Third Sector Transformation in an Emerging City State:  
A Case Study of the Toronto Social Planning Council

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Introduction

The organization now known as the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPCT) has been active in the third sector of Toronto in different forms since 1937. Established as the Welfare Council of Toronto and District (TWC), it was re-organized as the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto (SPCMT) in 1957 during the momentum of the post-war development and in order to adapt to the larger urban area that had been created by the amalgamation of thirteen local municipalities into the regional Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto in 1953.

On January 1, 1998, the CSPCT, an amalgamation of six non-profit voluntary planning organizations was created, the same day of incorporation of the new city of Toronto. At the order of the provincial government despite extensive local opposition, the responsibilities of seven local municipalities and a regional government have been merged into one large urban form. The new city of Toronto has a population of 2.4 million making it the largest city in Canada and the fourth largest in North America. It has a reputation as "Toronto the Good" in a country that ranked first of 174 countries on the 1996 United Nations Human Development Index. Toronto is an ethno-culturally diverse city, 48% of the residents are immigrants and 41% are of visible minority groups. The city is experiencing significant political, economic and social changes. Canadian governments have adopted policies of devolution in their strategies to reduce expenditures. The federal government has cut transfer payments to the provinces for health, education and social services. The province of Ontario has in turn re-configured the funding and program responsibilities between the provinces and municipalities which has left Toronto with higher expenditures for social programs and increased responsibility for program areas such as housing.

The study traces the practice of independent social planning that has evolved as the Council has sought to fulfill its mandate in response to a changing social, political and
economic environment. The focus is on the current experience of transformation in the context of the emerging city-state of Toronto. The paper draws on the theoretical framework of a three part model of society and the concept of civil society (Putnam, 1993; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Fraser 1989; Habermas, 1984, 1987). We conclude with a set of tensions and dynamics that must be carefully managed and converted into civic strengths if the Council is to effectively perform its mission.

An Association of Civil Society

The concept of civil society has a long history in Western political thought and has been revived in recent years as a possible response or solution to the dramatic changes the world is experiencing. We define it as a sphere of social interaction between the economy and the state composed of the family, voluntary associations, social movements and forms of public communication (Cohen and Arato, 1992:xii). The political sphere consists of political parties and government structures. The economic sphere is composed of organizations of production and distribution (Cohen and Arato, 1992:xii).

Civil society is conceptualized as a mediating sphere through which social organizations exert influence on the political-administrative and economic processes (Cohen and Arato, 1992:x). It is a contested terrain within which individual and collective actors compete to interpret needs and values as well as determine how social resources should be distributed (Honneth, (1991:vii). A competing view of civil society is as the location where social need is to be met beginning with the individual, family and informal networks, workplace supports, then community organizations including charity and faith groups. A publicly funded social safety net takes on a residual role for needs that have not been met through other support systems. Democratic institutions are also included in this analysis as mechanisms for citizens to participate in the public policy process when necessary (Maxwell, 1997). This conceptualization of civil society places the primary responsibility for meeting need with the individual and their personal relationships and informal networks, and positions the state in a residual role. Citizens are to be active in meeting social needs on a voluntary basis and work through democratic public institutions for change. A shared view across these conceptualizations is that dense associational life promotes social and economic well-being (Putnam, 1993).

Toronto does have a dense associational life that includes an infrastructure of voluntary human service agencies providing a myriad of supports including child care,
family services, community centres, information centres, recreational facilities, emergency hostel services, refugee and immigrant support services, home care, literacy and language programs, youth services, employment and training programs. In addition there are numerous advocacy groups organized according to interest and/or population groups. Groups advocate to public institutions and government around concerns of children and families, youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, education, ethno-culturally specific services, health and welfare services, legal assistance, fair employment practices, services to women, human rights and many other issues.

