



The Case for Indigenizing Mid-Sized Cities

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Introduction

Over the past 25 years, the urban Indigenous population has been growing steadily. In northern cities such as Sudbury, the Indigenous population has grown to more than 10% of residents (Fitzmaurice and Shawbonquit 2016). The sustained population growth of Indigenous peoples has led to the overcrowding of reserves and has resulted in the relocation of families to urban centres.

Cities have reacted to the increase of Indigenous residents in ways that primarily focus on their difficulties in transitioning from rural to urban environments. While schools and social service agencies have developed plans to address the increase in Indigenous residents, city planners and architects have largely neglected to include an Indigenous presence in the development of cities (Howard and Lobo 2013). In particular, the economic drivers in cities are largely absent of Indigenous business owners, investors, or philanthropists.

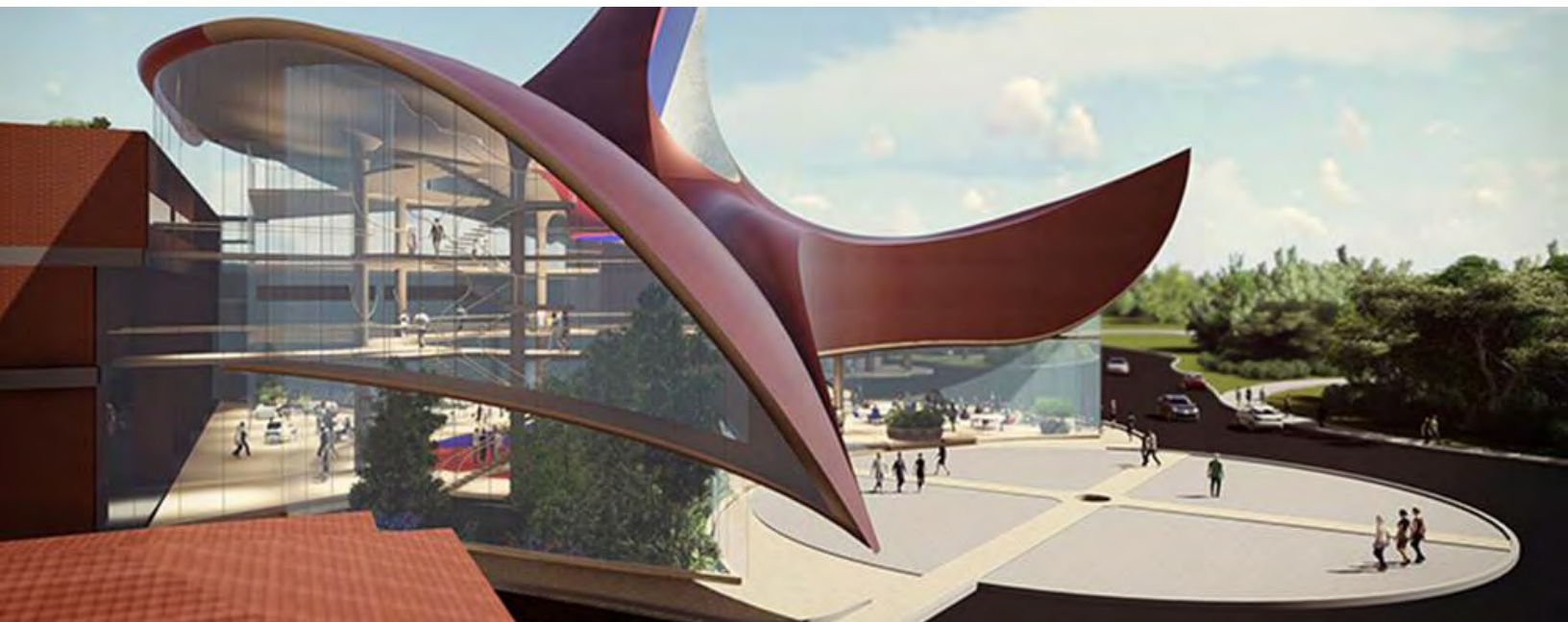
In this age of reconciliation, mid-sized cities are well positioned to play a leading role in bridging the divide between Canadian and Indigenous peoples. For decades,

Indigenous migrants have built new lives in mid-sized cities, but their presence is often ignored and primarily factored in social service conversations (Norris 2003). Despite this marginalization, neighborhood businesses, events and celebrations have become a mainstay of the urban Indigenous experience. Including the breadth of Indigenous experience in future city plans will greatly enhance the strength, diversity, rootedness and livability of mid-sized cities.

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A major consideration for the planning of mid-sized cities should be the emerging Indigenous middle class, which is greatly altering the urban Indigenous experience. For example, in 2011 there were 13,405 Indigenous people living in Sudbury and 3,565 (27%) of them had incomes greater than \$40,000. However, Indigenous middle class residents report a continuation of systemic racism and few opportunities to join established professional networks (Fitzmaurice and Shawbonquit 2016). With proper planning, urban

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Indigenous leaders will enhance professional networks and bring opportunity and agency for Indigenous residents of mid-sized cities.

An important shift in the lives of Indigenous peoples in urban centers has been the increasing influence they have on the arts and entertainment aspect of city life. However, while the urban Indigenous community has the capacity to fully participate in the planning and development of mid-sized cities, challenges remain over how to create fair and adequate representation. Indigenous residents have different relationships with the state: Some represent local First Nations whose traditional territory is occupied by the city, others are from neighbouring communities or migrants from other regions of the country, and some have status, some do not (Peters 2006). Currently there is no recognized urban Indigenous organization that represents the majority of residents at either the national or local level.

How can we include an Indigenous perspective in the future planning for mid-sized cities?

There is little research that speaks directly to the need for Indigenizing Canadian cities. While data can reveal much about migration patterns and statistical issues, the inclusion of Indigenous residents in the visioning process for the future of our cities has yet to be accommodated. Outreach through existing gathering spaces, schools, and service providers by urban Indigenous organizations can provide an opportunity for Indigenous residents to participate, although this approach has become the standard method with limited results (Newhouse, D. 2003). A more focused approach is required to develop, in collaboration with community members, a survey that captures the Indigenous



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perspective and to host events that draw out further dialogue without prescribing outcomes and presenting only binary options. However, this approach neglects to include the emerging urban Indigenous professional class who do not have a presence within urban indigenous organizations. Research has shown that Indigenous families entering the middle class avoid Indigenous organizations, such as friendship centres, as they feel these places are intended for people transitioning to the city (Fitzmaurice and Shawbonquit 2016).

There exists a need for Indigenous economic leaders, in cooperation with mainstream private sector representatives, to meet and discuss the establishment of urban Indigenous professional networks and form partnerships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous sectors. Their mandate would be to oversee the development of Indigenous owned and operated businesses and other economic development initiatives. Such a group could facilitate activities such as: Information sharing, networking, assistance with business plans, peer support, investment clubs, joint venture initiatives, entrepreneur role models and training programs. While current initiatives by organizations such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business are enhancing opportunities for Indigenous owned businesses, a local, focused strategy that brings together economic leaders within mid-sized cities has yet to be developed.

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