

Background Paper on A City for All

October 25, 2017

Biodiversity is one of the most significant contributing factors to resilience within an ecosystem. The diversity of a system reflects the complex interdependent relationships between organisms and constant feedback mechanisms as well as a safeguard against single shocks that might otherwise cause collapse.

In the future, the resilience of human systems will be tested by climate change, population shifts, growing inequality and other shocks unknown to many of us. In response, many sectors have rallied together behind initiatives to facilitate economic development in tandem with environmental protection. We have developed a great deal of technical expertise in matters such as carbon sequestration, energy generation and increasingly climate risk management.

Yet the social pillar of our urban sustainability discourse has been, by far, the most elusive and least emphasized.

CONTEXT

The role of civil discourse has been linked to measures to promote a society resilient enough to cope with rising tensions that result from growing diversity, increasing population and changing climate. On the international level, both the United Nation's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the recent Habitat III *New Urban Agenda* pledge that, in the pursuit of a sustainable and resilient world, "no one will be left behind." At the local level, this principle requires that cities be designed and built to allow safe and equal access by all. Furthermore, that cities seek to actively promote inclusive and non-discriminatory policies and planning practices.

Cultural heritage and connection, in its tangible and intangible forms, are increasingly recognized as key aspects of resilience that can support efforts to reduce disaster risks and vulnerabilities. In the same way that biological diversity increases the resilience of natural ecosystems, cultural and social capital has the capacity to increase the resilience of human systems.

ISSUES

Before embarking on building resilient cities, acknowledgement and reconciliation is necessary with past injustices and with those who currently experience trauma, often intergenerational. Current governance and city-building processes are insufficient to accomplish reconciliation. They continue to exclude certain community voices. In some communities, this exclusion can result in inadequate access to basic necessities such as healthcare, education and even clean water. These injustices translate into vulnerabilities and, coupled with isolation, they become the antithesis of resilience.

Vancouver's commitment to become a City of Reconciliation is not limited to the Aboriginal communities. Non-Aboriginal groups, such as early Chinese and Japanese immigrants, were subject to discriminatory public policies, exclusionary land-use practices and unjustified incarceration. These communities have persevered and contributed an immeasurable amount to the history of the region.

Without reconciliation, Vancouver continues to ignore the lived experiences of marginalized peoples and deny them their rightful place at the table. The road to resilient cities can be better served through people who openly tell their stories and lived experiences, to ultimately gain an understanding of how people arrived at their current destination and how we can move forward together.

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KEY DRIVERS FOR ACTION

A City For All is about the breadth of participation and applicability to all of those who refer to this region as home, as well as those who have yet to come.

Leading up to Habitat III, leaders and representatives of local governments clamoured for a seat at the global table, signalling the need for integrating on-the-ground knowledge and innovation into global governance. The importance of local governments to participate at the international scale is akin to bringing the unheard individuals or community groups to the local planning table.

Vernacular narratives grounded in the lived experiences of members in our communities are key for informing resilient strategies. So, when we consider our roundtables, committees and engagement processes, we must consider who is missing. Considerations of culture, gender, age, class, ability and sexual orientation can certainly serve as starting points, diversifying the approach to planning for resilience. However, communities are far more complex and require a deeper awareness of intersectionality.¹

We are also considering the future members of our community when we propose strategies such as Sanctuary City, especially key in a time when climate refugees are going to be very much real.

We are beginning to plan not *for*, but *with* the people. An empowered community is key to a resilient one. We may begin by removing some logistical barriers to public participation, such as providing childcare, a stipend, translation services and meals, but there are more socially imbued barriers at play as well.

Natural systems demonstrate that changes in parts of the system affect all of the other parts. Resilience derives from those changes working together to adapt better to new situations. In human systems, too, we need to consciously look to the relationships between interventions. Inclusion is necessary to diversity and diversity is necessary to resiliency.

QUESTIONS

- What does a 'City for All' look like in the context of Vancouver and the region?
- Who is being left behind and what facilitates the ability of individuals to be resilient citizens in an environment of growing inequality and polarization?
- How can intersectionality (the overlap of different social identities) and its cumulative effects be turned to advantage rather than disadvantage residents?
- How can we better diversify our existing structures, such as VCPC and other advisory groups?

The City for All is one in a series of background issue papers prepared for Shaping Resilience: A Summit on Resilience and Vancouver's Future. City for All was prepared by Amelia Huang, a Commissioner on the Vancouver City Planning Commission.

¹ Intersectionality is the idea that the overlap of various social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality and class, contributes to the cumulative systemic oppression and discrimination or advantage experienced by an individual or group.