
Collaborative partnerships for urban development: a study of the Vancouver Agreement

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Abstract. Collaborative partnerships—featuring intergovernmental and/or public–private sector cooperation—have been identified as a leading organisational expression of the ‘new urban governance’. The paper examines the Vancouver Agreement—an urban development compact between the governments of Canada, British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver. Signed in March 2000 for a five-year term, and renewed in April 2005, the Vancouver Agreement has been widely acclaimed as an example of successful collaborative working, addressed to the revitalisation of the city’s Downtown Eastside. The origins of the agreement are explained in the context of an urban crisis in the Downtown Eastside, where established policies were seen to be failing. High-level political support for a new governance approach led to the adoption of an urban development partnership, and the paper sets out its structure and strategic programmes of action. Benchmarked against conditions for effective intergovernmental working posited in the public administration literature, the paper then analyses five procedural attributes of the partnership: resource sharing, leadership, community involvement, mutual learning, and horizontal accountability. Concluding observations are offered on the long-term prospects for the Vancouver Agreement.

1 Introduction

Collaborative partnerships—featuring intergovernmental and/or public–private sector cooperation—have been identified as a leading organisational expression of the ‘new urban governance’ (Davies, 2002; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998; Stewart, 2005). Whether tasked with developing policy responses to complex social problems, or restructuring service delivery in order to meet demanding targets, these partnerships are one response to a widely recognised need for greater coordination in public administration. Following Kernaghan, a partnership may be defined as a formal agreement to share power with others in the pursuit of joint goals and/or benefits (1993, page 61). The numerous types of partnerships may be distinguished by the nature and extent of control of influence exercised by the parties to the agreement. At the more ambitious end of joint working, *collaborative partnerships* are those in which each partner exercises power in the decision-making process: typically, they feature a pooling of resources, consensual decision rules, and a harmonisation of activities (Kernaghan, 2003, page 62).

While area-based partnerships directed towards urban regeneration goals have received sustained academic attention, there remain competing accounts of their emergence and impact. Very broadly, these comprise, firstly, perspectives informed by critical political economy, which suggest new modes of urban governance reacting to the global imperatives of a ‘flexible’ or ‘rescaled’ capital. Harvey’s (1989) analysis of a new urban entrepreneurialism, in which metropolitan regions utilise public–private partnerships to boost locational advantages for investment and economic development, set the interpretive agenda for this approach. It has tended to focus more on explaining patterns and processes of urban development arising from interurban competitiveness than on examining policy interventions targeted at disadvantaged localities. Where critical political economy scholars have interrogated area-based regeneration partnerships, they

have found them to be compromised by their reproduction of the logic of interlocality competition (Brenner, 2004, pages 267–274; Swyngedouw et al, 2003).

A second perspective, more preoccupied with the political contexts of partnership formation, has generated most of the recent work on collaborative policy making and policy implementation for urban revitalisation. Here, a further distinction is useful: between urban coalition theories, centred on alliances of public and private sector actors fixated with boosting local economic growth; and network governance approaches, explaining partnership working in terms of local urban institutional settings and political cultures (see the surveys by Harding, 2005; Stewart, 2005). This theoretical division mirrors in large part a constitutional-level contrast between urban governance in the US and in the UK, though a sizeable transatlantic dialogue has also taken place. The influential American scholarship on urban coalitions, from work on individual cities (Mollenkopf, 1992; Stone, 1989) to comparative research (Elkin, 1987; Savitch and Kantor, 2002), has consistently highlighted the context-related ways in which multiorganisational partnerships on urban development are constrained, or enabled, by capital investment conditions, intergovernmental support, and local political circumstances. British studies on network governance have viewed urban regeneration partnerships as breaking away from state-determined policy making, being coordinated by relationships of trust (Harding, 1998; Stoker, 1998): despite key differences with urban coalition theory, this research shares a sensitivity to place-specific influences on partnership working.

However, criticism has been levelled both at urban coalition and at network-governance approaches for failing to acknowledge the *distinctiveness* of multi-organisational partnerships as an instrument of urban governance. Partnerships, it is claimed, are neither a direct manifestation of local political bargaining nor simply self-governing networks cut loose from government structures (Davies, 2002; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998). A pressing methodological need, therefore, is to examine collaborative working in urban regeneration contexts beyond the US and the UK; and while major Canadian cities have experimented with area-based regeneration in response to rising urban inequalities and have embraced entrepreneurial public management models, there are important differences from American and British structures of urban governance (Bunting and Fillon, 2000; 2001; Mason, 2003). Above all, Canadian city governments exist in an unsettled constitutional context, insofar as they have recently begun to reduce their legal and fiscal dependence on provincial governments. An assertion of municipal autonomy and a willingness to forge new collaborative partnerships to address specific urban problems are both symptomatic of this turbulent political environment (Graham et al, 1998, pages 175–201; Wong, 2002).

This paper examines one such partnership: the Vancouver Agreement—an urban development compact between the governments of Canada, British Columbia and the City of Vancouver. Signed in March 2000 for a five-year term, and renewed in April 2005 for a further five years, the Vancouver Agreement has been widely acclaimed as a leading example of successful collaborative working in urban governance (Harcourt, 2004; Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2005). To be sure, the Vancouver Agreement follows an administrative template set down, since 1981, in several urban partnership agreements involving the governments of Canada, Manitoba, and the City of Winnipeg. Ambitiously, these went beyond the cultivation of vertical linkages between the three levels of government to encompass horizontal coordination within each bureaucratic tier as well as the direct engagement of members of the community. The Vancouver Agreement also shares the core urban renewal vision of the Winnipeg Partnership Agreements: the development and implementation of a coordinated strategy to support long-term sustainable economic, social, and community development (Government of Manitoba, 2004). As with the case of Winnipeg, a programme priority

has been the revitalisation of older inner-city neighbourhoods—in particular, the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. What has drawn attention to the Vancouver Agreement has been its bold approach to the chronic social and economic problems in this part of the city.

