



**6th Annual Trudeau Conference on Public Policy 2009  
Ottawa, November 19-21, 2009**

**“Canadian Cities and the Public Sphere:  
Rethinking the Urban Commons”**

Canada is one of the most urbanized countries in the world, with major cities whose influence reaches across the planet through economy, culture, research and innovation. In this country of immigrants, it is generally in the urban environment, between the school and the factory, that we learn those two essential traits of our national identity: citizenship and diversity. In the decades ahead, it is also in our cities that we will master the consequences of climate change, of illness and disease, of new forms of communication, through the critical mass of the entrepreneurs and scholars and creative problem solvers gathered there.

Responsibilities for many critical elements of satisfying urban life, such as urban transit, planning, public architecture, green space, gathering places or walkable neighbourhoods are fragmented, haphazard, and within the model of federal and provincial taxation, chronically underfunded. Despite individual and private foundation generosity, attempts by local powers to draw provincial and national attention to urban problems or architectural design potential rarely amount to anything more than middling success. Ecologists have seriously shaken the foundations of modern urban planning, exposing the flaws in unbridled optimism and non-interventionist policies, the limits of technology to save us from limitless personal freedom to act outside the bounds of collective self-interest.

We know nonetheless that it is possible to create urban environments that are safer and easier to navigate, that are convivial and bustling with life. Groups of citizens, individual visionaries, mayors and councils articulate variations on this vision of cities with human scale, open networks of movement among neighbourhoods, ethnic groups, and economic classes. From time to time, this new city seems to be within our grasp. What is preventing us from building such environments, cities that the rest of the world might identify as embodying the soul of our country?

After all, great cities never resemble film set variations on constructed homogeneity. There are clashes of vision, social antipathies, and significant variations in political and social power, despite our ideals of eliminating violence, segregation or poverty. There are intriguing limits to collective action and outcomes often fall short, even with the highest aspirations. And inescapably, cities which begin as villages or towns, established in places that offered their founders beauty, vistas, water, and fertile land seem to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of concentrated human activity, with its cortege of dilapidation, degradation and waste.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a passion for the future vitality of our cities requires us to take an interest in a number of very different questions, some of which may lead to conflicting answers. What are the central features of modern urban civilizations? What is

human scale? How are great visions developed and then integrated into the public sphere of political debate and informed choices? How is it possible to plan the evolution of existing cities so that they encourage more satisfying rhythms and interactions for the people who live, grow, work, dream and create within them? What are the unique elements of a Canadian “architecture of happiness”?

The Sixth Trudeau Conference on Public Policies will explore these questions, one by one, examining the furthest reaches of the best international experience and expertise. We will start by having the conference participants take the measure of the needs to be satisfied, the efforts to be made and above all, the obstacles to overcome. The four Foundation themes will form the backbone of the conference while specific issues such as governance, immigration, homelessness, the greening of the city or the particular challenges of emerging cities will be addressed by Canadian and international experts, practitioners and academics, in dialogue sessions, that have become the trademark of Trudeau Foundation conferences.