

4

Urban Housing and Aboriginal Governance

J. D. Crookshanks

Introduction

The opportunities that could be provided by urban Aboriginal¹ self-government (or, as will be differentiated, self-governance) have been a topic of discussion for decades. The need for Aboriginal peoples to have control over Aboriginal affairs in urban areas has been demonstrated, even by (state) governments (Sgro 2002). Various models have been proposed and their feasibility has been debated (Peters 2005), yet detailed, case-specific approaches to Aboriginal self-governance within urban settings—and their real-life applicability beyond theoretical systems—have been described less often (Hanselmann 2002).

By focusing on the specific issue of housing in two case-study cities (Edmonton and Winnipeg), this paper attempts to demonstrate how urban Aboriginal self-governance is happening right now. In the spirit of *Fostering Biimaadiziwin*, the focus will be examples of successes, to avoid painting a depressing picture of oppression, while acknowledging that much work remains to improve housing for all urban Aboriginal people.

The relevant question that arises is how urban Aboriginal people describe “the good life” in this context. By seeking to understand what they wish to see for good housing in the city, this paper will examine how these goals can be met, not just through government programming, policies, and services, but through normative approaches to urban Aboriginal self-governance. The argument will be made that this should be carried out in the expression of collective agency to which numerous urban Aboriginal people aspire, something that many also see as part of “the good life.”

To examine how attempts are being made to achieve the good life in Edmonton and Winnipeg, this paper proceeds in the following manner. First, it will summarize the most useful and relevant concepts provided by a field theory method (Bourdieu 1990), the model of analysis used to understand the two urban housing fields and the struggles for power within them. Second, the study is framed by a discussion of existing literature on urban self-government in order to develop concepts for understanding what urban Aboriginal governance looks like and how it is taking place today. Using this framework, there is an examination of two case-study cities² to shed light on how Aboriginal people and organizations work together, with and against some powerful economic and political forces, to

meet their diverse housing needs. Using field theory, this paper examines how the housing fields are structured and the important role that various forms of capital play in governance. Finally, by highlighting two different urban Aboriginal organizations that have a housing focus, this paper will address the different ways that urban Aboriginal self-governance is carried out today in practice.

The content of this paper arises from the PhD work of the author. As a non-Aboriginal person, the author was an outside researcher in the Aboriginal communities where this work took place. The study was conducted after receiving ethics approval from the University of Alberta. Local Aboriginal elders and community members were consulted on cultural protocols and how to proceed. Trust was further built by volunteering for different Aboriginal and housing/homelessness-related organizations.

Field Theory

This paper will make use of Bourdieu's field theory concepts and analysis methods (Bourdieu 1990). The basis of field theory used here—field, habitus, and capital—is described below. A field is defined as:

a structured social space...[that] contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies. (Bourdieu 1998, 40–41)

Therefore, each city's housing field is, as it has been defined using Bourdieu's concepts, the network of organizations (including government departments, housing organizations, and Aboriginal organizations that work on housing issues) and individuals who share some level of interest in housing issues (the field's stakes), whether that means providing housing services or looking for a home (Bourdieu 2005).

Bourdieu believed that the structure of a field shaped its members' dispositions or "feel for the game" (what he called habitus), but that these dispositions, in turn, also shaped the field (Cronin 1996, 70; Jenkins 1992, 80). People's habitus (beliefs and behaviours), combined with the amount and types of resources (capital) available to them, determines their relative position in the housing field and whether they are in a dominating or dominated position.

Key to this paper is realizing the different forms that capital can take. Bourdieu outlined three main forms of capital—economic, cultural, social (1986). To understand the resources used in the field, we must recognize all of its manifestations, and not just focus on the most visible forms of economic capital. Economic

capital is easiest to understand when summarized as that “which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (1986, 106).

Cultural capital takes three forms. First, it can be found in an embodied form that includes one’s skills, learned knowledge, sense of sophistication, and demeanour (1986, 107). Second, cultural capital can be found in an objectified form. This is most easily seen in goods like art or literature, but also in the tools that (re)produce culture (1986, 109). Third, cultural capital takes an institutionalized form. A common example of this is a university degree (1986, 113).

Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1986, 110). It derives its profitability by providing the owner with the support of the network’s actors’ collective capital. A person needs competence (cultural capital) and a certain disposition (*habitus*, which will influence the competence) to maintain social capital and keep it profitable (1986, 111).

Cultural and social capital are converted to and from economic capital. In an economically focused world subject to the “brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics,” this conversion is hidden, meaning that cultural and social capital are “disguised” economic capital and are easily overlooked (1986, 113). If we care only about economic capital, non-economic efforts (such as learning a language or spending time with a friend) seem like wasted time and energy. But recognizing that investing in cultural and social capital has hidden economic returns shows us that these activities have a purpose in the field’s struggle, especially in self-governance initiatives.

