local and regional First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Aboriginal organizations. Regardless of the specific political arrangements that urban Indigenous communities consider best suited to meet their diverse interests, Aboriginal bodies, on the regulatory and service delivery ends, need a greater degree of power, control, and

¹⁰⁴ Interview, September 3, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Ontario and Manitoba differ with respect to the capacities and areas of jurisdiction that cities have. In the 1990s, a massive downloading of services was initiated in Ontario. Given that cutbacks are felt most acutely at the municipal level and that the ability of the city to raise revenue is limited, the City of Ottawa has supported Aboriginal community building efforts mainly as a facilitator and through in-kind contributions. In Winnipeg, social services are delivered by the province and a central focus has been the participation of Aboriginal peoples in the city’s labour force.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, May 21, 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Graham, “Urban Aboriginal Governance in Canada”, 377.

¹⁰⁸ Newhouse, “The Invisible Infrastructure”, 251. Cities, in particular, are well positioned to benefit from the opportunities presented by urban Indigenous communities, see Ryan Walker, “Improving the Interface between Urban Municipalities and Aboriginal Communities”. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 17, no. 1 (2008b): 20-36.

resources. This would not preclude but in fact require increased collaboration between different levels of government and Indigenous organizations through special-purpose bodies.

In light of the growth of urban Indigenous communities, self-government requires significantly more attention, because current funding practices, restrictions around access to services, and lack of political representation exacerbate the marginalization experienced by many Indigenous people. Several community leaders in Ottawa and Winnipeg noted that litigation may present a tenable route to transforming Aboriginal-state relations at the urban scale and to creating political arrangements that reflect and respond to contemporary realities of growing and diverse urban Indigenous communities. While efforts to “close the gap” and needs-based approaches are important, sustainable urban Aboriginal self-government arrangements will more likely emerge within contexts that substantiate Aboriginal rights.¹⁰⁹ Since urban Indigenous governance cannot be looked at in isolation, actualizing self-government in cities needs to be conceptualized as part of a larger transformation of Indigenous-state relations and the decolonization of Indigenous governance more generally.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon Christie, “Challenges to Urban Aboriginal Governance”. Michael Murphy, ed. *Canada: The State of the Federation. Reconfiguring Aboriginal-State Relations*. Montreal/ Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003. 93-115.

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