

"Sustainability is
here to stay or we
may not be."

NIALL FITZGERALD



Sustainability

The sustainable development discourse

The understandings of sustainability are old but ever-new. Scott Graham explores the discourse of the complex issue.

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The Olympic Games: A sustainable 'mega-event'?

Sustainability should be considered in Olympic planning. Vancouver-Whistler has an opportunity in 2010 to leave the games with a legacy of sustainability.

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Sustaina-what?

The gap between recognition and action on sustainability is often wide. Colin Grant give us some practical tips on how to bring sustainability alive in our communities.

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Sustainability and social enterprise: A new sector?

Non-profit and mission-driven enterprises are leaders in sustainable. Their record is impressive, and reach farther than you might think.

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Learning to live sustainably

THE BUILDING WHERE I WORK is lucky to have a doorway pole incorporated into it, a symbol that celebrates our Aboriginal culture and work with Aboriginal communities. *Wil Sayt Bakwhlgat* is the name of the pole, which means “the place where people gather.” It is not only a link to our heritage, but it depicts an important creation story and speaks to the relationship between humans and the natural environment. In the story, man is challenged to learn to live with creatures from the earth, water, and sky. Only as he proves able to live in harmony do the spirits allow him to expand his horizons and activities.

The story of the pole teaches, “If you want your children to go on living with you, learn how to live with them. If you can live with them, you can live with each other and you can live with yourself.” The story of the pole is a way to talk about sustainability. Sustainability is often talked of as the balance between elements of life, or an integration of social, economic, environmental, and cultural in a way that guarantees the same or better freedoms and opportunities for our children. Sustainability speaks to our very survival—as humanity now faces challenges of unprecedented scope and scale—and perhaps makes it the most important but least understood issue of this century.



We hope that this issue of *SPARC BC News* will provide some information and reflection on issues of sustainability and provide you with the tools to become engaged in defining the sustainable development of our communities. With the federal election campaigns now underway, it is important to get informed and engaged on the social issues. Visit the SPARC BC website to find our *Canada Votes 2006* papers, which provide information and questions intended to support democratic participation and foster awareness of social issues.

SPARC BC is proud of the way we have sustained our organization since its inception in 1966. This year, we will celebrate the accomplishments of a 40-year history in community development, and continue to manage our resources responsibly. Please see the insert in the centre of this issue for our annual thank-you to our members and donors. We are so grateful for your interest in and support of SPARC BC.

DANIEL HILL
PRESIDENT, SPARC BC

Sustainability



OUR MISSION

The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia works with communities in building a just and healthy society for all.

ABOUT SPARC BC

SPARC BC is a non-partisan, independent charitable organization. Since 1966, SPARC BC has conducted public education and advocacy on key social issues, focusing our efforts on the areas of:

- Income Security
- Accessibility
- Community Development



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CANADA VOTES 2006

Canadians are set to return to the polls on January 23, 2005 for another federal election. SPARC BC has once again assembled a social issues election information package, this time called *Canada Votes 2006*. The package is available for download from our website at www.sparc.bc.ca.

We encourage you to use *Canada Votes 2006* to foster debate and get social issues on the political agenda. The package is full of information on

six important social issues— Accessibility and Inclusion, Local Government, Children, Affordable Housing, Population Health, Taxation—and provides sample questions for candidates.

We also encourage everyone to consider organizing an all-candidates meeting. For some tips, see the article "Organizing an all-candidates meeting" on our website www.sparc.bc.ca.



The social enterprise is big, but relatively unrecognized. Bigger than fishing in B.C. Almost as big as oil and gas. This sector is leading the way in sustainability. **BY KYLE PEARCE**

Sustainability and social enterprise: A new sector?

MANY ECONOMIC SECTORS RECEIVE a variety of news coverage, but one that remains understated and unrecognized promises to contribute significantly to social and economic sustainability. This sustainability-seeking sector is unified by the fact that their goals are primarily mission- rather than profit-related, and their intent is often non- or anti-consumerist. They succeed as businesses by building markets of values-oriented consumers and by exploiting economies that go under the radar of large capital-intensive companies, often generating revenue while working to meet the needs of the most marginalized groups in society. While competing definitions of this field exist, the sector is made up of charities, non-profit societies, cooperatives, and for-profit enterprises.

At the micro level, many people see charities and non-profits as key players in the sustainability of communities and individuals. Whether an organization works to reduce clear cut logging, develop remote communities, provide cultural enrichment, or shelter abuse victims, it is clear that sustainability is, for these groups, measured in how they improve quality of life, economic conditions, or the resilience of individuals, families, and communities. However, with reductions in government social spending and an increasingly sophisticated pool of donors for charitable work,

organizations have found themselves dealing with the conundrum of sustainability in a more immediate way.

Caught in the dynamic of reduced funding are the organizations that were created to achieve social missions. I include arts and environmental organizations, who rarely have the financial strength to develop long-term plans and to ensure accessibility of their services to those with low incomes. Ironically, the very organizations that make our way of life more sustainable by lessening the disparity between 'haves' and 'have-nots,' have themselves become less sustainable.

The response of many in the non-profit field has been to become more resilient and to look at other ways of achieving their missions, and one of those ways has been through developing social enterprises. For example, in the fall of 2004, *SPARC BC News* featured an article by Liz Loughheed-Green about the Potluck Cafe in Vancouver. Potluck's innovation was grounded in a recognition of the fundamental nature of food to low income people, especially those with chronic illness. Potluck's success has come through sweat and rigorous thinking about balancing economic generators (catering and a café) with the needs of the surrounding community

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(generally low income, but including a range of businesses who need good food at reasonable prices). Currently, Potluck is blazing the trail by initiating new enterprise ideas, and leading in the development of a new process of accounting for both the financial and social impact of mission-driven businesses.

The issue of dental health is another space where the gap has become extreme. The proliferation of cosmetic dentistry belies the fact that dental disease is still the most common chronic disease of childhood, and is the most common reason for children under five to have surgery under general anesthetic (B.C. spends about \$7 million per year on this preventable surgery). Over the past five years, I have been involved in the development of a social enterprise in Vancouver's downtown Eastside that deals with this issue. Starting with a group of parents, elementary school principals, dentists, and community health activists, our commitment to improving children's dental health led to the development of a prevention-focused clinic serving the needs of Vancouver's inner city children and their families. Using a business model to serve families in four or more languages, and removing all barriers to treatment including cost, our model is effective, sustainable, and accountable to the immediate community. The result is that the Strathcona Health Society operates a business that provides over \$30,000 of free dental treatment annually, and which has eliminated the need for surgery under general anesthetic for children in the neighbourhood (from a starting point of 33 cases in its first year of operation).

The movement that spawned such original approaches to dealing with basic issues like food security and basic health is not new—Girl Guides started selling cookies in Regina in 1927—but the extent to which this approach is being used is growing faster than awareness of the sector.

The exact size of the social enterprise sector is unknown, but it is respectably large. At its narrowest—charitable organizations that engage in business activities—it accounted for almost \$4.25 billion in gross revenues, or 2.9% of B.C.'s GDP in 2002. By contrast, the fisheries industry, including commercial and sport fishing, aquaculture, and fish processing, generated \$601 million in 2001, or 0.5% of B.C.'s GDP.¹ And Tourism accounted for \$9.3 billion in 2002.² Even the sector that affects every economic transaction, the oil and gas industry, only generated \$4.5 billion in 2002 in B.C.³—that's only six percent greater than the gross revenue as generated by the market-based transactions of the charitable sector! By all accounts, the charitable social enterprise sector is large, and if one includes gross revenues for business operated by non-profits, cooperatives, and mission-driven for-profits, this sector could be a political player.

While the argument could be made that more space exists for mission-driven businesses, many factors limit the sector's growth potential. First, business activities are not always a panacea for reduced funding. Like any business, they require significant investment of time, energy, and capital. On the other hand, one of the strengths of the

1 BC Stats

2 Opportunities BC

3 BC Ministry of Energy and Mines

sector is that revenue-generation is not the primary goal, and in cases where business may not generate enough revenue to sustain itself, it may serve a new community or population that was previously unreachable. In the case where a business delivers a social benefit, it can be said to be either reducing the subsidy required or to be a drain on the organization's resources, depending on the perspective of its board of directors.

A significant development in this field is a movement to support these activities. In my role as Program Manager of the Enterprising Non-Profits (ENP) program, I am fortunate to facilitate a group of six funders⁴ that will make its 100th grant in the next year. ENP provides small grants of up to \$10,000 to non-profits so that they can plan a revenue-generating enterprise. While it is rare that a non-profit enterprise actually generates significant revenue, we have seen groups offset funding cuts, build a small revenue stream, or create new programs after developing business acumen and doing a thorough planning process. We have also seen groups decide to not pursue a business after assessing feasibility—a good decision because it mitigates the risk to the organization of investing scarce resources into a losing proposition.