The Council has worked both to develop and support the social service infrastructure and to conduct critical public policy analysis and advocacy. These core functions of independent social planning, have been consistently sustained by social research. A working assumption of this paper is that a vibrant civil society requires capacities for organization formation, knowledge creation and communicative action. Communication is the primary medium of influence of civil society and may be directed within its own sphere and/or with the state and economic sectors.

**The Practice of Independent Social Planning**

Independent social planning has been viewed traditionally as a field of practice of the profession of social work, a problem-solving activity concerned with social problems and social objectives. The process was expected to lead to agreement upon values, goals and means and in turn to priority determinations, the allocation of resources, the development of effective strategies and ultimately action programs (Warren, 1964:33). Independent social planning organizations have a long history in major Canadian cities providing a venue for residents to participate in the identification of problems within the local community and to determine how to best address these problems.

Three value orientations have broadly defined the work of these organizations: a commitment to a collective response to social need; a belief in citizen participation in public planning processes; and, a reliance on research and knowledge creation to guide the processes. The history of the Council reveals differing understandings and implementations of these values over time. A continuum of collective responses to need have been expressed, with private charity at one end and publicly funded social welfare programs at the other. The tension between public and private responsibility for well-being is at the centre of the current debate on social welfare.
The definition of 'citizen' has evolved. The membership of the Toronto Welfare Council was limited to the professional staff and volunteer board members of the social service agencies. In 1957, the emphasis shifted to lay representation from the professional social workers and the corporate elite of Canada dominated the forty-five board of the SPCMT. Twenty years later, middle class professionals and social activists (predominantly white) were in charge. The new CSPCT has an eighteen person board that attempts to reflect the diversity of the city. Mechanisms for broader based public input are being incorporated into the organization's structure.

Research has been a primary function of the organization since its beginning, part of the modernist belief in the potential of reason and knowledge to resolve the problems of society (Habermas, 1997). The process of social planning can be conceptualized as a process of knowledge construction. Knowledge is socially and culturally constructed according to the interests of those who have the power to create it. A complex reciprocal relationship exists between knowledge and power. Power is a productive network which runs through the whole social body forming knowledge and producing discourses (Foucault, 1980:119). Different methodologies of knowledge formation have been pursued by the different actors who controlled the organization over time (McGrath, 1998). Positivist, interactive and critical approaches to research (Neumann, 1997; Park, 1993; Habermas, 1971) have all been used by the organization with each approach dominating different time periods and resulting in different interpretations and policy positions. The Council has been a site where individual and organizational actors have struggled over competing interpretations of needs and values and the allocation of charitable and public resources.

**Foundations of the Canadian Welfare State**

In 1938, the newly formed Toronto Welfare Council took a firm and clear position on the public policy action needed to deal with the local conditions resulting from an international economic and social crisis. Joining its voice as a voluntary organization with other community, religious, and labour groups from across Canada, the TWC appeared before the Rowell-Sirois Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations to call for national programs that would bring Canadians out of the Great Depression and to prevent any recurrence of the severe social and economic hardship of the 1930s. The TWC proposals included joint national, provincial, and local government action to create and administer unemployment insurance, affordable housing, health insurance, public pensions, minimum wage levels, family support services and other social programs (Toronto Welfare Council, 1938). Significantly, the TWC proposed more than merely social service responses to the harsh social
conditions of the day. In its brief to the Rowell-Sirois Commission, the TWC drew a clear relationship between social well-being and economic means:

The difficulties connected with the relief of unemployment are increased by the accompanying problems of low wages, or labour paid below subsistence level. This in effect is sweated labour, which means the employment of workers under conditions which inevitably devitalize them. The number of those who must be classed as workers not earning a living wage is appallingly large, if annual average earnings is taken as the test. And very many of them are responsible for the support of a family. (TWC, 1938)

