Indicators and core area planning: applications in Canada’s mid-size cities

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Presentation structure

- About mid-size cities (MSCs)
- Core area challenges
- Monitoring, evaluation and indicators (MEI)
- Indicators
- Indicators and core areas
- Research findings
- Implications for research and practice
About mid-size cities (MSCs)

- Different definitions (e.g. Brookings)
- Size matters...some of the time
- Canada: 85 MSCs (50-500K range)
- Core cities, peripheral or “stand-alone”
- Significant resource issues
- Complex challenges; overlooked in research
- Large-city solutions: poor fit?
Core areas are *special* places

- *Functional role* – retail hub, cultural centre, institutional centre, residential, etc.
- *Symbolic role* – barometer of community health, well-being, confidence
- Provide and represent community *sense of place*
- Important as cultural landscapes in *selves*, and as part of *community* cultural landscape
Core area challenges

- Built form – run-down
- Disproportionate share of marginalized
- Obsolescent infrastructure
- Loss of traditional role (e.g. commercial)
- Investment in suburban and exurban fringes
- Negative image: crime, safety, aesthetics
- Result: cycle of disinvestment, QOL suffers, and community image affected
What we’re trying to avoid…
The preferred alternative
Typical interventions

- Parking
- Banners
- Street furniture
- Paving stones
- Marketing
- Patrols
- Property acquisition
- Projects
Tough questions…

- *are* we achieving our goals?
- *are* they the *right* goals?
- *are* they the *right* policies and projects?
- *should* we try something else?
- *if so*…what?
- *how* do we know?
- *who* says?
- *what was the problem, again?*
Monitoring, evaluation and indicators

- Considerable attention in public sector
- Influences: Sustainable development, quality of life (QOL), healthy community, and performance measurement cultures
- Issues: time, resources, skills, receptive organizational culture, data management
Indicators…

- “indicate” or tell us something important
- provide key signals, information
- establish direction (positive or negative) of change
- establish extent of change
- provide basis for decisions re: policies, programs or projects
I+M+E

- indicators provide information that permits…
- monitoring of activities, trends and phenomena that are interpreted through…
- evaluation of policy, program or project activities and outcomes re: intentions
Indicators

- Dozens of models to consider
- Examples: FCM-QOLRS, CPRN, SCIP…
- Hundreds of indicators available
- Majority at city-wide scale
- Recent work at neighbourhood level (NNIP)
- Little work on indicators in MSCs
- Core areas in MSCs – paucity of research
We wanted to know...

- Which indicators used?
- Why used?
- Sources for information?
- Roles: collection and analysis?
- Clients and stakeholders?
- Communications strategies?
- Facilitating/obstructive factors?
Research approach

- Web-based survey (Zoomerang)
- Structured questionnaire
- 56 Canadian MSCs (English-speaking)
- Two rounds of email contact
- 43/56 responded (78%); national coverage
- Simple analysis: percentages and some ranking
Research findings

- Most MSCs use traditional *economic* indicators (e.g. unemployment, vacancies)
- *Social* indicators next in importance (e.g. use of social services)
- *Environmental* indicators least used
- Some movement towards QOL and SD
- Non-traditional indicators: homeless data
- Data collection and analysis constraints
Research findings

- Urban planners – collection and analyst role; external stakeholders (BIA groups)
- Clients: Council, internal and external stakeholders
- Communications – conventional reports, some innovation (newspaper inserts, Web)
- Factors: resources and accessibility to data (rarely available at sub-community level)
Implications for research and practice

- Gap between literature and practice
- How to move beyond basic indicators?
- Guidelines and models for indicators in MSC context
- Broader organizational culture issues
- Resource support – chronic issue
- Training and education: roles for Planning programs?
UW research initiatives

- Centre for Core Area Research and Design (CCARD)
- Waterloo CURA (Community-University Research Alliance)
- Mid-size City Research Centre (MCRC)

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Thanks/Merci!

Centre for Core Area Research & Design

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