I begin by outlining the origins of the Vancouver Agreement in the context of an ‘urban crisis’ ascribed to the Downtown Eastside by governments and the media. Protracted policy failure, with the legitimisation losses it inflicted on governing authorities, is argued to have been pivotal in provoking political leaders to approve a new governance approach. The embrace, in particular, of horizontal management points to a realisation by public sector actors of organisational interdependencies and the potential for reaping mutual benefits. I show how this is reflected in the structure of the Vancouver Agreement, and give examples of its practical realisation in coordinated projects. Following this I provide an analysis of the Vancouver Agreement process which, drawing on conceptions of collaborative working from public administration theory, isolates five key attributes for evaluation—resource sharing, leadership, community involvement, mutual learning, and horizontal accountability. The presence of these characteristics has been posited as conducive to successful partnership building in public sector management: does this hold in this case? In conclusion, I consider whether any wider implications can be inferred from the Vancouver experience of urban development agreements.

2 The origins of the Vancouver Agreement: the Downtown Eastside as a zone of crisis

Covering little more than 200 ha, with a population of 16 590 (in 2001), the Downtown Eastside is the oldest district of Vancouver and, for the first half of the 20th century, served as the city’s commercial hub. Much of the physical and social character of the neighbourhood is shaped by this past, which is manifest in its constituent seven planning subareas, as marked out by the city council (figure 1). For example, to the west of the district, jutting against Vancouver’s current downtown business core, Gastown trades on its port-related heritage buildings to draw in tourists and professional service tenants. From early on, Vancouver’s natural-resource-based industries

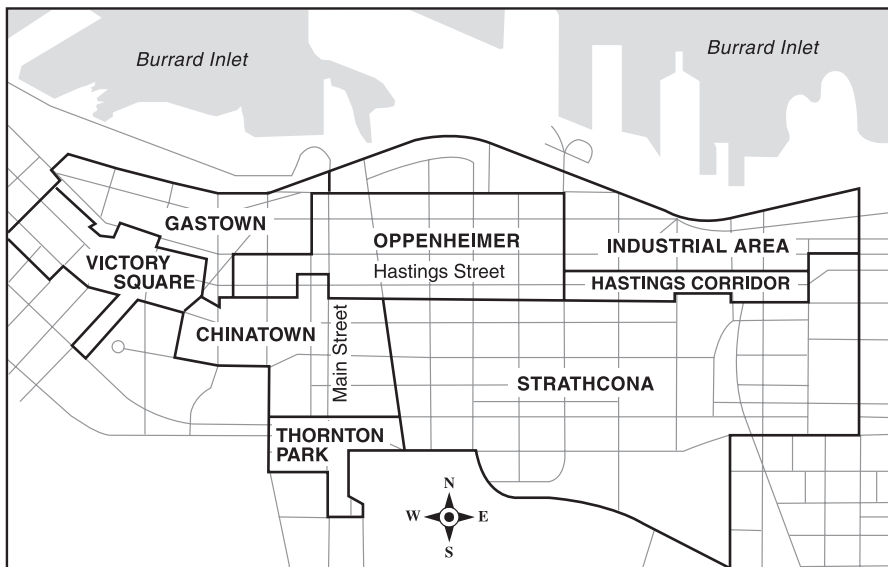


Figure 1. Downtown Eastside communities, Vancouver.

attracted numerous immigrants to what became the Downtown Eastside; Chinatown—a designated historic district—can trace its origins to this time, and there is now also a majority Chinese-speaking community in adjoining Strathcona. Many other immigrant groups who first settled in the neighbourhood eventually moved on, but the area remains ethnically diverse. In line with Vancouver as a whole, about half the population of the Downtown Eastside is comprised of ‘visible minorities’, though there is a higher proportion of aboriginal people living in the neighbourhood—notably in Victory Square and Thornton Park, where they make up just under a quarter of the population.

The Downtown Eastside has historically contained a large low-income population but, alongside port-related distribution and processing industries, supported a healthy retail and entertainment sector until the 1970s. Since that time, however, deindustrialisation and disinvestment have undermined its economic viability, in marked contrast to the rest of downtown Vancouver. It is significant that, just as the substantial flow of Asian investment into the city in the 1980s and 1990s largely bypassed the Downtown Eastside, the numerous Chinese business immigrants entering Vancouver during that period chose overwhelmingly not to settle in Chinatown (Olds, 2001, pages 99–140). Moreover, the suburbanisation of shopping and the creation of larger malls in Vancouver’s downtown core in the 1980s precipitated the collapse of the Downtown Eastside’s retail thoroughfare—Hastings Street; and the effects are enduring. In 2003, 33% of the storefront on Hastings Street was vacant, with much of the surviving retail activity centred on pawnshops, convenience stores, and fast-food outlets—some of them involved in illegal activities (CCAP, 2002; Vancouver Agreement Secretariat, 2004a, page 24). Criminal gangs openly ran drugs and sex trades, building up a substantial illicit economy.

As deep-seated as these challenges have been, the catalyst galvanising the city government into action in the Downtown Eastside was an acute health crisis, encompassing a high incidence of mental illness, drug addiction, and HIV within the local population. Sommers and Blomley (2002, page 20) identify a moral panic that erupted in the city in 1997, when health authorities pinpointed the Downtown Eastside as the centre of an HIV epidemic in the region. In the health authority zone which covers the neighbourhood—Local Health Area 162—188 persons died of HIV/AIDS between 1996 and 2002, 27% of all of those who died of the disease in Vancouver. Illicit-drug deaths also peaked in the late 1990s in the Downtown Eastside, as the arrival of crack cocaine accentuated addiction rates in groups already afflicted by high rates of heroin use. For example, at this time aboriginal residents in the neighbourhood were ten times more likely to die from drug-induced deaths than the city average (Vancouver Agreement Secretariat, 2004a, pages 58–63). Compounding these problems, in 1994 the provincial government had slashed residential mental health care in Greater Vancouver, and many of the predominantly middle-aged patients migrated to the low-cost single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels in the Downtown Eastside: at the end of the decade, mental diseases or disorders in the 45–54-year-old age group for the neighbourhood were 3.6 times that of Vancouver as a whole (Vancouver Agreement Secretariat, 2004a, page 71).