The Rowell-Sirois Commission concluded in its report to the federal government that the municipal and provincial financial base was inadequate for the provision of essential health, social, and income supports to the Canadian people (Smiley, 1963). The Royal Commission's report created the rationale for the introduction of a new set of relationships between the federal and provincial governments that enabled the national government to assume a stronger leadership role in constructing the modern welfare state in Canada over the forty years following World War II. National leadership was necessary at the time, but so was provincial and local cooperation for sharing costs, designing delivery systems, and administering these support programs. Working together the three levels of government created the Canadian welfare state in the form of a family income support program, unemployment insurance, public pensions, health insurance (medicare), hospital and university construction, post-secondary education financing, anti-poverty initiatives (Canada Assistance Plan), and other programs (Armitage, 1988). The product of this national leadership and provincial-local cooperation was the social union of a geographically spread, culturally diverse Canadian people.

The TWC adapted itself to the new conditions of Post-War Canada, settling comfortably into the roles of needs assessment, service planning and evaluation, and service coordination for efficient use of the resources available in the economic growth and service expansion period of the 1940s through 1960s. The response to social need was to be taken up primarily through the voluntary action of the social and economic elite of the community through the careful administration of charitable resources. A network of community-service organizations was the means by which the citizens of a modern city attempted to meet basic welfare, health and recreational needs (SPCMT, 1963:14). The Council's early mandate was to develop an orderly plan of community services in Metropolitan Toronto (SPCMT, 1957).
Early concerns focused on the efficient management and administration of the social services and the optimal allocation of the limited resources. Social science research was to guide the decision-making and the responsibility for this research or knowledge formation was placed with the SPCMT. It was anticipated that needs would always exceed resources and allocation decisions should be based on reason and rationality. The positivist model of knowledge formation dominated the early years of the SPCMT when it was under the direct control of the corporate sector. Decisions were based on technical, professional studies conducted by expert planners and service providers. Those who actually used or would use the services being planned had no presence. The Council was under constant pressure by its primary funder to support the efficient allocation of limited charitable resources.

The group that was not benefiting from the social service system were the poor. Social services did not increase income and the modest income security programs of the liberal welfare state (Esping-Anderson, 1990) meant that poverty persisted. The Council’s organizational commitment to democratic participation created an opportunity for the poor to try and secure influence. In the context of the emerging social movements of the sixties and seventies, an attempt was made by a group of social assistance recipients with the support of progressive academics to take over the board of the Council. The low-income people were largely unsuccessful but a reform presence was created and was bolstered with the efforts of the urban activists. Like many North American cities in the sixties and seventies, urban renewal was a contentious issue in Toronto. A group of urban activists, having achieved some significant land-use planning victories, turned their direction on the SPCMT to address social concerns. The seventies was a period of struggle for control of the Council and in the end was won by the progressive professionals, a group that constituted the membership of most of the emerging social movements (Offe, 1985; Melucci, 1989). By 1978, a coalition of activists from labour, faith communities, academia, and professional groups constituted the board and worked closely with the professional staff who were committed more to community development rather than social service case work as a form of practice.

The organizational practices were made more transparent and participatory. Consultation of poor and marginalized groups was incorporated into the research process. The technical data collection was still at the core of the research methods, but the data was now interpreted through the experience of the residents and the expertise of leading authors in the field reflecting an interactive approach to knowledge construction. Urban planning issues were the focus of the work of the Council. The intent of the major study of the period Suburbs in Transition (1980) was to create a
new and mutual understanding among residents and decision-makers of the social issues and needs facing the community. The result of the study was an awareness that urban social problems were not contained within the central city, but were growing along with the surrounding suburban areas. A re-distribution of social resources and the development of services in the suburban areas resulted from this study. The presence of local social planning organizations expanded along with the social service system.