Once a business idea looks good enough to pursue, a growing range of financial supports are available, including small family foundations, large fundraising charities, and an increasing number of specialized funders like BC Technology Social Venture Partners, and

Community Futures Development Corporations.

A new and significant source of support is in the recognition of social enterprise by the federal government, and the provision of resources that may help communities to develop innovative businesses that enable services and programs to continue. As a collective, this movement also reinforces itself through peer mentorship and conferences.

Like any new movement, the future of social enterprise is difficult to foresee, but some general trends in other jurisdictions may come to pass here, and much of that relates to the ability of groups not only to reinvent sustainability for themselves, but to also translate that into a coherent political and economic voice. For example, if social enterprises can create a compelling case that their activities are not only economic generators but that they reduce overall social costs through quicker workforce integration or harm prevention (like Potluck and the Strathcona Health Society), they may come to be seen as an industry that is capable of extracting preferential policies, regulations, funding or concessions, as other industries have done.

In ten years or so, we can look back on this period of challenge for mission-related enterprise and have some perspective on the growth that is occurring today. Until then, charities, non-profits and cooperatives will likely test ideas and learn business skills in the hopes that they can resolve the sustainability conundrum at both the organizational and social level. ■

⁴ Vancouver Foundation, United Way of the Lower Mainland, Vancity Community Foundation, Coast Capital Savings Credit Union, Western Economic Diversification Canada, and Vancity Savings Credit Union.



The Olympics, with its huge, one-time influx of economic, social, and cultural capital, are a huge challenge—and an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy of sustainability. **BY ROB VANWYNSBERGHE, PHD**

The Olympic Games: A home for a sustainable “mega-event”

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE OLYMPIC Games are in the news these days, together. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has committed the Olympic Games to sustainable development and considers the environment as the third pillar of the Olympic movement (sport and culture are the other two). For example, organizers of the 2006 Winter Games in Torino recently announced that they will buy carbon credits and set up renewable energy projects abroad in order to offset the over 100,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions that their venues and operations will produce. Similarly, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) has signed an agreement to reduce environmental pollutants and to raise public awareness with Beijing Olympic Games officials. And the 2012 Games in London has adopted the motto “Toward the One Planet Olympic Games” in

announcing to the world its commitment to becoming the first sustainable Games.

As a sociologist who studies sustainability, health promotion, and the Olympic Games, I believe that the Olympic Games in Vancouver-

Whistler are well placed to contribute to the ‘greening’ of the Games. This brief essay makes the case that the greening of the Games could lead to a legacy of a sustainable and healthy community.

In such a short piece, it is impossible to fully explain why a sustainable and healthy community is a feasible and desirable legacy for the 2010 Games. The following quote is useful in

outlining this argument.

“Sustainable communities are towns and cities that have taken steps to remain healthy over the long term. Sustainable communities have a strong sense of place. They have a

“As a sociologist who studies sustainability, health promotion, and the Olympic Games, I believe that the Olympic Games in Vancouver-Whistler are well placed to contribute to the ‘greening’ of the Games.”

vision that is embraced and actively promoted by all of the key sectors of society, including businesses, disadvantaged groups, environmentalists, civic associations, government

ingful and broad-based citizen participation; and economic self-reliance.”

—Institute for Sustainable Communities
<www.iscvt.org>

“To begin to achieve a sustainable and healthy community legacy, the Olympic Games must be seen for what it is, a mega-event. That is, the Games will be a one-time massive influx of human, cultural, and economic capital, all of which is commandeered to conduct the high-level planning and building necessary to host the visitors who attend and viewers who watch it all unfold.”

Translation: it is easier, but less beneficial for sustainability to “purchase carbon credits” and “raise awareness” than to actually engage local people in meaningful dialogue regarding their sustainability communities. The benefits of a community-oriented approach to sustainable and healthy communities are three-fold.

agencies, and religious organizations. They are places that build on their assets and dare to be innovative. These communities value healthy ecosystems, use resources efficiently, and actively seek to retain and enhance a locally based economy. There is a pervasive volunteer spirit that is rewarded by concrete results. Partnerships between and among government, the business sector, and non-profit organizations are common. Public debate in these communities is engaging, inclusive, and constructive. Unlike traditional community development approaches, sustainability strategies emphasize: the whole community (instead of just disadvantaged neighborhoods); ecosystem protection; mean-

First, we learn to extend our concern beyond our immediate future to the broader community and the social and natural systems of time and location. Second, we gain the will to address our perceived lack of control by recognizing our assets. Third, we seek information about the facts that explain the state of the world, its various trends and limits and how this evidence absolves or implicates our daily choices.¹

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1 Jepson, Edward J (2001). “Sustainability and Planning: Diverse Concepts and Close Associations.” *Journal of Planning Literature*. 15(4): 499-510.

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level planning and building necessary to host the visitors who attend and viewers who watch it all unfold. Mega-events are organized by a number of public agencies, private firms, and non-profit enterprises. The host city requires this network of agencies to address the rigid timelines, packaged images, and public consultations necessary to host these events. The key to social sustainability is to be just as innovative and entrepreneurial in capitalizing on the resources available to build local resources.

A coalition of community organizations has spent the last four years addressing the priority issues and challenges associated with a healthier and more sustainable community. Known as the Impacts on Community Coalition (IOCC), this group has members from such organizations as the Tenant Rights Action Coalition and Better Environmentally Sound Transportation. The IOCC was established in 2002 during the debate over Vancouver's bid for the Games. The organization's central goal then was to monitor the bid, and in the event the Games were granted to Vancouver, to monitor both the positive and negative effects for social, environmental, and economic urban processes in the city. The IOCC is interested in a socially sustainable 2010 Olympic Games. Today the IOCC seeks to partner with a broad cross-section of the region's citizens, community leaders, policy makers, and academics to monitor the Games in order to protect the homeless, provide local short- and long-term jobs, and

ensure that civil liberties are respected. This monitoring is designed to take the forms that establish networks, generate symbols, share authority, and enhance governance to improve our collective well-being.

Social sustainability is about broad-based linkages; it is concerned with integrating community organizations, local and regional government, the media, and ordinary people in fostering a shared vision of a healthy and sustainable community. The process of exploring our desired futures in relation to the Games is natural because we can build upon the good will and interest generated by the in winning the bid in 2003. Having already invested almost four years into a locally meaningful dialogue of the Games, there is a well-developed infrastructure of social networks, organizational assets, and other community engagement avenues to contribute to an informed, intense, but ultimately healthy debate about our collectively preferred future. In the recent past, we have done so by supporting a host of opportunities like the Mayor's Forums that led up to the City of Vancouver plebiscite on the Games. In fact, the plebiscite was instrumental to a July 2003 decision by the International Olympic Committee to grant Vancouver and Whistler the right to host the XIX Winter Olympic Games. The continuation of this legacy could be Vancouver-Whistler 2010's great contribution to sustainability in our region and the tradition of the Olympic Games. ■



2006 is set to be a big year for sustainability in BC. Can our communities actually move past the complex ideas and get to making real, lasting change? **BY COLIN GRANT**

Sustaina-what?

A practical guide to bringing sustainability to life in our communities

THE TERM ‘SUSTAINABILITY’ SEEMS to be everywhere today. Anyone who says there’s no such thing as a free lunch clearly doesn’t move in the world of sustainability, where it feels like you can work your way from one sustainability event to another almost every day of the week. And this is before Vancouver hosts a number of major international events in 2006, including the World Urban Forum, Globe, and Thirty Days of Sustainability.

But how much progress are we really making in this part of the world? Are communities, municipalities, towns, and cities able to present sustainability in the simple, compelling, and engaging manner that will lead to the tipping point sustainability folks often dream of—that magic moment when passionate talk and baby steps turn to massive action and lasting, dynamic change?

However we define sustainability—and there are usually as many definitions as there are people in a room—the word is being used to describe one of the greatest changes in human attitudes in history. In any cultural transition,

organizational change experts say that certain key elements need to be in place. These often seem to be forgotten in sustainability models. Now, the sustainability movement is not generally known for simplicity so here is a guide to bringing sustainability to life in a community.

1. Create a vision everyone will fall in love with

*“Vision without action is a daydream;
action without vision is a nightmare.”*

—Japanese Proverb

“A vision without a task is but a dream.

A task without a vision is drudgery.

A vision with a task is the hope of the world.”

—Church Inscription, Sussex, England 1730

In order to capture the imagination of any group of people, you must have a clear, compelling vision, something that makes them smile and, ideally, prompts the hairs on the back of their necks to stand on end. Ideally, a broad, inclusive group of stakeholders generates this vision. To date, however, most sustainability discussion excludes the generations who have most

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need of a sustainable future: children and youth.

Vision is generally done very poorly in sustainability models. The vision needs to come alive in multi media tools. People need to be “wowed” and to be able to envision themselves living in a better future world.

In order to avoid becoming stuck somewhere between drudgery and nightmare, as described in the ancient wisdom above, the vision needs to be linked to action. The first step in this process is to develop goals.