Often of poor quality, SRO hotels constitute half the low-income housing in the Downtown Eastside (5183 units in 2002), and their residents generally suffer poor health and high rates of hospitalisation. Homelessness is also an issue: of the hundreds regularly sleeping rough in the neighbourhood, two-thirds are aboriginal (BC Housing, 2000; Vancouver Agreement Secretariat, 2004a, page 47). While it has been the priority of the city planners to retain provision of affordable housing in the neighbourhood, residential gentrification is being induced by the area’s cheap land and central location (Blomley, 2004, pages 32–36; Punter, 2003, pages 280–283).

Indeed, local policy aspirations to social cohesion in the neighbourhood have run against the grain of an overarching central area plan for Vancouver, which has encouraged 'new economy' production and consumption clusters to locate ever nearer to the Downtown Eastside. The high-end condominium development and residential renovation that has facilitated an associated influx of managers and professionals into the inner city has accentuated the social marginality of the Downtown Eastside, as well as increased market pressure on its private stock of low-cost housing (Hutton, 2004; Ley, 1996).

In the late 1990s the popular construction of the Downtown Eastside as a crisis zone threw into relief years of enduring policy failure and political neglect. Within the city council, efforts were already underway to integrate service delivery at the neighbourhood level throughout Vancouver. Downtown Eastside planners argued that such policy coordination between city departments would be inadequate for this neighbourhood without the active involvement of relevant provincial and federal agencies. Philip Owen, the City Mayor at the time, devoted considerable political energy to forging a wide-ranging partnership of governmental and nongovernmental organisations to address drug addiction and criminal disorder in Vancouver, particularly in the Downtown Eastside. The Vancouver Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment (since renamed the Four Pillars Coalition) championed a framework for action that was pathbreaking in Canada—the integration of prevention, treatment, enforcement, and harm-reduction activities in a comprehensive strategy of community economic and social development (MacPherson, 2001).⁽¹⁾ Cosponsored by the city council, the coalition successfully applied for a grant (\$5 million) from the federal government to fund a five-year Crime Prevention through Social Development Project: what subsequently became known as the Downtown Eastside Community Development Project ran from 1999 to 2004, and initiated a wide series of community capacity-building activities, targeting vulnerable groups (Vancouver City Council, 2004).

Keen to institutionalise the fresh collaboration set in play by the coalition, Mayor Owen sought a politically sustainable platform to underpin it—one that would strategically bind in both the provincial and federal governments. Health Canada was an active partner in the coalition, and had been involved in the Winnipeg Partnership Agreements. It is not surprising, therefore, that in discussions on Vancouver's drug problems between the mayor's office and Health Canada staff, urban development agreements were soon identified as a promising governance template, and senior city officials travelled to Winnipeg to learn more.⁽²⁾ The protracted writing of the Vancouver Agreement, clearly influenced by the Manitoba experiment, attests to the complex negotiations necessary to draw in numerous public agencies from three jurisdictional levels. A draft Vancouver Agreement was endorsed by all three governments in July 1999, and received positive feedback in a community review process that then took place in the Downtown Eastside (Vancouver City Council, 1999). Ironically, while the formal agreement was signed the following year, Mayor Owen then fell foul of his local political party—the Non-Partisan Association (NPA)—as elements unhappy with the four-pillars approach ejected him in the run-up to the 2002 municipal elections. Significantly, a left-wing party—the Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE)—swept to power in these elections on a manifesto featuring a firm commitment to the continued implementation of the Vancouver Agreement, including the four-pillars plan.

⁽¹⁾ Interview D MacPherson, Drug Policy Coordinator, City of Vancouver, 13 July 2004.

⁽²⁾ Interviews with B Mackenzie, Assistant Regional Director, Population and Public Health Branch, Health Canada, 5 July 2004; and P Owen, former Mayor of Vancouver, 7 May 2003.

3 Vancouver Agreement: structure and strategies

In a national context in which local governments generally have weak legal powers, it is revealing that both Vancouver and Winnipeg are accorded broad municipal authority on the basis of provincial statutes. Vancouver's charter was granted in 1953 and this, coupled with a city manager system of administrative authority, has enabled the city to maintain a high level of autonomy in urban development policy and planning (Graham et al, 1998, pages 153–161; Punter, 2003, pages 13–14). The Vancouver Agreement is acknowledged by all its governmental partners as a 'bottom-up' governance process: politically, it has been driven by the mayor's office at City Hall—an arrangement that continued when former Provincial Coroner, Larry Campbell, replaced Philip Owen as mayor in November 2002. However, the COPE administration has stressed the social and economic development remit of the Vancouver Agreement, often clashing with a neoliberal provincial government intent on eroding income assistance and other social welfare expenditures. An active involvement in the agreement of COPE councillors with long-standing community advocacy experience in the Downtown Eastside has heightened these tensions.