By the early eighties the globalization of the economy and technological development were contributing to extensive de-industrialization and increasing unemployment in the Toronto area. The knowledge formation of the Council became more critical and identified the labour market and income security programmes of the government as major problems in the constitution of poverty. A major campaign to increase social assistance rates and improve training programmes was launched in collaboration with groups representing the vulnerable populations most affected by these policies. A comprehensive study by the provincial government resulted in proposals for significant changes in welfare policy, many of the recommendations had been initiated by the Council. The first phase of the policy changes was implemented but by the early nineties, Canada and particularly Ontario was in a recession. High unemployment accompanied by cutbacks in the national unemployment insurance program put an enormous strain on the social service budgets of municipalities and provinces.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the SPCMT re-focused its research and policy analysis expertise on major structural conditions of society such as poverty, unemployment, racism; conditions that marginalized and excluded segments of the population from the benefits of the economic growth and high living standards of the middle class (Wharf, 1992). Much of the SPCMT's research and analysis addressed itself to the need for senior government policy and action in areas such as social assistance reform, child poverty, housing, affordable and quality child care for working families, employment creation, labour market training programs, etc. While the SPCMT kept a hand in the human service development and coordination area, local social planning bodies at the area municipal level within Metro Toronto evolved during the 1970s and 1980s and assumed more of an orientation to human services planning and coordination.

Back to the Future: Devolution and Downloading Policies
In the mid-1970s the momentum of the welfare state started to slow; it stalled and eroded through the 1980s; and since the early 1990s in Canada, as in many Western countries, has begun to disintegrate. Emerging out of the international crisis of the Great Depression in the 1930s, the welfare state is now being submerged by the engulfing forces of globalization, the underlying and explicit assumption being that governments can no longer afford it (SPCMT, Child Poverty Action Group, Citizens for Public Justice, 1994). In the last fifteen years the federal government, first under the Progressive Conservatives and since 1993 under the Liberal party, have pursued deficit-fighting strategies that essentially amount to a "disengagement" from the Post-War national social contract initiated by the response to the Rowell-Sirois Commission (Torjman and Battle, 1995). Federal income transfers to individuals and families have been severely reduced and the funding transfers to the provincial governments for health, post-secondary education, and anti-poverty programs were cut back by seven billion dollars between 1995 and 1998. In reaction, provincial governments began cutting their own transfers to municipalities and to community organizations ("transfer payment agencies"). Devolution of responsibility and downloading of costs have been the driving force of public policy by the two senior levels of government in Canada in the 1990s.

In Ontario, devolution and downloading are consistent with the ideological convictions of the Conservative Government elected in 1995. It fervently believes in reducing government provided and tax-funded social provisions for all but the neediest and most destitute, generally reducing the role of government in citizen's lives, lowering individual and corporate taxes, controlling labour while deregulating business, and giving free rein to the private market to lead economic recovery with the expectation that the market will be the main engine of job creation (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994).

Essentially, devolution and downloading represent a move away from the traditional "redistributive" role of the higher order governments. Limited to revenue from assessment on the property tax base and user fees, municipal governments cannot effectively perform the redistributive function of senior governments. Municipalities are compelled to cut services or to contract out potentially more profitable service areas to commercial operators (e.g. child care, senior care, welfare administration), which usually means sacrificing service quality (SPCMT, 1997a). Withdrawal of direct public service provision, reduction of public funding supports to the community sector of voluntary service agencies, increased commercialization of human services, all serve to fragment the human service system. In a policy statement on devolution
passed by the SPCMT Board of Directors in 1997, the main threat of devolution to the social services system was summarized as follows:

In fact, because of the extensive voluntary sector delivery system and the very heterogeneous nature of social services, devolution threatens to create an even more highly stratified "three-tier" social services system:

1. high-end MARKET services based on the well-off consumer's ability to pay the PRICES;

2. lower quality PUBLIC services for the broad middle part of the population supported by a diminished TAX base; and

1. low-end COMMUNITY services for the impoverished and destitute delivered by voluntary agencies and churches and supported primarily by private CHARITY (SPCMT, 1997b)