2. Make the vision tangible with Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BEHAGS)

A vision that wows people needs inspiring goals—*real* goals that require *real, substantive* action—that compel them to create significant change. Here, community leaders are lagging behind business leaders. For instance, Van City has announced its intention to become “climate neutral” by 2010. My own company became certified climate neutral this year through a tree planting program along with Small Potato Urban Delivery. Who will be the first mayor in B.C. to announce a date when their city will be climate neutral?

3. Link the goals to actions

At a recent workshop I facilitated with a group of district council officers and employees, they stated that there was currently no link between the strategic plan for the district and the budget that drives day-to-day actions. Sounds like some-

“In order to avoid becoming stuck somewhere between drudgery and nightmare, the vision needs to be linked to action.”

where between drudgery and a nightmare. People need to be able to see how their actions roll up to amalgamate with other actions towards achievement of the vision and goals.

4. Develop an indicator map that gets people engaged

People respond to positive adjectives— like “happy,” “vibrant,” “robust,” “engaged,” “safe,” and “beautiful”—to describe the world they want to live in. If you can’t tie your indicators and plans to words that help people see a vibrant, better future world, you are unlikely to achieve widespread engagement and action.

5. Integrate sustainability into “The Other Plan”

If there is a “business as usual” plan and a sustainability plan, the sustainability plan will not succeed. These need to be integrated into one simple, clear, compelling model that mayors and senior offices recognize as the key issues for the community.

6. Show people where you’re going, as well as where you’ve been

The vast majority of sustainability reporting shows stakeholders what has happened in the latest and preceding reporting periods but do not link this to a forward-looking plan geared towards achievement of the vision and goals.

This is like trying to steer a ship by looking at its wake—you know if you're going in a straight line, but you can't see what you might hit.

"If people recognize the indicators as their own, they are far more likely to become engaged in the associated programs—and achieve the vision."

7. KISS (Keep It Simple) and watch out for the following sustainability ailments:

INDICATORITIS: *Symptom* – "We don't know which set of indicators we should use so we can't really start the program."

Suggested Cure – Don't wait for a nationally or internationally acceptable set of indicators to appear—it will be a long time coming and is unlikely to engage the community even if it does arrive. Ask the people who live in your community to identify the indicators you should be using as you work together towards the vision you have agreed. If they recognize these as their own, they are far more likely to become engaged in the associated programs.

BENCHMARKITIS: *Symptom* – "We don't know where we currently stand so we can't go forward." [Associated ailment to *Indicatoritis*.]

Suggested cure – Don't wait for a definitive list of metrics to appear from some academic institution or NGO to show you where you stand against other communities. That may come in time, but right now you have unprecedented challenges and opportunities to address so roll up your sleeves and get on with it.

FRAMEWORKITIS: *Symptom* – "We're currently trying to figure out the connection between John Elkington's three legged stool, Mike Harcourt's four pillars, The Natural Steps' four system conditions, and Cities Plus' three core themes."

Suggested cure – Keep it simple and be very careful when using prescriptive frameworks—my rule of thumb is if you go above three core elements in your model, people will forget at least one of them (and may also begin to display symptoms of another nasty associated ailment, *multidementia*—see 7. below).

7. Bill Gates hasn't built tools designed to communicate sustainability

Sustainability is a difficult concept to convey in full, especially to diverse audiences with varying points of view and differing levels of understanding. Sustainability models need to be brought to life—in a way that "wows" and inspires people to make change. The next generation sustainability tools can bring your model to life—something you cannot do effectively in Word, Excel, and Powerpoint (warning: severe risk of *multidementia*). As the founder of a company that makes one of these tools, I recognize a conflict of interest here so I'll simply say that there are two companies in Vancouver making tools that can bring sustainability alive. As far as I know, there are none in Seattle.

Good luck! ■



Current understandings of sustainable development depend on a broad inter-relation of ideas and perceptions on social, economic, and environmental issues. **BY SCOTT GRAHAM**

The sustainable development discourse: A view through the social constructivist lens

ALTHOUGH A COMPLETE INTELLECTUAL history of the discourse of “sustainable development” and its sister term “sustainability” is out of the question,¹ it is useful to highlight the major elements constituting the discourse or, in other words, examine the talk and text about the idea. This kind of exercise, more than anything, is an invitation to explore an alternative way of thinking about sustainable development.

Because all discourses evolve, how we understand the evolution of the sustainable development discourse is contingent upon the frame of interpretation that one employs. One way of peeking into how the sustainable development discourse has been created is to employ the social constructivist lens.

What is the social constructivist lens?

Simply put, the social constructivist lens is a way of looking at the processes and results of human efforts to create meaning for expressions of language. It involves a consideration of the actors who create the language, the techniques for deploying it, and the processes by which its meanings are contested and transformed. In *The*

Social Construction of What?, Ian Hacking argues that when something is said to be “socially constructed” this is a shorthand way of saying that in the present state of affairs X is commonplace and therefore appears to be inevitable.² The sustainable development discourse appears to be inevitable to us due to the efforts of individuals and organizations to create meanings for the discourse’s expressions.

Thus, to say that the sustainable development discourse and the goals toward which it strives is socially constructed assumes that ideas with respect to sustainable development are created, re-created, and instantiated by proponents of sustainable development in particular socio-historical settings. This means that the components of the discourse—concepts, principles, policies, theories, research reports, conversations, declarations, and so on—are built up through the appropriation of the possible meanings of the term. This method of thinking about sustainable development involves understanding the creation of the sustainable development discourse as both a historical and an ongoing process that will continue to be re-created by people acting on

¹ See the following article for a more comprehensive overview of the sustainable development discourse: Wagle, S., (1998), “Sustainable development: Some interpretations, implications and uses,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*, 13, 314–323.

² Hacking, Ian (2001), *The Social Construction of What?*, Harvard University Press, 12.

their interpretations and their knowledge of it. The articles on sustainability in this issue of *SPARC BC News*, including this one, all fall into the historical trajectory of the collective efforts to add to the sustainable development discourse.

A glimpse of the building process

When we talk about sustainable development, we are talking about a particular kind of development. In idealistic terms, development is a planned change towards a perceived improvement in the quality of life of people in a place. The question that rises next is: How does the descriptor “sustainable” modify or put constraints upon how we understand development? Although contestable, general consensus exists around the definition of sustainable development advanced in the 1987 Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future*. The report defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition contains two key concepts:

- The concept of ‘needs,’ in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor to which overriding priority should be given; and
- The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.³

It is in *Agenda 21: Programme of Action for*

Sustainable Development that the nations of the world endorsed the doctrine of sustainable development and created an approach to integrating its basic principles into development activities.⁴ Out of *Our Common Future* and *Agenda 21*, a plurality of meanings and methods of measuring sustainable development have been socially constructed. There are at least two central factors that influence how sustainable development is conceived and measured.

The first factor relates to how different methods of analysis are used to conceive and measure the sustainability of a given development. In the case of welfare reforms, for example, a data analysis can lead decision-makers to the conclusion that cuts to welfare is a development that will contribute to the increase and sustainability of economic activity. A different method of analyzing the same data, however, might conclude that an increase in particular kinds of spending on welfare will better serve the sustainability of economic activity. The different outcomes of analyzing the same data complicate efforts to understand which conclusion would most contribute to the sustainability of the economy and, moreover, presupposes that there is one method that is inherently better suited to produce the outcomes and understandings we seek.

The second principal factor contributing to the social construction of sustainable development relates to the first and is the goal that prac-

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³ World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, 43.

⁴ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992). *Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development*. Rio de Janeiro.

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tioners and academics alike strive toward: innovation. For practitioners, a common goal is to tailor-make sustainable development action plans, implementation strategies, and evaluation tools to address the issue in question. As such, practitioners are required to adapt old practices to work in new contexts. Similarly, academics that produce novel research about sustainable development often employ their research findings as a resource for expanding contemporary notions of sustainability. Such intellectual innovations expand what we can know about sustainable development by adding to the discourse new variations of the theme and thereby make possible the integration of such insights into future sustainable development initiatives.

A central dialectic in the sustainable development discourse

Although the major builders and the tools of their respective trades have contributed to the creation of several dialectics in the sustainable development discourse, I will draw our attention to a key dialectic between critical theorists, proponents of neo-classical economics, and business consultants that drives change within the sustainable development discourse.⁵

Critical theorists from a wide range of disciplines have worked to highlight the issues inherent to the sustainable development thesis, especially as it is conceived within the neo-classical economic development model. To risk oversim-

plifying this model is to claim it involves maximizing aggregate economic growth by adopting either the capitalist ‘free market’ or the planned ‘state monopoly capitalist model’ (or appropriate combinations and variations thereof). Such an idea assumes that, in the long run, the ‘trickle down’ effect of growth will make the inequality of wealth distribution palatable. Critics, however, point to the high poverty rates among minorities and lower-class citizens in industrialized nations as evidence of the failure of the neo-classical approach. After more than two hundred years of economic growth, these groups remain poor—and the critical theorist might quip that the tide does not raise all boats.