Self-Government and Self-Governance

It is difficult to pin down a consistent definition for urban Aboriginal self-government or self-governance. For the purposes of this paper, and to make use of a field analysis method, self-governance here is defined as a process, or system of processes, through which a collective has a certain amount of autonomy (attempting to meet self-determination goals) in making decisions for the group, and in which members of the group are themselves involved in governance. This can include self-government tools, but goes beyond institutions to include civil society and informal decision-making processes. Good governance tests, such as asking whether the process is inclusive or not, are also vital. This is central to understanding the relative positions of power within the housing field. Some of the literature is used here to demonstrate how and why this paper approaches urban Aboriginal self-governance (and understands self-government and self-determination) this way.

We begin with the term “self-government” because it is the phrase most commonly used by authors (Belanger 2008; Wuttunee 2004; Friesen and Friesen 2008) and it is recognized by the federal government (Government of

Canada 1995). The concept of urban Aboriginal self-government also poses important and unique questions regarding its structure, so it sometimes draws special attention (Weinstein 1986; Wherrett and Brown 1995; Peters 2005); however, such consideration can sometimes amount to a general description of a particular number of theoretical “models” of self-government that can be adopted for an urban setting (Wherrett and Brown 1995; Peters 2005; Mountjoy 1999; Graham 1999). While some models are useful for understanding what can be legislated in an area, they can easily fail to address what is subjectively and objectively taking place in reality, in a dynamic environment with hidden relations of power. As such, proposed models or structures are useful conceptual tools in the abstract, but risk failing to address urban Aboriginal peoples’ lived experiences.

Second, some definitions are limiting. For example, Aboriginal self-government can be described as a “defined level of jurisdiction or control to be exercised either exclusively, or on a shared basis, with either aboriginal [sic] and/or non-Aboriginal governments, with a broad or narrow range of ‘government’ or jurisdictional sectors” (Cowie 1987, cited by Wherrett and Brown 1995, 85). This very institutional/government-focused definition leaves little room for the non-institutional, society-based social organization that is important both in urban and Aboriginal (whether urban or not) settings.

In this vein, scholars recognize that self-government in cities is going to be different because of a diffused population and national and cultural diversity with different legal relationships with the state (Peters 2005). Some relational conceptions show that while self-determination (further defined below) is “sovereignty within a territory,” self-government is instead the “ability for people to make significant choices about their own political, cultural, economic, and social affairs” (Cassidy 1991, cited in Peters 2005, 40). For others, while self-government is not the equivalent of self-determination, it is not inherently negative; self-government is about capacity (not dependency), empowerment (not marginality), providers (not clients), and rights (not needs) (Peters 2005, 40).³

However, the problem with such a definition of self-government is that most of the models offered for self-government are centred around concerns about the structural nature of the self-government models, and are not necessarily suited for looking at the people and processes that operate inside and outside of these institutions (Peters 2005). In field theory, it is just as important to recognize the roles that less visible or marginalized urban Aboriginal community members play if we want to understand the effects of Aboriginal autonomy, empowerment, and decision-making strategies.

This overriding focus on institutionalism is not helped by ideas stemming from the Government of Canada’s official conception of self-government (1995). It recognized that Aboriginal people have the right to decide matters that are “internal to their communities, integral to their unique culture, identities, traditions, languages, and institutions, and with respect to their special relationship to

their land and their resources” (cited in Morse 1999, 29). If limited conceptions of self-government form the basis of analysis, then study will demonstrate little of the economic or political control necessary to implement and meet the goal of the inherent right to autonomous self-determination. Although the federal government’s contemporary Urban Aboriginal Strategy program has expanded its goals to include forms of economic development (UAS 2010; Morse 2010, 12), the financial limitations (“social investment-style” project funding) of the program, and the government’s simultaneous decision not to approve the substantially more encompassing Kelowna Accord speaks to a consistently narrow scope of understanding for urban Aboriginal affairs.

In contrast to these approaches, Aboriginal leaders sometimes state that self-government is best understood as traditional government; it is a governing process that is not written or codified (Wuttunee 2004, 30). Such a view of self-government strongly contrasts institutionalized views of (state) government, and explains why some Aboriginal people do not like using the term because it has been conceived by outside forces (Wuttunee 2004). It is also, by nature, very difficult to carry out in an untraditional, urban environment. Further, mainstream concepts of self-government have been “appropriated by the federal government and the Aboriginal political elite,” and manipulated by academics (Coates and Morrison 2008, 15).

Thus, self-government has been problematized, both because of its impractical use and because of its relative meaning (or lack thereof). The term “self-government” is gradually being replaced by “self-determination” because the latter sounds better and is a recognized human right (Green 2005, 337). As such, self-determination encompasses self-government, but goes beyond it.⁴ Many authors and Aboriginal people therefore turn to self-determination claims as the preferred concept for exploration and attainment (Walker 2006).