Nearing the end of the decade, local pressures on municipalities and communities in Canada evoke memories of the conditions of the 1930s. Then, an international economic crisis contributed to the creation of severe social hardship. National political leadership in partnership with provincial and local authorities was necessary to overcome these circumstances and led to the creation of the modern Canadian welfare state. In the 1990s, this national-provincial-local partnership in social welfare is being dismantled in the name of disentanglement, deficit-fighting, and debt reduction in order to contend with the forces of globalization. Municipalities and communities, however, find themselves in a "back to the future" scenario reminiscent of the 1930s, isolated and without the powers and resources required on their own to generate economic sustainability and to ensure social security and stability.

**Environmental Conditions for Transformation**

The line of social planning councils from the Welfare Council of Toronto and District through the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto and its local planning partners at the area municipal level to the recently formed Community Social Planning Council of Toronto reflects an historic tradition of:
1. providing an independent community voice on social policy and social development;

1. supporting citizen participation in the social policy development;

1. recognizing the link between economic participation and social well-being;

1. affirming an active and positive role for government working with the market and voluntary sectors for social and economic well-being; and

1. advocating for change to improve the living conditions of the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community.

The thrust of public policy at senior government levels in the 1990s poses a direct challenge to this tradition and approach to independent social planning. The SPCMT diligently documented the severe community impacts of senior government withdrawal of commitment and support to the social safety net (SPCMT Social Infopacs, 1992, 1995; Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, City of Toronto, SPCMT, 1996 and 1997). It participated actively in a major federal government social policy review in 1994; it collaborated with other community partners to organize the Paying for Canada Coalition in 1994-95, which produced research to dispel the myth that the Canadian social welfare system was unaffordable and proposed sound policy proposals that would meet the federal government's deficit reduction targets while preserving social programs (SPCMT et al., 1994). Still, the national budget of February 1995 clearly signaled the federal government's intention to withdraw from a leadership role on national social support programs and to exercise a minimalist role in preserving the social union. This was assessed by many community groups including the SPCMT as a demoralizing defeat in regard to influencing national social policy (Conway, 1998).

The election of the Conservative Government in Ontario in the summer of 1995 exacerbated the direction set by the federal government. Major cuts to social assistance and to social service agencies were implemented almost immediately. Transfers to municipalities were curtailed in the first provincial budget, which led to local pressures on community services and supports. Plans for off-loading major areas of previous provincial funding responsibility such as public health, social housing, long term care, and others were initiated. In Metro Toronto, which was home to disproportionately high numbers of poor people and people with high service needs
(e.g. settlement services for new immigrants), the spectre of reduced provincial transfers and increased service responsibilities was further complicated by the provincial government's imposition of Bill 103 to amalgamate the six areas municipalities and the regional municipality into one unified municipal government within one year. This monumental restructuring initiative was combined with major reordering of the education and health systems and property tax reform. In the face of such institutional upheaval, it was clear that the social service system in Toronto, which had developed in a relatively planned and progressive way under metropolitan government with federal and provincial frameworks of support, was in dire jeopardy (Novick, 1997).

Independent social planning was itself at a crossroads in this turbulent environment. Prior to 1995, the SPCMT and its five local planning organization partners (LPOs called the City of York Community and Agency Social Planning Council, East York Community Development Council, Etobicoke Social Development Council, Human Services Scarborough, North York Inter-Agency and Community Council) were embattled but weathering pressures from their major funders at the United Way and Metro Council. The LPOs, however, suffered major provincial funding losses by the end of 1995. In most cases they were reduced to just several staff people, including an Executive Director responsible for both managing the organization and running program. Two-tier social planning at the metropolitan and local levels was clearly threatened. Thus, even before the Ontario Government framed and initiated Bill 103 to amalgamate the municipality, the SPC and LPOs began discussing strategies for integrating social planning more effectively for long term sustainability. By 1997, a joint working group of volunteer leaders and executive staff of the six planning organizations developed a proposal for a new amalgamated social planning council. A legal framework was created and the new Community Social Planning Council of Toronto actually came into legal and operational existence on January 1, 1998, the exact same day that the new amalgamated City of Toronto was officially born by the force of provincial statute (Bill 103).