Nevertheless, it has been an achievement of the Vancouver Agreement to foster effective working relationships between the three levels of government. Ultimate responsibility for decisions made under the agreement rests with a Policy Committee comprising: the Federal Minister of Western Economic Diversification; the Provincial Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; and the Mayor of Vancouver. It has proven difficult to schedule meetings to guarantee attendance of all three, so in practice the Policy Committee has met no more than twice a year—delegating strategic guidance and implementation responsibilities to a Management Committee consisting of three senior representatives from each level of government. Despite substantial differences in jurisdictional authority and financial capacity, a decision rule of unanimous consent ensures that each governmental partner exercises equal power in the two committees. The primary operational committee of the Vancouver Agreement is a Coordination Team, which meets biweekly and in turn liaises with a series of task teams addressing strategic goals specified by the Management Committee.

Federal representatives participating in the Vancouver Agreement have described it as a "living experiment in governance".⁽³⁾ The greatest immediate obstacle facing collaborative working in the Downtown Eastside was the sheer scale of jurisdictional fragmentation, evident from the number of participating governmental units: twelve federal departments, nineteen provincial ministries or agencies, and fourteen municipal departments. So while intergovernmental cooperation was the *raison d'être* of the agreement, early coordinative efforts of agreement partners took place *within* each tier of government. For the city, horizontal management was already facilitated by its well-established Community Services Group, which integrates municipal responsibilities for economic and social development; but the provincial and federal governments had to set up Vancouver Agreement committees to harmonise their own service-delivery configurations. These structures challenged line managers to identify common approaches, which were in turn publicised by the Management Committee for the other governmental partners.

Given the initial need for the participating governments to synchronise their own efforts, it was not until March 2002 that the Management Committee belatedly held a workshop to draft a strategic plan for the Vancouver Agreement. Following approval by the Policy Committee, an Integrated Strategic Plan was released in 2003.

⁽³⁾ Interview with K Fernandez, Assistant Deputy Minister, Western Economic Diversification, 5 July 2004.

The plan was informed by the Downtown Eastside Strategy attached to the original Vancouver Agreement, and has since become incorporated into its successor, the 2005 Vancouver Agreement. There are thirty-one priority actions clustered under four strategic programmes: (1) revitalisation of the Hastings Corridor, (2) dismantling of the open drug scene, (3) turning problem hotels into contributory hotels, and (4) making the community safer and healthier for the most vulnerable. Each strategic priority will now be outlined.

3.1 Revitalisation of the Hastings Corridor

At the heart of the urban development vision of the Vancouver Agreement is a two-year Economic Revitalisation Plan, issued in March 2004 after consultation with the Downtown Eastside Community. Its goal is to create a positive cycle of growth, whereby the stimulation of demand for local products/services accompanies efforts to strengthen the capabilities of local suppliers and increase employment opportunities for local residents (Vancouver Agreement Secretariat, 2004b, pages 9–27). The Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community programmes established by the US in the mid-1990s have been a important influences on the thinking behind the Economic Revitalisation Plan—notably, the Urban Enhanced Enterprise Community created in Portland, Oregon with its creative blend of targeted government interventions, private sector investment and community-based social enterprises⁽⁴⁾ (North Sky Consulting, 2002, pages 9–14). For the Downtown Eastside, this has meant—among other initiatives—the mixed-use development of the Woodward’s department store site on Hastings Street (incorporating 200 affordable-housing units) and the creation of a community access point for business development support, training programmes, and employment assistance. Local procurement and hiring practices are integral to this enterprise model: here, the revitalisation plan has identified the 2010 Winter Olympics and a planned expansion of the Vancouver Trade and Convention Centre as key drivers for the economic engagement of the Downtown Eastside.⁽⁵⁾

3.2 Dismantling of the open drug scene

Coordinated enforcement of the illegal-drug trade in the Downtown Eastside was already a priority for the four-pillars framework. The Vancouver Agreement has added political resolve to concerted efforts to disrupt the open drug market in the area, pulling together what had previously been disjointed policing and sentencing actions. However, this has taken place without major increases in spending. Under a city-wide Enforcement Team Project, sixty police officers were redeployed to the Downtown Eastside for high-visibility actions against drug dealers operating at the intersection of Main Street and Hastings. In support of these interventions, the Vancouver Agreement provided Can\$1.5 million towards a variety of initiatives involving multiagency enforcement. One such initiative was Project Lucille, which targeted businesses profiting from the drugs trade and led, in 2004, to enforcement actions against twenty SRO hotels and pawnshops in the Downtown Eastside.⁽⁶⁾

At the same time, the Vancouver Agreement partnership has assisted the regional health authority—Vancouver Coastal Health—in its employment, under the four-pillars approach, of treatment and harm-reduction strategies for illicit-drug users. While actions include addiction-treatment services and a school-based prevention programme,

⁽⁴⁾ Interview with J Green, Councillor, City of Vancouver, 5 May 2003.

⁽⁵⁾ Interview with J Porter, Employment Project Manager, Vancouver Agreement Coordination Unit, 5 July 2004.

⁽⁶⁾ Interviews with J McKay, Inspector, Vancouver Police Department, 6 July 2004; and R Rich, Deputy Chief of Police, Vancouver Police Department, 13 July 2004.

media attention has centred on North America's first medically supervised injection facility, which opened in September 2003 and, for a three-year trial period, is exempted from Canadian narcotics-control legislation. Located on East Hastings, the facility had registered over 2405 participants by July 2004—approaching half the number of intravenous-drug users in the Downtown Eastside.⁽⁷⁾ The collective support shown for the supervised injection site by the Vancouver Agreement governmental partners is unprecedented and controversial, and drew criticism early on from the US Office of National Drugs Control (*Vancouver Sun* 2003).