Such critics claim that principles of sustainability as defined in *Our Common Future* and *Agenda 21* are incompatible with the kind of development that results from the functions of the neo-classical economic model. Thus, any effort to marry the two is to embark upon an impossible task. From this slant, what is needed is the refinement of economic theories, practices, and legal constraints that harmonize with the principles of sustainable development.⁶

The popular counterpoint to the demand for innovations to the neo-classical economic model and its corresponding functions is the assertion that economic growth is the key to sustainable development and there is no better model for the job. Simply put, the cost of sacrificing economic growth at the expense of social and environmen-

5 Broadly defined, a dialectic is an exchange of propositions and counter-propositions resulting in a synthesis of the opposing assertions.

6 Govindan, Parayil (1998). “Sustainable development: The fallacy of a normatively-neutral development paradigm.” *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 15(2), p. 186.

tal consideration will not result in the improved living conditions sought by critical theorists, and could in fact worsen conditions by depleting the economic base that currently sustains people. One synthesis of these opposed views is the metaphor of the triple bottom line as advanced by green-minded business consultants.

Traditionally, companies and economists alike have used the metaphor of the 'bottom line' as a profit figure. In trying to assess a company's economic bottom line performance, accountants gather, record, and analyze a wide range of numerical data. This metaphor has been expanded in recent years to reconcile principles of sustainability to economic activity. In his book *Cannibals with Forks*, John Elkington works to include two more 'bottom lines' that companies ought to consider when planning, implementing, and measuring their activities: the environmental bottom line and the social bottom line.

The environmental bottom line involves the concept of natural capital, which is typically thought of as coming in two major forms: critical natural capital, which includes any element in the environment that is essential to the integrity of a given ecosystem, and renewable natural capital, which consists of elements of the environment that can be renewed. Inquiries into a company's environmental bottom line will involve asking questions like: What forms of natural capital are affected by our operations, and are the identified forms of natural capital sus-

tainable given our activities and other pressures?

The social bottom line involves the concepts of human and social capital. Simply put, human capital involves the public health, skills, and education of a population group, whereas social capital involves the ability of people to work together for common purposes in organizations. Organizations concerned with the social bottom line will ask the following questions: What are the forms of social and human capital that are imperative to our ability to become a sustainable organization? What is the role of our organization in creating and sustaining the identified forms of social and human capital?⁷

Albeit not comprehensive, the above minimap of the this central dialectic in sustainable development points to how it will continue to be played in the discourse, intersecting with other dialectics and resulting in innovations in what is known and understood about the subject. Regardless of future directions in the discourse, the fundamental principles of sustainable development remain imperative to our thinking about the kind of world we want and the kind of world to which future generations are entitled. In closing, I offer a recycled piece of this discourse that I believe provides a succinct description of the basic spirit of sustainability: "A sustainable society which is unjust can hardly be worth sustaining. A just society that is unsustainable is self-defeating."⁸ ■

7 Elkington, John (1998). *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*. New society publishers, p. 69–96.

8 Birch, C. et al. (1979). *Faith, Science, and the Future*. Preparatory readings for a World Conference Organized by the World Council of Churches at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Cambridge, Mass.

Left Behind:

A Comparison of Living Costs and Employment and Assistance Rates in B.C.

SPARC BC's most recent examination of income assistance rates in B.C. shows that current levels do not permit individuals or families to meet the basic costs of daily living, writes **Michael Goldberg**.

LEFT BEHIND IS SPARC BC'S latest report to compare welfare benefit rates available to individuals and families eligible for 'temporary assistance' with the cost of the goods and services required for daily living. These goods and services include the costs for food, clothing, household supplies, personal care, transportation, child care, shelter, and other costs associated with participation in community life.

The report uses five hypothetical households as reference points for the calculation of BC Employment and Assistance income and minimum monthly living costs. These households include: a single adult; a single parent with a three-year-old child; a couple with no children; a single parent with a fifteen-year-old child; and a couple with a four-year-old and a one-year-old.

Left Behind clearly demonstrates that maximum BC Employment and Assistance benefit rates remain too low to sustain anyone requiring income support. Income assistance meets only 41% of the SPARC BC cost estimates for a single adult, 45% of a childless couple, 57% of the expenses for a single parent with a three-year-old or a teenager, and 58% of the living costs of a couple with two children.

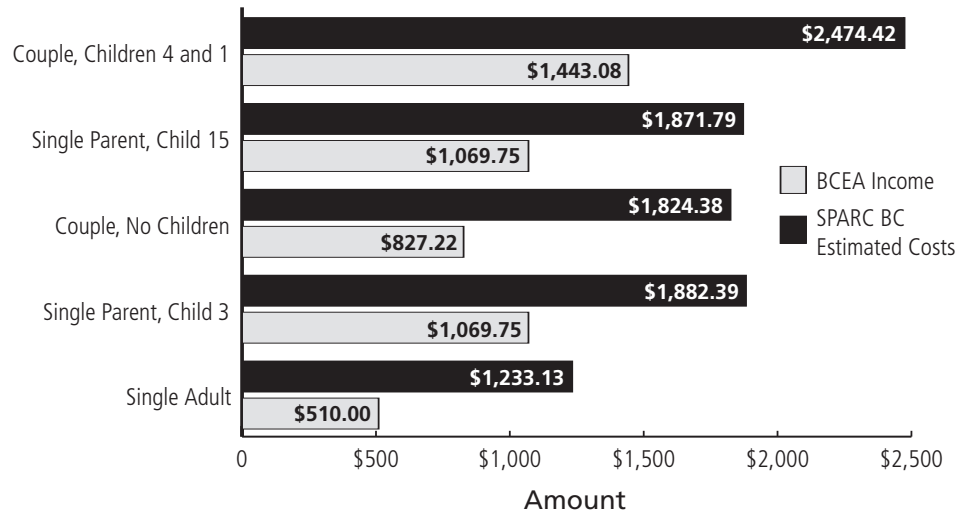
SPARC BC believes that reducing the poverty of persons receiving income assistance is a question of public and political will. British Columbia has the opportunity and capacity to be a leader in advocating for progressive income security policies. BC Employment and Assistance rates must be set at levels that permit the purchase of nutritious food, appropriate clothing and transportation, quality child care, adequate health care, and decent housing. In addition, income assistance should permit recipients to participate in a meaningful way as members of their communities. To this end, SPARC BC recommends that:

- The Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance revise its 2005/06–2006/07 Service Plan and subsequent service plans to include performance measures that reflect a commitment to poverty reduction rather than simply caseload reduction.
- The provincial government immediately raises benefit rates to a level that will allow all recipients to meet the minimum living costs presented in this report. The Ministry should set benefit rate levels that are transparent with respect to some measure of the actual cost of daily living. Benefits must be increased annu-

ally to keep pace with inflation.

- The separation between the support and shelter components of income assistance be eliminated, creating a single overall benefit that allows recipients to make their own spending allocation decisions.
- Enhanced medical benefits be extended to all income assistance recipients in order to ensure that they have access to appropriate health, dental, and optical care.
- Earnings exemption be restored for persons receiving temporary welfare benefits in order to facilitate connections to paid work.
- The three-week waiting period before persons are eligible to apply for welfare be eliminated in recognition that persons who turn to welfare do so when other resources have already been exhausted, and immediate income support is required.
- The 'two-year independence test' and 'two-year time limit' eligibility restrictions be eliminated as denying access to welfare creates unnecessary hardship and significant risks to the health, safety, and livelihood of persons in need of income assistance.
- In the absence of a publicly funded child care system (including full-day care) the child care subsidy rates should be set at levels that cover the actual cost of quality child care provided

Comparison of B.C. Employment and Income Assistance Rates and SPARC BC'S Estimated Monthly Costs



by professionally trained staff.

- The allowable asset limits be set at \$2,500 for a single person and \$5,000 for single parents and couples without children. The assets limits should allow for one vehicle per household.
- The policy concerning liens on a recipient's home be abolished.
- A public review committee be established if the BC government rejects the above recommendations to: (i) develop an adequate income assistance rate structure and (ii) assess the social impacts of the 2002 welfare reforms. ■

A copy of the complete report and all the recommendations is available at

www.sparc.bc.ca/resources_publications/left_behind

The Regional Vancouver Urban Observatory (RVu): Measuring *ouR View* and tracking our progress towards sustainability

Clare Mochrie, the project manager for RVu, shares the focus, desires, and activities of the global sustainability knowledge network.

THE LAST THREE DECADES HAVE WITNESSED a fundamental transformation in the economic, social, and environmental contexts in which we live. Advances in information technology and communications have altered traditional concepts of space and time. We have experienced unprecedented increases in global warming, species extinction, and desertification. The gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' has widened and our communities have been enriched by increasingly multicultural populations.