Strategic Transformation

Although in gestation before Bill 103 was proposed, the amalgamation of the six social planning bodies into one Council was given some impetus by the public debate that Bill 103 generated. The move to create one unified City of Toronto provided social planning leadership with a clear focus and sense of joined purpose that took the amalgamating bodies beyond the complexities of creating a new single organization. Other groups, notably a downtown Toronto citizen-based movement called Citizens
for Local Democracy (C4LD), led the advocacy campaign of resistance to Bill 103. While supporting these groups on the issue of democratic process, the SPCMT and LPOs focused more specifically and intentionally on the implications for social development of a unified City of Toronto. Even as the social planning leadership proceeded with model-building, organizational design, negotiation of the final terms of the amalgamation agreement, and securing board and membership approvals of the amalgamation, SPCMT and LPOs actively led a community consultation process on the social infrastructure of the new City of Toronto. Social planning partnered with Metro Toronto elected officials and staff in the summer and fall months of 1997 to reach more than 30 community service networks across Metro Toronto. A large part of the social planning network of 400 community-based voluntary service agencies convened three times in this period. The result was a joint community and municipal report with a clear and compelling presentation of the key elements of a sound social infrastructure for the new City and 20 specific recommendations for action by the new City of Toronto Council (Metro Community Services and SPCMT, 1997). This plus the advice provided in additional consultations with the authorities responsible for setting up the new City structures have already had a significant impact on some of the first decisions on social development issues of the new City of Toronto Council (CSPC, 1998).

Strategically, the Community Social Planning Council has very intentionally continued to focus its energies on the shaping of the social infrastructure of the new City of Toronto. CSPC is doing so out of a conviction that this is the moment to influence the formation of social development policy frameworks, institutional structures, and municipal practices that may be entrenched for decades before coming under review for change. As well, the CSPC is consciously promoting a "civic alliance" between the community sector and the municipal sector with the view to fortifying resistance to additional downloading and to establishing a united local base from which to advocate to senior levels of government for the recreation of a joined federal-provincial-local commitment to the social support needs of Canadians. Since they have been left to deal with the consequences of downloading by senior levels of government, the community and the municipal sectors are natural civic allies for these purposes.

One of the first tasks of the new CSPC Board of Directors was to frame its vision and mission statements. Just completed and approved in April, 1998, they reflect the civic focus of the new CSPC as it enters the next millenium:

**Our Vision**
The Community Social Planning Council believes that to improve the quality of life in our city, everyone must take an active role in the public affairs of the city again. We must regain a sense of a shared responsibility for each other's well-being.

We call this a vision of a Civic Society: one in which respect, decency, and fairness are central to all aspects of our lives -- in our families, neighbourhoods, voluntary and recreational activities, at work and in politics.

**Our Mission**

The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto will promote the creation of a Civic Society by performing the following core functions:

Policy Analysis and Social Research

Community Education and Advocacy

Community Capacity-Building

Social Reporting

(CSPC Board Minute, April, 1998)

**Converting Tensions to Civic Strengths**

As the CSPC adjusts to a new municipal environment and to a very different national and provincial context from previous decades of welfare state-building, it is contending with a set of tensions and dynamics that must be carefully managed and converted into civic strengths if it is to perform effectively its mandate of independent social planning.

*Focusing on the municipal as opposed to the federal/provincial levels.* The new CSPC has intentionally focused its program on the formation of the new City of Toronto, and specifically the social infrastructure of the new City, rather than on the macro public policy issues to which the previous Metro SPC devoted much of its attention (e.g. labour market policy, pensions, etc.). This focus does not reflect acceptance of the residual role of the state in provision of social and economic supports to its citizens. Rather, it is recognition of the current reality of politics at the provincial and
national levels in Canada.