3.3 Turning problem hotels into contributory hotels

Integrated enforcement actions against business premises in the Downtown Eastside have highlighted the dilapidated physical state of many SRO hotels. Within the first phase of the Vancouver Agreement, the task teams charged with improving living conditions in these hotels introduced measures for upgrading building maintenance and management, and also secured funding for a modest development of new supported housing. In a political environment in which neither the federal nor the provincial government was engaged in the creation of affordable housing, the COPE-led city council commanded the housing agenda of the Vancouver Agreement. This marked a shift in emphasis from Mayor Owen's NPA administration, which saw gentrification as the principal vehicle for ratcheting-up housing conditions in the Downtown Eastside, whilst also allowing the conversion of several SRO hotels into budget hotels for tourists. The passing in September 2003 of a single-room accommodation bylaw gave the COPE council power to approve, with conditions, the conversion or demolition of SRO units, and attests to a more socially inclusive vision of housing in the Downtown Eastside—one acknowledging the long-standing settlement entitlements of the low-income residents (see Blomley, 2004, pages 92–101).

3.4 Making the community safer and healthier for the most vulnerable

Priority community safety actions under the Vancouver Agreement, as undertaken by four task teams, have targeted women, youth, and aboriginal people at risk and also tackled food-security issues for low-income residents. No group is more vulnerable in the Downtown Eastside than the numerous sex-trade workers, particularly the 400 or so youth prostitutes—many of them aboriginal—working the nighttime streets of the Industrial Area neighbourhood. Since the late 1970s this area has been a magnet for violent sexual predators—notably from the US, but also including one man from Greater Vancouver who, by May 2005, had been charged with the murder of twenty-seven women (mostly sex-trade workers) from the Downtown Eastside. The provincial Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services has led Vancouver Agreement projects to reduce risks to sex-trade workers, with crucial support from Justice Canada regarding the sexual exploitation of aboriginal youth: measures completed include the provision of a mobile safety unit, counselling, and preemployment skills training.⁽⁸⁾ Participation in these activities by the Vancouver Police Department has, significantly, reinforced and disseminated their own, innovative, harm-reduction initiatives in this area—above all, self-defence training for sex-trade workers and intelligence gathering on sex-trade consumers.⁽⁹⁾

⁽⁷⁾ Interview with J West, Consultant, Supervised Injection Site Project, 6 July 2004.

⁽⁸⁾ Interviews with S J Whitley, Regional Director of Policy and Programmes, BC Region, Department of Justice Canada, 8 July 2004; and M Wright, Director (Aboriginal Directorate), Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, 7 July 2004.

⁽⁹⁾ Interview with J McKay, Inspector, Vancouver Police Department, 6 July 2004.

4 A success story? Examining the process dynamics of the Vancouver Agreement

“The Vancouver Agreement has succeeded in forging shared objectives and helping to correlate multiple agencies in a common effort to deal with multi-faceted challenges.”

Macleod Institute (2003, page 34)

The above judgment—from an academic institute commissioned to undertake the first independent evaluation of the Vancouver Agreement—has been endorsed by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (2005). Both assessments centred on levels of collaboration and cross-jurisdictional activity engendered by the Vancouver Agreement process, in part because comprehensive monitoring data on substantive outcomes did not come on-stream until September 2004. The original research reported on here took as its analytic focus whether the lauded procedural attributes of the Vancouver Agreement met the necessary conditions for effective intergovernmental collaboration hypothesised by public administration scholars. For area-based urban partnerships with socially inclusive development goals, five process-based characteristics are claimed to be critical for successful cooperation: resource pooling, political leadership, meaningful community involvement, mutual learning, and clear horizontal accountability (Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Kernaghan, 1993; Stewart, 2005). Two rounds of interviews with twenty-two key informants, conducted in May 2003 and July 2004, elicited responses on these themes, with preliminary results relayed for feedback to a Vancouver Agreement Coordination Team meeting in July 2004.⁽¹⁰⁾ What follows are the key findings.

4.1 Resource pooling

Surveying the first flurry of public organisation partnerships in Canada, Kernaghan argued over a decade ago that resource pooling was a common attribute of successful partnerships, as participants reaped significant synergies from the blending of expenditures and expertise (1993, page 74). I deal below (section 4.4) with the forecasted benefits arising from collective problem-solving: funding arrangements are clearly pivotal to intergovernmental partnerships, for the routine expectation of politicians sponsoring such agreements is that they will deliver efficiencies and/or combined impacts not possible under existing ‘silo-based’ governance structures. In western Canada, however, a major obstacle to intergovernmental working on urban development has been the concern of city leaders that the convention of equal cost sharing among federal, provincial, and municipal governments imposes an unfair—and unsustainable—burden on city finances. The Vancouver Agreement has been presented as a model for a more *flexible* financing of intergovernmental partnerships, where the parties pool resources according to their fiscal capacity and where, also, private sector money is actively sought (Wong, 2002, page 13).

Interestingly, prior to the release of the strategic plan, the agreement had no dedicated funding. Monies were made available for approved initiatives from the *realignment* of existing funding from each level of government. In interviews, participants in the process stated that this was actually an advantage for early collaborative working as it freed parties from having to haggle over projects dependent on dedicated funding. The Vancouver Agreement was, according to a provincial government representative, a “political lens” for integrating expenditures already within the remit of the partners—broadly, the community-development and health-based work of the provincial government, alongside federal interventions focused on economic revitalisation

⁽¹⁰⁾ The interviewees comprised seven City of Vancouver representatives, three participants from the provincial government, and four from the federal government, two Vancouver Agreement Secretariat staff, and five community representatives from the Downtown Eastside. Summary transcript notes (anonymised) are available from the author.

and criminal justice issues. As already noted, the City of Vancouver was able to make use of existing integrated service delivery structures to channel its expenditures in the Downtown Eastside (for example, on policing and building improvements). Before long, though, the agreement partners found that the absence of new funding hampered long-term planning; and this was reported by some participants to have been manifest in the deliberations of the Management Committee.