Leading experts in all the relevant fields agree that humankind now has the resources, technology, and knowledge to develop a way of living that could be economically healthy, socially equitable, and ecologically sustainable. And yet, we continue to struggle with how to establish this balance in practice. What sustainability means in one context to one person differs completely from what it means to someone else. How to manage population growth in a way that recog-

nizes these different perspectives but still provides a healthy, respectful safe, and economically viable environment for their citizens is possibly *the* fundamental challenge of our future.

Our cities stand at the forefront of this sustainability challenge. Massive urbanization is currently underway across the globe, and based on trends of the past fifty years, it is expected that virtually all the population growth between 2000 and 2030 will be concentrated in urban areas. By 2030, 60% of people in the world will live in cities, and by 2050, urban populations around the world are expected to double in size. In Canada, our three major urban centres will absorb 75% of our population growth over the next generation. For cities, therefore, more than anywhere else, the principles of sustainable development are quickly becoming a survival mandate. In an effort to help cities accept and deal with this reality, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) estab-

What is RVu?

The **Regional Vancouver Urban Observatory (RVu)** is a project based at Simon Fraser University and grounded in the urban community of regional Vancouver, British Columbia.

RVu is engaged in a process to develop a set of indicators that relate to today's environment, reflect the priorities of Vancouver region's residents, and can track our progress towards the Vancouver that we would like to realize in the future.

RVu is part of the global network of local observatories organized by UN-Habitat on the premise that better information builds better cities. Independently and together, these observatories from around the world operate to improve the worldwide base of urban knowledge by helping governments, local authorities, and civil society organizations develop, gather, and apply policy-oriented urban indicators, statistics, and other urban information. They believe that better indicators and information, grounded in the issues and ideas that matter most to citizens across the region, can help the local community reach its highest goals.

lished a network of Global Urban Observatories.

Established in 1997, the purpose of the network is to build a knowledge base related to sustainability to equip cities with the information they need to make better decisions and track their progress. Currently, the network consists of over 80 observatories in cities around the world. Each of these observatories independently develops and tracks measures of urban sustainability. They also work together to benchmark their progress, share lessons, and build capacity.

In the fall of 2004, Vancouver joined this expanding network. The purpose of the Regional Vancouver Urban Observatory (RVu) is to contribute to the worldwide urban knowledge base through the development and distribution of policy-oriented urban indicators and statistics. Its goals are to:

- Connect and coordinate critical indicators for the region
- Capacity-build through partnerships with existing partnerships and networks
- Communicate the process and its results to local decision makers and others

The initial phase of the RVu project focused on research into other local and global indicator and sustainability initiatives. In the fall of 2005, RVu began to reach out to the broader Vancouver community.

Guided by a board of advisors with expertise in sustainability indicators, this public engagement phase of the project was launched with a workshop called *Focusing our View* on October 24, 2005. This event brought together over 100 individuals from different communities

throughout the Vancouver region to express and explore their diverse perspectives and priorities, hear presentations on the indicator research process, and work towards a common purpose: better measures and targets for our development and progress. Participants' ideas were clustered into eight general focus areas, and some individuals committed to a six-month study group process to examine, explore, and recommend what the measures should be in each of the following topic areas: mobility, community building, food systems, economic and social development, urban development, the environment, governance, and culture.

In April 2006, the groups will come together to share their indicator recommendations. The results of their process will be published in *Counting on Vancouver: Our View of the Region*. These indicators and related trends will also be presented at the third World Urban Forum, being held in Vancouver in June 2006.

Feedback gained through the Forum will provide critical direction for the longer-term monitoring, engagement, and research activities of the Observatory. The information will inject new energy into the ongoing dialogue around sustainability indicators in the region. It will also provide decision makers with critical input, helping to support better urban policies and clearing a path to a more sustainable future. ■

To learn more about the RVu project and to get involved, visit <www.rvu.ca>

Public policy for women

A recent conference in Vancouver took up the issue of public policy as it relates to women. **Margaret Condon** reports back from *Imagining Public Policy to Meet Women's Economic Security Needs*.

RECENT DISCUSSION OF PUBLIC POLICY and how it serves women's needs has been limited. Hence, when the Simon Fraser University Women's Studies Department and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office held a conference on the subject in Vancouver in early October, it was a reminder for many of the "boomers" in the audience of the 1960s and 1970s women's movement, while for the "genx-ers" it was an occasion to revisit their women's studies curriculum of the 1980s and 1990s. Sponsored by the Economic Security Project, a multi-year research initiative funded by a SSHRC Community University Research Alliance grant, the "Imagining Public Policy to Meet Women's Economic Security Needs" conference presented an opportunity for both the academic and the community-based participants to go beyond criticizing existing policy to imagining realistic policy based on both new ideas and successful programs elsewhere.

The conference opened with an address from the Hon. Monique Begin, who set the scene by making a compelling case for a focus on women's economic security needs—for example, 22% of women vs 12% of men are in low-paid

(>\$10/hr work)—and also for the identification of public policy examples from around the world that better address women's needs—for example, 99.7% of children aged 3–5 years in France attend pre-school. She recounted an interesting anecdote from her early days as Minister of National Health and Welfare (1977–1984), namely that it was her goal to introduce a Guaranteed Annual Income program, but that the idea had to be set aside when she learned of the impending recession and that it would have required a doubling of the social assistance budget due to the numbers of the working poor.

She concluded by cautioning us about the myth vs the reality of our nation, and to be aware that Canada is not "the Sweden of North America." She challenged us to think about why we are so parsimonious with social assistance, yet so generous with health care, and offered that values of equity and social justice are prerequisites to public policy that meets women's economic security needs.

The conference program covered the policy areas of employment standards and barriers to labour force participation, social assistance and social policy, and community-based health care.

"We need to better address women's needs—for example, 99.7% of children aged 3–5 years in France attend pre-school."

Selected highlights follow:

- Alternatives to the traditional model of labour and social protection were presented that consider the life course of the individual as opposed to strictly the employment relationship, and reflect shared work and valued caregiving as opposed to unequal work and undervalued caregiving.
- The Living Wage concept, which has gained momentum in the UK, where it was found to be 30% – 40% above the minimum wage on average, and has led to the prominence of the visible minority community and defacto faith-based communities there, was presented as an issue that has the potential to unite different groups in Canada.
- The criticality of showing that welfare benefits don't only accrue to the poor but to all of society was stressed.
- Likewise the need to demonstrate the economic value of good social policy that is integrated and flexible and thus able to meet diverse needs was emphasized.
- The various dimensions of caregiving and the increasing likelihood of women to be simultaneously seeking or providing care for children *and* aging parents emerged during the discussion on social supports.
- The fundamental need for good child care and other supports in welfare-to-work programs was highlighted, along with a warning that an increased focus on family can lead to spousal and child abuse not being a priority.

The conference concluded with a presentation on strategies for change by Hilary Wainwright who reminded conference attendees of the need to address mobilization along with

“Canada is not ‘the Sweden of North America.’ Why we are so parsimonious with social assistance, yet so generous with health care?”

the development of alternative policies. She recommended working to strengthen the autonomy of popular democratic organizations outside of the state through use of state public resources. She offered that feminists and other activists have very few allies today and therefore need to develop cross-sectoral organizations. At the same time she suggested that the crisis of legitimacy of traditional organizations such as the World Trade Organization presents an opportunity for the emergence of transformative organizations, where there is a connectedness from below rather than above. This environment could give rise to new values that would lead to public policy that meets women's economic security needs. ■

Resource Websites

ESP Conference

<www.sfu.ca/espconference2005>

National Action Committee on the Status of Women

<www.nac-cca.ca>

Status of Women Canada

<www.swc-cfc.gc.ca>

Alternative access to media

Organizations like AudioVision and VoicePrint are expanding access to print and visual media in Canada. SPARC BC applauds their efforts in helping to foster universal access.

AT SPARC BC, WE WORK hard to promote accessibility for people with disabilities in communities all across B.C. We are fortunate to also work within the community of organizations and individuals who also work for the same cause. It is especially gratifying to observe the progress that is being made in expanding access in all kinds of areas, for the benefit of all of us.

One such success that recently came to our attention is a new agreement the government of Canada has signed with AudioVision Canada to provide video description for a selection of titles from the National Film Board’s vast library. The described versions will be added to the content on the NFB’s current website and will increase access for persons with vision disability. In addition to its existing online material, the NFB will create a new website that focuses on animation, and which will also feature described titles.

AudioVision Canada is a division of The National Broadcast Reading Service Inc., a not-for-profit enterprise that provides access to print information in a broadcast format to Canadians with vision and print restrictions. Through a pro-

gramming license issued by the CRTC, VoicePrint Canada produces and delivers audio versions of the major stories published by the national daily newspapers. Through its Local Broadcast Centre initiatives, VoicePrint also provides audio versions of stories, editorials, public service announcements, and grocery specials published by community papers to communities across Canada via the Internet. SPARC BC has partnered with VoicePrint to make SPARC BC News articles available, as well as some of our publications, especially those designed to support citizen engagement.