In the face of the disengagement of senior governments from their social and economic obligations to citizens and communities, the CSPC's strategy is to forge a strong and constructive working relationship with political leadership and public service officials at the municipal level. The objective is twofold: (1) to collaborate in whatever way possible within the scope of powers and resources available to municipalities to preserve and strengthen social infrastructure; and (2) to join the community voice with that of the local municipal leadership in a "civic alliance", advocating for the re-engagement of senior levels of government on their responsibilities for social and economic development.

This approach does not suggest simply restoration of the trappings of the old welfare state. It acknowledges that new and different forms of federal-provincial-local partnership need to be designed and effected. The key, however, is that the roles and responsibilities of the senior governments for social security and stability be redefined rather than abandoned. In this way, the CSPC performs a mediating role out of its community base in order to deal with a set of environmental circumstances that it wishes to change. If successful over the next three to five years, it is quite conceivable and even probable that the CSPC's program of policy analysis and research would shift back from a primarily civic focus to the larger macro issues over which senior levels of government have more direct influence.

*Addressing issues relevant to both the disadvantaged and the broad mainstream population.* The CSPC's vision of a Civic Society is clearly inclusive, envisaging a high quality of life for all members of the community. This was true of all six of the previous organizations that have joined to create the CSPC. In many respects, however, their work often focused on the social and economic needs of disadvantaged and marginalized community members. The motto of the Metro SPC was "A voice for social change", and much of its research and policy work concentrated on disparities and inequitable resource distribution among different parts of the population.

The harsh political reality of the dismantling of the welfare state is that the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the community have experienced the greatest losses. It is commonly acknowledged that these constituencies are perceived to have the least political power and they can easily be scapegoated for a government's debt problems. Their needs are readily sacrificed, therefore, when government spending cuts are imposed. The new CSPC is more conscious of the need to build a larger public
consensus on the role and importance of strong social infrastructure and of the value of equity and fairness in the social development of the new City. The challenge is to extend this awareness and conviction to the broad mainstream population and to achieve some degree of identification with the life hardships of the disadvantaged. The CSPC is committed to a "civic development" program that will promote more active civic participation in the broader population and that will provide information and resources to foster greater community solidarity for social development that is equitable and inclusive.

Maintaining a commitment to and a capacity for both advocacy and service planning /coordination. Related to the preceding point is the concern that the new CSPC not sacrifice the strength of its voice for social change in order to accommodate an appeal to a larger, more mainstream constituency. As indicated earlier this has been a regular and recurrent tension within independent social planning. The corporate charitable community and key social planning funders such as the United Way are more comfortable with social planning that is service development rather than social reform in orientation. The preference of the Canadian political and economic elite for "minimalist" government (Ekos, 1994) and the media promotion of that message (McQuaig, 1998) add further pressure to reduce the role of advocacy in independent social planning.

The strength of social planning's traditional advocacy role, however, has always been its grounding in research and critical analysis. In the current context, the CSPC must be even more sophisticated in both its advocacy and service/planning coordination functions. Given a hostile political climate, the CSPC must pick its advocacy agenda very strategically, looking for ways to create understanding and garner support of the wider community against social injustice to any part of the population. With regard to service planning/coordination, the CSPC must facilitate the development of new support models and approaches that optimize the use of resources, since the former days of funding for service expansion are not likely to return soon.

Maintaining funding stability in a constrained and uncertain environment. Historically, independent social planning has encountered pressure from its core funders when it advocates a cause or assumes a policy position that challenges the interests of the establishment (Wills, 1995; McGrath, 1998). This issue has arisen a number of times with both major core funders of the previous SPCMT, the United Way and Metro Toronto Council. Concerning the former, tensions surfaced when the SPCMT assumed positions that critiqued corporate influence and power; with respect to Metro Council, again advocacy for policy or action opposed by strong Metro
Council leadership would raise threats of funding cuts.