The launch in April 2003 of the Integrated Strategic Plan marked a major shift in the funding of the Vancouver Agreement: the provincial and federal governments both announced that they would contribute Can \$10 million in the remaining period of the agreement. Vancouver's bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics was the catalyst here, as a commitment to Downtown Eastside revitalisation was integral to the social inclusion motif of the Canadian proposal, with the Vancouver Agreement offering an obvious vehicle for signalling intergovernmental resolve on this pledge. The Province of British Columbia therefore agreed to a Can \$10 million grant to support the implementation of the strategic plan, and effectively doubled the level of funding by making it conditional on a matched grant from the federal government.

Participants in the Vancouver Agreement acknowledged in interviews that this dedicated funding altered the dynamics of the agreement, which confirms an earlier finding (Macleod Institute, 2003, page 20). It raised the public profile of the partnership and added pressure on agreement parties to deliver on the priority actions featured in the strategic plan. Nevertheless, the flexible financing crucial to parity of treatment of each governmental partner was preserved, which maintained the symmetry of political representation underpinning effective collaboration within the agreement. The City of Vancouver was not expected to match the 2003 investments by the other governments, making a lower contribution largely of in-kind goods and services. Furthermore, the Olympics linkage eventually enticed in major corporate sponsorship of the Vancouver Agreement: in January 2005, the telecommunications company, Bell Canada, offered Can \$2 million to support the agreement's Economic Revitalisation Plan for the Downtown Eastside.

4.2 Leadership

Key informants from each level of government opined that leadership was a necessary condition for advancing intergovernmental collaboration on the agreement, although there were notable differences in emphasis over the political and administrative capacities perceived to be in play. According to urban policy and public administration research, leadership becomes particularly important when the governance challenge is horizontal or vertical integration across interdependent organisations: it has to combine strong, purposive action with the effective mobilisation of support from a disparate range of authorities and constituencies (Haus and Heinelt, 2005, pages 26–30; Sproule-Jones, 2000, pages 102–103). Haus and Heinelt capture succinctly the distinctive leadership function needed to address complex urban development goals; that is, “[the] capacity to establish, clarify and focus on broad purposes where this is difficult to achieve, and to accept public accountability for the realisation of these purposes” (2005, page 29).

The Vancouver Agreement has benefited from high-level political support across the three governmental partners. City and federal government interviewees acknowledged the catalytic role of ‘political champions’ in the intensive brokering over the formulation and implementation of the agreement. It was acknowledged that, at least in Vancouver, Mayor Owen and then Mayor Campbell were the most visible political advocates for the agreement and, arguably, the locus of executive leadership: that they both embraced the four-pillars framework for the Downtown Eastside extended the window of opportunity for municipal collaboration with the national and

provincial governments. While Health Canada headed initial consultation on federal cooperation with the City of Vancouver, the political champion in Ottawa turned out to be Stephen Owen—Member of Parliament for Vancouver—Quadra and Minister of Western Economic Diversification—who ensured that federal involvement fostered broad-based economic development goals for the Downtown Eastside. The limited duration and targeted efficiency gains of the Vancouver Agreement were crucial for soliciting the engagement of a national government reluctant to sign up to new, long-term commitments. Provincially, the agreement was championed by Community Development Minister, Jenny Kwan, in a centre-left administration sympathetic to its objectives: when a neoliberal government came to power in 2001, the manifest efficiency savings of the agreement and the prospect of dedicated federal funding secured continued provincial sponsorship.

Canadian urban development agreements have to be signed up to by politicians, who publicly institutionalise a political will shared by the participating governments. Nevertheless, as recognised by the interviewees, this investment of political capital can only be cashed if it energises and, if necessary, alters the operational practices of the relevant bureaucracies. It was mentioned by federal and provincial participants that horizontal management is nowhere mandated in the responsibilities, performance pay, and professional standards of public sector officials: the Vancouver Agreement sanctioned what one provincial government respondent described as “the permission to take risks when most of us are risk-averse”. Significantly, there was a perception that deputy ministers failed to relay effectively to their ministries the administrative challenges issued by their political superiors; but that the agreement was fortunate enough to have administrative champions within the senior bureaucracy—notably, the assistant deputy ministers of participating federal and provincial agencies, the chief executive officer of Vancouver Coastal Health, and the chief of the Vancouver Police Department. Once again, the city set the operational agenda for cooperative planning through its existing structures for integrated service delivery, aided, as one municipal planner stressed, by the simple fact that city staff were “already present on the ground” in the Downtown Eastside.

4.3 Community involvement

In Europe, where urban regeneration partnerships are well established, studies have shown that, where community participation is meaningful, collaborative processes are more likely to meet the economic and social needs of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. More precisely, the interplay of multilevel governmental agencies and community groups achieves an effective complementarity, it is claimed, when decision making is transparent, inclusive, and politically empowered (Mayo and Taylor, 2001; Stewart, 2005). Whether or not this is realised in practice, though, often rests on the place-specific events or political cultures shaping the behaviour and expectations of relevant actors (Cars et al, 2002; McCann, 2002).

An explicit commitment to inclusive and accessible community participation is written into the Vancouver Agreement: the Policy Committee is charged with establishing processes for community input, and the Downtown Eastside Strategy sets ambitious objectives for community capacity building. In practice, representatives of Downtown Eastside advocacy and service-delivery groups have taken part in the task teams, with further consultations on priority actions under the Integrated Strategic Plan. However, implementation of the agreement has yet to see a high level of community engagement—a situation candidly acknowledged by interviewees, with one governmental participant declaring “the Vancouver Agreement has no presence in the community”. From the perspective of city officials, the Downtown Eastside Community Development Project—a separate programme, as mentioned above, run by the City of Vancouver and the Four

Pillars Coalition—has obviated the need for further broad-based community input. An interdepartmental core staff team, directed by the city manager's office, ensures that staff from the community development project sit on the Vancouver Agreement management and coordination committees, and this is perceived as an appropriate conduit for relaying the concerns of Downtown Eastside residents. However, the relationship between the two initiatives has not been clearly defined, and community groups remain shut out from agreement decision structures (Coyne, 2003, pages 32–33; Macleod Institute, 2003, pages 15–16).