We see these opportunities as an important example of the expanding access for people with disabilities that brings our goal of truly inclusive communities that much closer. It is important to recognize and celebrate these achievements. Universal access benefits us all. ■

“We see the efforts of organizations like AudioVision and VoicePrint as important examples of the expanding access for people with disabilities that brings our goal of truly inclusive communities that much closer. It is important to recognize and celebrate these achievements.”

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- Web Links**
- AudioVision:** <www.audiovisioncanada.com>
 - VoicePrint Canada:** <www.voiceprintcanada.com>

An urban Aboriginal life:

The 2005 indicators report on the quality of life of Aboriginal people living in the Greater Vancouver region

Nathan Cardinal, a researcher with the Centre for Native Policy and Research and author of *An Urban Aboriginal Life*, reports on the study's process, findings, and recommendations for action and further research.

WHILE THE MAJORITY OF CANADIANS enjoy one of the highest levels of quality of life in the world, the situation is radically different for Canada's Aboriginal population. In 2003, Canada ranked 8th in the United Nations' Human Development Index. However, if this ranking were recalculated solely for Registered Indians in Canada, this ranking would drop to 48th, just above Cuba and the Bahamas.

In order to document the social, economic, and environmental conditions of Aboriginal people living in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), a series of indicators relevant to the Aboriginal community were identified and evaluated by the Centre for Native Policy and Research (CNPR). While a significant trend exists that shows a migration of Aboriginal people to urban areas—with over 57% of all Aboriginal people now living in urban areas—little general information is available about this segment of the Aboriginal population. The information gathered for these indicators attempts to fill this gap in understanding by providing a comprehensive assessment of the quality of life of the Greater Vancouver region's urban Aboriginal population.

Indicators: a social measure

The CNPR's recent report, *An Urban Aboriginal Life: the 2005 Indicators Report on the Quality of Life of Aboriginal People Living in the Greater Vancouver Region*, documents the present social, economic, and environmental condition of Aboriginal people living in the GVRD. Further the report acts as a benchmark for future studies, highlight gaps in data, and provides recommendations regarding future data gathering, research, and policy development.

The suite of indicators chosen were selected to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the present social, economic, and environmental conditions of Aboriginal people living in the GVRD, as well as highlight gaps in available data and provide recommendations for future research and policy development. The medicine wheel, a holistic expression of the Aboriginal worldview, was used as a framework to determine categories and indicators for each of the four traditional directions: north, south, east, and west. At the core of the framework are both the elements and goals of a sustainable city: healthy people,

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healthy nation, and healthy land—society, economy, and environment. Advice from discussions with Aboriginal community members and professionals, as well as a comprehensive literature

“The medicine wheel, a holistic expression of the Aboriginal worldview, was used as a framework to determine categories and indicators for each of the four traditional directions: north, south, east, and west. At the core of the framework are both the elements and goals of a sustainable city: healthy people, healthy nation, and healthy land—society, economy, and environment.”

review, was used in selecting categories and indicators for the project. The scope of the report is limited to the Aboriginal (First Nation, Metis, and Inuit) population living within the jurisdictional boundaries of the GVRD. In total, 33 different indicators were selected in 12 different categories in the four traditional directions.

Data for each indicator were gathered and standardized as much as possible for each indicator to allow comparisons on various levels, including comparisons over time, between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in the GVRD, and between the Aboriginal population in the GVRD and the total Aboriginal population of B.C. Indicators were analyzed and rated according to one of four categories: strong, improving/fair, deteriorating/weak, or poor.

Disparities, inequality indicated

The indicator analysis revealed poor social conditions among the Aboriginal community in the GVRD, with significant disparities between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. Health conditions for Aboriginal people lagged behind the non-Aboriginal community. Cultural activities and language fluency were weak or deteriorating, and conditions for the Aboriginal family were also poor. Incarceration rates for Aboriginal people revealed a discouraging level of overrepresentation of Aboriginal people among convicted offenders. However, such dark clouds have a

silver lining: high school attainment rates are improving in the region, and there are positive signs of language rejuvenation among Aboriginal children.

Economic indicators showed pronounced levels of inequality between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population in the GVRD, but showed signs of improvement. While employment rates were weak, there were positive developments in the proportion of Aboriginal people holding management-level positions and in self-employment. There was also a noticeable improvement in the level of youth involvement in the local economy. Education proved to be an important factor in economic involvement; the employment rate of Aboriginal people with at least a high school diploma was nearly equivalent to that of their non-Aboriginal peers.

In contrast, the research indicated that present environmental conditions were stable but showed signs of significant deterioration in the near future. The amount of green space and protected areas were fair for an urban area, but there is concern because of pressure placed on these areas by a growing population. Forecasting of air emissions shows that emission levels of greenhouse gases will increase well above the targets set by the Kyoto Accord. Similarly, there were causes of concern regarding our interior environment. Aboriginal people were significantly overrepresented among the region's homeless, and the rate of Aboriginal households requiring major repairs is one of the highest for large cities in Canada.

There were significant data gaps for various indicators. For many of the statistics, especially vital statistics, data was available for only one segment of the Aboriginal population (e.g. Status Indians); conversely, data was also aggregated to provide a general statistic for all Aboriginal people, and did not differentiate between the various Aboriginal groups. There were also issues regarding differing spatial coverage and a subsequent lack of region-specific data, as well as issues regarding a lack of past data. In addition, there was often a general lack of data on issues important to Aboriginal people, such as diabetes rates.

More research, better policy

Policy needs to be developed that targets the basic socioeconomic conditions of urban Aboriginal people in the region. Issues of cultur-

al loss, housing and homelessness, education, and employment are key to improving many of the issues affecting Aboriginal people, such as health, crime and safety, and even salmon escapement.

Also, we must invest in more and better research. Specifically, we should conduct further research into what constitutes a "traditional" activity and develop a comprehensive approach to documenting homelessness in the Aboriginal community. Periodic 24-hour counts, while extremely useful, only provide a glimpse of the issue. Researchers should also undertake further research regarding both diabetes and cancer rates in the urban Aboriginal community. Rates for both diseases have significantly increased over the past 50 years, and urban Aboriginal populations may be influenced by characteristics that are unique compared to the rural population. A comprehensive study regarding Aboriginal involvement in the local urban economy is needed to examine the changing level of involvement, especially among youth.

We need to improve the gathering of vital statistics data regarding Aboriginal people to include all Aboriginal people, not just Status Indians. Lack of information regarding other portions of the Aboriginal population inhibits our ability to see a complete picture of the condition of health in the Aboriginal community. ■

The CNPR's report, "An Urban Aboriginal Life," is available for free download through their website and <www.cnpr.ca>.

Rethinking development

The concept of Gross National Happiness, an alternative philosophy of development, reports **Jim Sands**, continues to gain popularity and change the way people think about development and the goals of our society.

IS GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS really more important than Gross National Product?

Over 200 delegates representing 43 countries gathered last June in Antigonish, Nova Scotia to explore that question and to discuss how to integrate sustainable and equitable economic development with environmental conservation, social and cultural cohesion, and good governance. The event, entitled *Rethinking Development: Local Pathways to Global Well Being*, was the second International Conference on Gross National Happiness.

“It is evident that triumphs in the rat race to earn more, have more, and consume more do not bring true and lasting happiness,” Jigmi Y. Thinley, Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs for the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, said during an opening speech to delegates. “The rich, the powerful, and the glamorous, it appears, are often the ones who are more impoverished spiritually and socially, and thereby are less happy,” he added.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) has been adopted by Bhutan as the guiding philosophy of its development process. The term was coined by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck who stated during his inaugural address in 1972 that “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product.” This philosophy has

guided development in Bhutan based on the four pillars of sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, good governance, environmental preservation, and cultural preservation and promotion.

Noting that Bhutan is a truly remarkable country, philosopher John Ralston Saul told participants that “it is not an accident that it has come up with the highly disturbing concept of Gross National Happiness—‘disturbing’ because it upsets completely what is in place.”

The first conference on GNH, held in 2004 in Bhutan, provided an opportunity for international academics, community members, government officials, and others to engage in close discussion and dialogue about the concept. Antigonish, Nova Scotia was a fitting location for the second international conference for a number of reasons. First, it is the home of the Antigonish Movement, founded in the late 1920s by Catholic priest Moses Coady, which utilized study circles and adult education to develop support for the establishment of credit unions and cooperatives as a means of community and economic development.

Second, Nova Scotia is home of the Genuine Progress Index Atlantic Society, which is taking a leading role in the development alternative methods of measuring progress that take into

account social, economic, and environmental development. GPI Atlantic, a sponsor of the Rethinking Development Conference, has worked to integrate GNH with alternative systems of development utilized around the world.