Significantly, both the United Way and the new City of Toronto have agreed to consolidate their previous core funding to all the amalgamating social planning organizations into the new CSPC without any reduction. This was major and necessary accomplishment for the success of the amalgamation. It speaks to the credibility which the funders believe that independent social planning has with the community agency sector. This will also present a challenge, however, to the CSPC when a critical community or policy issue may demand voicing a strong advocacy position counter to the interests of its core funders. The CSPC maintains that its core functions including research-based advocacy are essential to the vital social development of the community. It contends that it has a just claim on a share of public funds through the municipality and on community dollars raised through the United Way in order to perform its mandate on behalf of the community.

While tension with funders is an occupational hazard for the CSPC, the larger voluntary community service sector has absorbed severe funding cuts since the early 1990s, especially by the provincial and federal levels of government. The SPCMT participated in survey research to document the impact of these cuts on agencies and the communities they served (Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto et al., 1996 and 1997). In response to the situation, the SPCMT established a network of more than 400 community-based agencies to advocate against further funding cuts. Research indicated that the voluntary service sector added many times more value to the social support system than the public funding investment but that this could only be sustained if the funding partnership with governments at all levels remained in place and stabilized (Community Voices of Support, 1994).

*Balancing a citywide agenda and local interests.* Many in Toronto vigorously opposed the City's amalgamation because one unified municipality would be over-centralized and too corporate in its approach to both service and democratic process (Citizens for Local Democracy, 1997). Similar concerns were raised about the fate of social planning when the proposal to amalgamate the six planning bodies came forward. The social planning leadership argued that the CSPC would join the strengths of the citywide mandate formerly exercised by the SPCMT with those of the LPOs which were rooted in local community networks across the city.

The operational model adopted by the CSPC intentionally seeks to connect local concerns with the citywide social development agenda. At the City level, the CSPC is
working to build formal relationships between the municipality's social development functions and real community experience. For example, the CSPC is working directly with City Councillors and staff to set up a major new policy coordinating body for supports to children and youth. Built into the design of this "civic commission" is a formal working relationship with a number of "community prototypes" where local residents and service practitioners are actually testing new support strategies for children, youth and families in their communities (Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services, 1998).

The CSPC is also conducting "community connections" meetings and civic assemblies on a social development strategy for the new City of Toronto. These will be locally conducted across the City in order to hear and explore concerns at a neighbourhood and district level. They will also be organized on an issue basis so that concerns not locally specific can be identified and processed. The goal is to maintain a local and city-wide presence that will inform each other in an ongoing dialogue.

Conclusion

The transformation of the political sphere has a direct impact on the third sector or social sphere. Independent social planning has historically adapted to the demands and needs of the changing urban form of Toronto since 1937. The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto has strategically re-organized to respond to the formation of the new City of Toronto, now the fourth largest city in North America. This sea change is taking place in a context of the disintegration of the Canadian welfare state. Social welfare programmes are being devolved and downloaded from the federal and provincial levels of governments to local municipalities.

The Council has been positioned as an association of civil society, a contested terrain within which individual and collective actors compete to interpret needs and values as well as determine how social resources should be distributed. Through a process of participatory knowledge creation and communicative action, the Council strives to exert influence on the political-administrative and economic processes. The organizational history reveals this relationship is reciprocal with the work of the Council often constrained by the political and corporate sectors.

The new CSPCT is working to improve the quality of life in the city with a vision of a Civic Society: one in which respect, decency and fairness are central to all aspects of
the lives of the residents of Toronto. The Council promotes the creation of this Civic Society through: policy analysis and social research, community education and advocacy, community capacity-building, and social reporting. The tensions and dynamics of the process of transformation have been re-defined as potential civic strengths.

References


University.


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