Indeed, key governmental informants expressed scepticism about the legitimacy of some of the civil society organisations operating in the area. A large number of diverse advocacy and service-delivery associations claim to represent various Downtown Eastside constituencies, but antagonism between groups is not uncommon—such as that between Gastown business interests and drug-user collectives. Significantly, the area's highest profile advocacy organisation, the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association [with a long-standing record of effective campaigning on social housing issues (see Ley, 1994)], has recently been embroiled in an internal dispute over a failed SRO-hotel redevelopment. Downtown Eastside activists interviewed felt that this had blunted their political capacity to press the Vancouver Agreement partners on community capacity building. Moreover, the governmental partners in the agreement have tended to sidestep activist groups in the Downtown Eastside, cultivating instead project-based links with community business organisations.

With regards to community engagement, the greatest challenge for the Vancouver Agreement has been, and remains, the participation of the Downtown Eastside aboriginal population. An Aboriginal Strategy Task Team, led by a provincial representative from the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, is charged with coordinating relevant service-delivery efforts and ensuring aboriginal input across all levels of the agreement process. For some participants, a separate task team has not served the interests of this group best, and a contrast was cited with the 2003 Winnipeg Partnership Agreement which includes a priority programme on aboriginal participation. Within the Downtown Eastside, there is a multiplicity of groups claiming to represent aboriginal interests—a fragmentation of voice accentuated by fractured federal–provincial responsibilities. The federal government has primary jurisdiction for aboriginal peoples, but their welfare needs in urban areas also fall under areas of provincial authority. Since 1998 Vancouver has been one of eight cities piloting an Urban Aboriginal Strategy designed to harmonise governmental efforts, and the Vancouver Agreement Aboriginal Task Team has closely liaised with this initiative.⁽¹¹⁾ It is significant, though, that the most pressing issue identified by aboriginal people to Vancouver Agreement participants—the exploitation of aboriginal youth by the Downtown Eastside sex trade—has still not elicited a high-level political response from the federal and provincial governments.

4.4 Mutual learning

A core rationale for collaborative, multiorganisational partnerships is that they foster the cognitive capacity of the parties to address complex problems. For intergovernmental partnerships in particular, where participants typically come from sectoral, hierarchical modes of working, cooperation offers the potential for mutual learning; that is, collective understanding gained from exposure to new information and perspectives. An influential thesis from public administration scholarship on partnerships

⁽¹¹⁾ Interviews with S J Whitley, Regional Director of Policy and Programmes, BC Region, Department of Justice Canada, 8 July 2004; and M Wright, Director (Aboriginal Directorate), Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, 7 July 2004.

is that successful collaboration entails at least an underlying reliance on informal, trust-based relationships: these social networks are the wellspring of shared learning for effective horizontal management (Kernaghan, 1993; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998; Sproule-Jones, 2000).

In interviews, participants in the Vancouver Agreement from each tier of government identified collaborative learning as a key dynamic and outcome of the process. The task teams were seen as the loci of this learning: in part by releasing staff time, through efficiency savings, for problem-based deliberations; although more emphasis was given to what was termed ‘knowledge spillover’—cognitive or informational gains generated by closer engagement with client groups and interaction with new sources of expertise. Given the overlapping memberships and mandates of the task teams, these spillovers were perceived to take place across as well as within teams. For example, much was made of the way in which the agreement process defused what had been a long-running antagonistic relationship between the provincial health authority and Vancouver City Police, which first flared up when the health authority set up a needle-exchange scheme in the Downtown Eastside in March 1989. The Treatment and Harm Reduction Task Team oversaw training for police officers on drug addiction and overdose response conducted by Vancouver Coastal Health, which improved relations between the health authority and the city police. This cooperation enhanced the work of other task teams, notably the one developing an integrated enforcement strategy.

In accounting for the knowledge spillovers of their tripartite working, federal representatives made reference to the concept of learning organisations, as interpreted for public service management in Canada by Lawrence (1998). Imported from organisation theory, its stress on deliberative communication and team-based problem solving was described as informing the lean, flattened structure of the Vancouver Agreement. However, city and provincial participants viewed agreement-induced collaborative learning simply as a result of good working relationships between receptive individuals. By facilitating flexible cross-agency cooperation, the Vancouver Agreement was credited with promoting the transmission of skills and information, which both rendered the process more effective, and also fed back into the participating public sector organisations. Continuity of personnel was seen as indispensable to mutual learning: indeed, a high turnover of federal and provincial staff during the first few years of the agreement was judged to have slowed down progress in intergovernmental collaboration.

4.5 Horizontal accountability

As highlighted by Stewart (2005), the governance of multisectoral working presents novel questions regarding accountability: “joint action and co-funding cloud the responsibilities and obligations of participant organisations in partnership and traditional expressions of accountability become unclear” (page 162). When, as with the Vancouver Agreement, collaborative decision making is restricted to governmental partners, the challenge is to isolate the distinctive answerability for horizontal programmes over and above hierarchical (vertical) chains of responsibility already in place for the participating departments or ministries. Disaggregating horizontal from vertical accountability is by no means easy, but public administration scholars see formal structures for monitoring and reporting programme outcomes as critical to the credibility of any claims to success by collaborative partnerships (Kernaghan, 1993, page 75; Sproule-Jones, 2000, pages 103–105).