GNH is rooted in Buddhist and Enlightenment concepts and perceptions on the nature of happiness. “The Enlightenment theory of happiness has absolutely nothing to do with the 20th century theory of happiness,” said Ralston Saul. “It’s very important to keep reminding people that in the phrase ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ happiness refers to the public good; it does not mean that you can go away and look after yourself and make yourself happy.”

During his address, Thinley noted “GNH recognizes that happiness should not be approached or viewed as yet another competitive good to be realized by the individual. It supports the notion that happiness pursued and realized within the context of the greater good of society offers the best possibility for the sustained happiness of the individual.” ■

A full report of the Rethinking Development Conference is available online at:
<www.gpiatlantic.org/conference>

The four pillars of Gross National Happiness

Excerpts from a speech by Jigmi Y. Thinley, Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs, Bhutan.

1. Sustainable and equitable Socio-economic development. The necessity for materialistic development is obvious from the scale of economic suffering faced by the majority of global population. Ignorance, ill health, deprivation, and poverty in their most abject forms are still serious challenges faced by much of the developing world. Economic growth is of absolute necessity to eradicate poverty. It is, therefore, true to say that for many countries and for vast sections of our global community for whom physical survival is an every day challenge, economic policies are what matters most. Securing jobs and livelihood are prerequisites of happiness.

2. Conservation of the Environment. It would seem from happiness researches that environment and biodiversity are not strong correlates of happiness. This is partly because, apparently, no one has attempted to seriously measure happiness against environmental variables. Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue against the value of environment in everyday life and hence our happiness, given that our health and aesthetic experiences depend on the quality of the physical environment around us. This is particularly true for the Bhutanese who live in an extremely fragile environment. I contend that even the development of our finer senses depend on our regular, if not daily, access to the natural environment. Thus, I would argue that there is a demonstrable relationship between happiness and natural environment.

3. Preservation and Promotion of Culture. While there should be all the space for choice, we should distinguish situations where individuals change their identities voluntarily from situations where powerless individuals are changed by profoundly pervasive forces such as open-sky and free trade regimes which spawn cultural hybridization, creolization, and displacement of vernacular economies, even before one realizes. This is particularly true in highly asymmetric situations like Bhutan where massive external cultural influences could literally overwhelm local cultural values when the borders open wide under the onslaught of globalization—hence the need for a vigorous promotion of indigenous cultures as a context for making available true choice to individuals. We believe that a state which does not preserve its cultural richness is one where the choices and well-being of its citizens are diminished and greatly constrained.

4. Good Governance. In one sense, securing any public good, such as collective happiness, depends on realising governance oriented to it. Logically, if a government should reflect the ultimate democratic desire or opinion of the people, which is happiness, then the nature of governance should also be attuned to it. But I must admit that both theoretically and practically, we are far from grounding GNH in any contemporary system of government and political structures, of which the most well established is liberal democratic system.

Engaging civil society in the creation of sustainable cities

While sustainable development may be the new conventional wisdom, many people have still not grasped its meaning.

—Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, 2002

By **Margaret Condon**

WE HAVE ALL HEARD THAT the Olympics are coming to Vancouver in 2010. However, in just a few months, from June 19 – 23, 2006, Vancouver will be on the international stage as it hosts the World Urban Forum. Why should we be excited, you say? Well, apart from the fact that up to 10,000 delegates from over 150 countries are expected to come to Vancouver for the event, it will mark the 30th anniversary of the landmark Habitat Conference that was also held in Vancouver in 1976.

History

Habitat in 1976 was a landmark conference that raised global awareness of the importance of human settlement development and sustainability, and led to the creation of a new United Nations agency, the UN Centre for Human Settlements (now known as UN-Habitat). At the local level, particularly through the exhibition in the old hangars at Jericho Beach, it strongly affected many of the young people of Vancouver, raising our awareness of the poor living conditions and inadequate housing facing many of the world's cities and communities.

In 1996 a second Habitat conference was held in Istanbul. Then, after 2000, a biennial UN-Habitat event was established known as the

World Urban Forum (WUF). The first WUF was held in Nairobi in 2002, the second in Barcelona in 2004, and now the third—and expected to be the largest by far—will be in Vancouver in 2006. Recently Housing Minister Fontana, speaking in Vancouver, stated, “I believe the third World Urban Forum provides a tremendous opportunity to re-fire the idealism of the 1976 conference and remind us all of what is possible if we seize the moment and work together”.

WUF and why it is important

The World Urban Forum provides an open forum—*registration is free and open to everyone*—for dialogue, networking, and generation of new ideas on tackling rapid urbanization and its impact on our communities, cities, economies, and policies. Compared to official UN meetings, WUF is designed to be informal and provide for the effective participation of non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, urban professionals, academics, governments, local authorities and national and international associations of local governments.

The main theme of WUF 2006 is “Our Future: Sustainable Cities – Turning Ideas into Action” (see the sidebar on page 32 for other themes). In understanding the urgency to the

sustainability of our planet of taking action on urbanization, consider that in 1950 one-third of the then world's population of 2.5 billion lived in urban areas, whereas by 2050 it is projected that two thirds of the forecast population of over 9 billion will be urban dwellers and living in some of the poorest parts of the world. This gives rise to the startling statistic that poor countries will have to build the equivalent of a city of more than a million people each week for the next 45 years just to absorb the increased numbers!

Canadians are becoming familiar with some of the pressures of urbanization too, such as crowded highways, crumbling infrastructure, unhealthy air and water, and waste management. Too many Canadians are also experiencing homelessness or a risk thereof due to a lack of affordable housing. Canada will be showcasing its broader commitment to municipalities through the "New Deal for Cities and Communities" at WUF, and is also hoping to have its new Canadian Housing Framework finalized in time to unveil at WUF.

Role of SPARC BC at WUF

SPARC BC has applied to host an official WUF Networking event under the social dimension dialogue theme of "Inclusion – The Right to the City". Our proposal, titled "Accessible Urban Space: A Facilitated Discussion on Inclusive Communities", will build on the findings of SPARC BC's Dialogue on Community Accessibility held in April, 2005. Whether or not we are accepted (there is much competition to host the 130 official WUF networking events)

SPARC BC anticipates holding a dialogue event in conjunction with the WUF in June, 2006. At this event we will explore issues around planning and design of the built environment, and how they impact on social inclusion in different cultural and economic settings. The needs of marginalized groups, barriers to equal access to urban space, and examples of good civic practices will be identified. Furthermore the dialogue will reflect on the importance of local citizen participation in the planning and design of accessible inclusive communities.

Local lead up to WUF 2006

In the Greater Vancouver area, the "sustainability community" has been coming together under

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EARLY RESULTS OF HABITAT JAM

As part of the preparations for WUF 2006, from December 1-3, 2005, a unique internet event was held that brought together over 25,000 people from around the globe to discuss and debate issues around sustainable cities. Canada, as the host country, put forward the idea of the on-line Habitat JAM as a key strategy to creating an inclusive WUF 2006. For 72 hours non-stop, everyday citizens, students, slum dwellers, subject matter experts, world leaders, and key thinkers shared their knowledge and ideas on some of the most urgent issues facing our rapidly urbanizing planet. While jamming herself, Mrs Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director, UN Habitat, observed "The fact that the debate on slums has moved from the academic world to the streets of Nairobi, Dakar, Cape Town and Mumbai, Rio, Lima, and Manila is a powerful signal to world leaders on the need for concerted action." The results of the Habitat Jam will be analyzed and integrated into the agenda of WUF 2006. As well they will remain posted for your viewing through to June, 2006 at <www.iamthejam.com>

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the Habitat +30 umbrella group, for the purpose of organizing a wide range of events leading up to and occurring in conjunction with WUF 2006. In October there were two major launch events—a panel discussion on “The Sustainable City” featuring the Hon. Michael Harcourt, co-chair of the WUF 2006 National Advisory Committee, and Dr. Peter Oberlander, organizer of the 1976 Habitat conference, which launched the UBC “Living the Global City” series. There was also a Regional Vancouver Urban Observatory (Rvu) workshop and dialogue event led by SFU where over 100 citizens and profes-

sionals participated in the launch of a study group process to develop a set of urban indicators for tracking progress and change in the Greater Vancouver region, the first report of which will be presented at WUF 2006.

Legacy of WUF 2006

It is hoped that WUF 2006 will focus the attention of national governments around the world on the urban agenda, and encourage them to take practical steps, particularly in the third world but also in Canada, to alleviate the living conditions of the urban poor and help pull them out of the cycle of poverty.