Interviewees across the three tiers of government conceded that Vancouver Agreement partners only belatedly addressed the horizontal accountability of the agreement process. Not until August 2003 did the Management Committee commission the

Macleod Institute of the University of Calgary to develop an accountability and evaluation framework for the agreement. The process-based perspective of the Macleod Institute study revealed a preoccupation in Vancouver Agreement evaluation efforts with project outcomes rather than with the collaborative partnership itself: this emphasis, it claimed, clouded responsibilities for agreement implementation and failed to generate explicit decision-making criteria for gauging agreement effectiveness (Macleod Institute, 2003, pages 42–44). While a few informants felt that the Macleod Report failed to grasp the negotiation of horizontal management through working relationships between individuals, it did capture the perceptions of participants that prescriptive, process-based evaluation might erode freedom of action within the agreement—exposing individuals and activities to political interference. In any case, noted participants, limited resources available during the first phase of the Vancouver Agreement hampered even the project-based evaluation of some task teams: the organisational infrastructure was simply not in place to facilitate horizontal monitoring and evaluation.

The Macleod Report recommended an accountability framework that would render more transparent the governance roles and responsibilities within the agreement, as well as set measurable standards for evaluating governance objectives (Macleod Institute, 2003, page 45). These recommendations were broadly endorsed by the Management Committee, and shaped a move to comprehensive evaluation planning in the second phase of the Vancouver Agreement. Indeed, evidence of more integrated monitoring and evaluation was a political prerequisite for the 2005 renewal of the agreement. Federal representatives pointed here to a strong steer from the Policy Committee to deliver a clear ‘analytical narrative’ on the Vancouver Agreement. In part, this reflected an existing federal government predilection for the employment of results-based management and accountability in collaborative partnerships (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2003); and the evaluation approach in the renewed agreement certainly reflects this with a results-based logic model linking project activities, outputs and outcomes. Yet, it was also apparent from interviews that participants were under political pressure to create storylines showing connections between the agreement process and priority outcomes, even if these linkages were underdetermined by outcome measures.

5 Conclusion

At least for those priority actions where short-term outputs are meaningful, the Vancouver Agreement can demonstrate significant results. Some of these have been mentioned above, such as enforcement actions against drug-trade infrastructure and planning approval for 200 affordable-housing units in a major redevelopment of the Woodward’s site. There is also independent evidence that the supervised injection clinic in the Downtown Eastside has cut syringe sharing amongst injection-drug users (Kerr et al, 2005). It is, however, premature to talk of the success of the Vancouver Agreement—at least in terms of its long-term goals for the Downtown Eastside: increased economic activity; improved living conditions; decreased preventable deaths, injuries and illnesses; and increased community cohesion. Even the vaunted criminal justice efforts of the agreement have yet to break the grip of organised crime on the Downtown Eastside, chiefly those gangs involved in drugs trafficking and prostitution.

For its participants, the Vancouver Agreement has been an effective framework for intergovernmental cooperation, fostering goal-oriented decisions on urban development. Benchmarked against conditions for successful partnership working posited in the public administration literature, the analysis of the agreement process threw up some surprising findings: notably, that the *absence* of dedicated funding for the first few years of the agreement had assisted collaborative deliberations, and that agreement

implementation seemed to defy academic predictions that urban regeneration partnerships need high levels of community engagement and horizontal accountability in order to gain traction locally. From the process-based success of agreement insiders, collaboration between as well as within different tiers of government was facilitated, above all, by flexible financing, high-level political sponsorship, and organisational autonomy.

However, these very governance features may well militate against the long-term success of the agreement in improving economic activity and living conditions in the Downtown Eastside. In the first place, the ad hoc nature of the Vancouver Agreement renders it vulnerable to changes in the political opportunity structure supporting it, such as the recent (November 2005) return to municipal power in Vancouver of the NPA and the fall of the federal Liberal government. Neither political event necessarily threatens the continuation of the agreement, but suggests that, in order to be more secure, trilevel governmental collaboration on urban regeneration should be formally institutionalised—a recommendation self-evident in Canada (Graham et al, 1998, pages 185–187; Wong, 2002, page 16) but applicable at least to other federal governance systems in North America and Europe.

Second, while the Vancouver Agreement participants positively attributed their freedom of manoeuvre to a nonprescriptive accountability framework, this openness in self-evaluation has made it difficult to identify precise parameters for measuring success or failure. In particular, there remains a gap between the long-term indicators stated in the Vancouver Agreement evaluation plan and routine agreement activities. Indeed, the 2005 renewal of the Vancouver Agreement featured a commitment by the three governments to incorporate more directly long-term evaluation into the ongoing operations of project and task teams.

Third, a prospective rather than retrospective analytical narrative would have to acknowledge a more central role for local actors in meeting the long-term objectives of the agreement. The priority here is to realise the community capacity-building goal which is at the heart of the original Vancouver Agreement, but has been sidelined, as noted above, by a separate Downtown Eastside Community Development Project running parallel to—but unconnected with—the agreement process, and the implosion of the leading residents' association in the area. Unless local civil society and business organisations engage more comprehensively in its project work, the Vancouver Agreement will miss out on that complementarity of urban leadership and community involvement necessary for grassroots legitimacy and effectiveness.

Lastly, stepping back from the agreement process, further research could usefully dwell on exogenous variables: notably, the location of the initiative within a wider political economy of urban governance. The conditions of possibility of any social-centred urban development policy have been hypothesised as intergovernmental support and a fertile environment for capital investment (Savitch and Kantor, 2002). Vancouver's dual ability in recent decades to exercise public control over urban development and to attract substantial inward investment suggests at least background circumstances compatible with a bold social-inclusion agenda for the Downtown Eastside. However, the incursion of market-led development interests into the area, as envisaged by the agreement, is likely to induce socially destabilising and exclusionary consequences. Managing this inherent tension is the greatest long-term challenge for urban regeneration governance, both in Vancouver and in all other cities locked into the competitive logic of global capitalism (Brenner, 2004, pages 295–304; Hutton, 2004, page 1975).

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