WUF also presents an opportunity to focus global attention on urban-specific issues as they relate to our local experiences, such as:

- Making compact, transit-oriented urban villages the predominant form of new residential development
- Creating incentives to kick-start the development of renewable urban energy sources, such as wind turbines, solar power, biomass conversion, and co-generation
- Putting in place favourable conditions for the pursuit of green architecture and building practices

To sum up WUF 2006 will provide a legacy of best practices, partnerships and networks, and hopefully focused leadership to the challenges and opportunities of urbanization—widely believed to be *the* great global issue of the 21st century. Let's hope it also results in an increased interest in sustainability by the general public in Vancouver, and in B.C. and Canada. ■

THEMES OF THE WORLD URBAN FORUM 2006

Main theme:

“Our Future: Sustainable Cities – Turning Ideas into Action”

Sub-themes:

“Sustainable cities: urban growth and environment”

“The shape of cities: urban planning and management”

“Energy: local action, global impact”

Sustainable Cities: Partnership and Finance

“Municipal finance: innovation and collaboration”

“Urban safety and security: taking responsibility”

Sustainable Cities: Social Inclusion and Cohesion

“Achieving the MDGs: slum upgrading and affordable housing”

“Public engagement: the inclusive approach”

WEBSITES

UN-Habitat World Urban Forum:

<www.unhabitat.org>

Canada World Urban Forum 3:

<www.wuf3-fum3.ca>

Habitat +30 Sustainability Community:

<www.habitatplus30.org>

Child poverty explodes in B.C., is Canada's worst

"A global human society, characterised by islands of wealth, surrounded by a sea of poverty, is unsustainable."—Thabo Mbeki

By **Michael Goldberg**

BRITISH COLUMBIA HAD THE WORST child poverty rate of any province in 2003, according to the latest figures from Statistics Canada.

The 2003 B.C. child poverty rate was 23.9%, well above the national child poverty rate of 17.6% and more than double the child poverty rate of 11.3% in Prince Edward Island.

The estimated number of poor children in B.C. in 2003 was 201,000. That was about the same as the entire population of Burnaby or the entire populations of Nanaimo, Kelowna and Cranbrook combined.

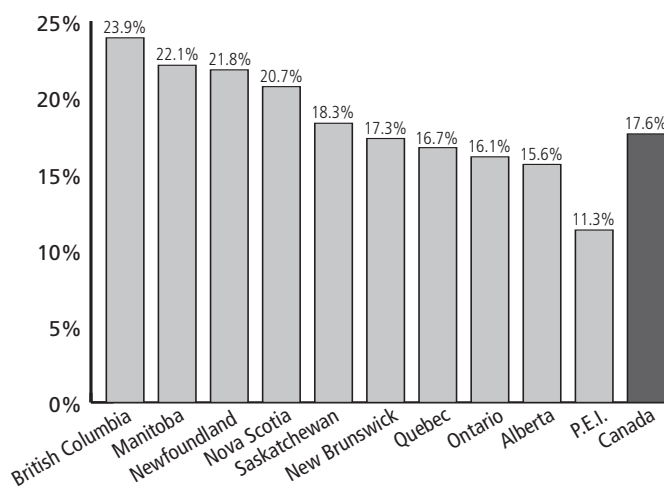
The statistics show that B.C.'s booming economy is not benefiting everyone. The private sector is failing children by not providing parents with enough jobs that pay decent wages in good working conditions. Governments are failing children by not providing adequate supports.

In 1980, when Statistics Canada first started publishing poverty statistics on an annual basis, B.C. had the lowest child poverty rate in Canada. The B.C. rate was 10.7%, well below the national rate of 16.2%.

In 1989, the year of the House of Commons all-parties resolution to end child poverty in Canada, the B.C. child poverty rate was 14.3% and the national rate was 15.1%.

In 1997, before the federal government introduced the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the year after the provincial government introduced the BC Family Bonus, the B.C. child poverty rate was 19.5% and the national rate was 22.1%.

Child Poverty Rates by Province, 2003



As of 2003, B.C. has the largest increase in child poverty since 1980. B.C. is also the province with the largest increase in child poverty since the House of Commons resolution in 1989. And B.C. is the only province where the child poverty rate was actually higher in 2003 than in 1997, despite increases in child benefits.

Further, contrary to common impressions, most poor children in B.C. live in families with incomes well below the poverty line. In 2003, the average 'depth of poverty' for poor children in this province was over \$11,000.

Concerted action by both the Federal and Provincial governments will need to be taken if we are to make any inroads in significantly reducing child poverty in BC and Canada. ■

Detailed fact sheet and an action plan to reduce child poverty in B.C. are available on the First Call web site <www.firstcallbc.org>

Measuring up

Community indicators can be a great tool for communities to use to assess community health and inspire change.

COMMUNITY INDICATORS CAN be powerful planning tools. They can assist communities to identify needs, plan for the future, and initiate transformation that can lead to improved health and well-being. The use of indicators in community development is on the rise across B.C.

A number of key elements exist that can assist in designing a sustainable indicator project.

Inclusion and process

Involve a broad range of community representatives from the inception of the project and throughout each step of the process in order to build a sense of ownership and commitment. Make sure that the process is inclusive.

Vision

Community development is by its very nature transformative. Social indicators don't measure for the sake of measuring, they spur the transformation inherent in community development work. This transformation should start with an understanding of the community vision, and a clear enunciation of values. Social indicators are only illustrative of where transformation needs to occur—they are a tool, not an end.

Indicators

Social indicators should be adequate in a number of ways:

- **Measurable** – data should be available for the indicators chosen.
- **Meaningful** – because indicators are used in community transformation, they should be understandable to the general public.
- **Modifying** – indicators should lead to a change in behaviour.
- **Maintainable** – indicators should be trackable over the long-term.
- **Magic** – indicators should be inspirational and build community buy-in.

Management and communication

In order to get from indicators to action, a performance management framework is needed: community development. Such a framework should include open communication, especially with the members of the target community. Further, it is important to continue to return to the communities' values, and always involve the institutions and decision-makers who have the power and influence to marshal resources, carry the project forward, and who can assist in implementing the changes identified by the community for the community. ■

For more information on community indicator projects, see SPARC BC's 2004 publication *Tools for Change* on our website. It describes over 40 community indicator projects at work throughout the province.

Please join us in building a just and healthy society for all!

ADDRESS

FIRST NAME

LAST NAME

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL ADDRESS (optional)

CITY

POSTAL CODE

1 Join

I will renew my SPARC BC Annual Membership

\$25 Individual \$60 Organization

Low income membership available — contact us for more information.

2 Make a donation

I will further support SPARC BC's programs and services

\$75 \$50 \$35 \$ _____

Payment

I would like to pay by:

- Cheque
 VISA
 MASTERCARD

\$ _____
TOTAL AMOUNT

CREDIT CARD NUMBER

EXPIRY DATE

SIGNATURE

DATE

3 Become a sustaining member

I would like to show my commitment to the work of SPARC BC by becoming a sustaining member and making a **monthly pre-authorized donation in the amount of**

\$20 \$15 \$10 \$ _____

I understand I will receive one tax receipt for my entire donation within a calendar year, and that I may change my donation any time by sending written notice to SPARC BC of my new donation amount.

I prefer to pay by cheque.

I authorize SPARC BC to withdraw from my chequing account on the ____ day of each month, beginning _____, 20____, for the amount indicated above. (I have included a cheque marked void).

SIGNATURE

DATE

I prefer to pay by credit card.

I authorize SPARC BC to charge my: (check one) VISA MASTERCARD

on the ____ day of each month, beginning _____, 20____, for the amount indicated above.

ACCOUNT NUMBER

EXPIRY DATE

SIGNATURE

DATE

SPARC BC collects certain personal information from our members and donors during the course of your financial support of the organization in order to manage our relationship with you. For example, as a federally registered charity we collect your name, telephone number and address in order to issue you a tax receipt. Additionally, SPARC BC uses that information to contact you for future donations to support our programs, renew membership, and issue copies of SPARC BC News. The submission of this form constitutes your consent to the collection and use of information for the purposes described above. You may withdraw or change your consent at any time, in respect of your personal information and in respect of any of the purposes described above, by contacting SPARC BC by email info@sparc.bc.ca or phone at (604) 718-7734.

Additionally, on approval of SPARC BC's Board of Directors, SPARC BC may periodically share your contact information with other charitable organizations within BC, so that they may contact you about their local programs. In all cases these organizations would have goals and charitable purposes similar to SPARC BC. No financial information will ever be shared. If you do not wish to have your information used in this manner please contact us by email

- **Parking permit holders: membership in SPARC BC does not affect your permit status.**
- **To update your contact information please: print corrections on the letter address label, call 604-718-7733 or email info@sparc.bc.ca**
- **Please return this form with payment to:**

SPARC BC
201-221 East 10th Ave.
Vancouver, BC V5T 4V3





Left Behind

A comparison of living costs and employment assistance rates in British Columbia

A Report from the Social Planning and Research Council of BC

by **Michael Goldberg** and **Kari Wolanski**

DECEMBER 2005



Thousands of British Columbians with low incomes, especially those on income assistance, do not have enough money to secure safe and adequate shelter or food. Left Behind clearly demonstrates that the maximum income assistance rates in BC

remain too low to sustain anyone requiring income support. Worse, income assistance recipients are being squeezed harder than ever, as the benefit levels in BC have remained static despite rising shelter, heating, transportation and food costs.

Download the report at www.sparc.bc.ca.