Self-determination goals are linked to autonomy goals such as post-colonialism and power-sharing by equals. As a paradigm, self-determination “rejects the legitimacy of existing political relations and mainstream institutions as a framework for attainment of aboriginal [sic] goals” (Fleras and Elliott 1999, 190). As such, recent consideration has found that self-government “draws on contingent rather than sovereign rights,” and is therefore not full self-determination (Maaka and Fleras 2008, 79). It is argued that self-government requires Aboriginal people to cooperate with the system, to limit independence, not to violate the territorial integrity of the country, to harmonize with state governments, and to try to assimilate Aboriginal people into Canadian society (Maaka and Fleras 2008, 82). Unlike self-determination, self-government is not fully sovereign or independent (Morse 2008, 60), but self-government can be carried out with the goal of self-determination to try to achieve these principles.⁵

Thus, self-determination can be understood as a less tangible, broad goal of autonomy, and self-government is the political manifestation of this quest.⁶ Since it is more visible, we can observe the extent to which self-government approaches

self-determination. Self-determination may not be fully possible in an urban setting, but it sets a normative goal for ending colonialism by calling for Aboriginal control over Aboriginal governance through collective community empowerment.

Based on the tensions described above, this paper uses the concept of “self-governance” as a frame for (urban Aboriginal) analysis. Simply put, governance is a form of collective action used to make decisions (Graham, Amos, and Plumptre 2003, 2). It is primarily concerned with the roles people take in making decisions, or “who should be involved in deciding, and in what capacity” (Graham, Amos, and Plumptre 2003, 2, emphasis removed). It is also inherently tied to normative questions about how decisions are carried out (e.g., by asking who is included).

Distinguishing governance from government is important because it opens space for investigating the roles of non-government (civil society) actors in public decision-making processes (Graham, Amos, and Plumptre 2003, 6). Further, good governance principles set normative goals for governance processes. These include ideals such as inclusive participation, transparency, accountability, and equity (Graham, Amos, and Plumptre et al. 2003). The extent to which governance meets these goals, and the extent to which it has, or approaches objectives of self-determination, creates the “self” in self-governance. Without decision-making processes geared toward the needs of the collective, including the inherent right of its members to collectively determine their shared future, the governance process could be directed either by outsiders (e.g., non-Aboriginal people, state governments) or a few powerful insiders who are the only ones to profit from the process. There is a separation that can be made here between the governed and the governing (Tully 2008, 275). Thus, for self-governance to exist, urban Aboriginal people must be included in the governing and not be relegated to being governed subjects.

Most explicitly in an (urban) Aboriginal context, self-governance can be seen as the “individual and collective control over the structures and processes of everyday Aboriginal life” (Newhouse 2000, 403). Broader than self-government, it occurs when “the major structures and process of Aboriginal life...[are] largely under Aboriginal control and will influence identity, education, and government” (Newhouse 2000, 407). This definition captures the fact that self-governance is not just political, but social and cultural, and that it involves both institutions (structures) and non-institutional (processes) forces. The education-focused view of self-governance above can be easily applied to other social fields such as housing. Providing adequate shelter for members of a community, including a focus on providing for the next generation, has been an important component of urban Aboriginal self-governance strategies (Hanselmann 2003). Without satisfying this basic necessity, effective self-governance will be next to impossible.

Finally, an emphasis on self-governance is also much more compatible with what researchers will actually be able to observe in the urban housing field. Looking for “self-determining governance” (self-governance with goals of self-determination in mind; a concept introduced by Maaka and Fleras 2008, 77),

allows one to see the extent to which urban Aboriginal people are self-governing, that is, how much they are exercising decision-making control within the field (and pursuing the good life), while using their own concepts of governance in ways that are not colonial extensions of the settler state. Thus, looking for the “self” in self-governance can mean looking for the (re)introduction or affirmation of traditional methods of governance, or traditional cultural practices and concepts, into governance that help secure Aboriginal control (Coates and Morrison 2008, 117). This focus on relative power is central to field theory and can be used to describe Edmonton’s and Winnipeg’s housing fields. This can also be employed to examine what people expressed about their ideas of the good life or good housing.

Field Theory in Urban Aboriginal Governance

A first step in field analysis calls for a description of the field and its actors. Doing so in Winnipeg’s housing field, one can see how Aboriginal people are in a dominated position. Although there are a number of organizations that provide housing specifically to Aboriginal populations, most Aboriginal housing providers are funded by residual grants from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) that were transferred to the provinces when the Chrétien government attempted to “get out of housing” (Chisholm 2003, 10; Falvo 2007, 11; Falkenhagen 2001, 55). Most of these funding agreements, which keep Aboriginal housing affordable through rent-gear-to-income programs will expire in the coming years (Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association 2008). Thus, most Aboriginal housing programs are at the mercy of the provincial government (a government that cannot afford to maintain the housing field alone), and wait to hear what exactly will happen when the funding agreements run out. One provincial organization, the Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association, represents the Aboriginal housing providers (including approximately eight in Winnipeg, which count among them some of the largest and oldest urban Aboriginal housing programs in the country), and is attempting to work toward a solution.

Generally, Winnipeg’s housing initiatives (Aboriginal or otherwise) are coordinated through the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI), although “coordinated” may be inaccurate. The WHHI was established in 2000 in order to centralize, in one building, the housing-related programs of the three levels of government. However, according to research participants at the WHHI, the three governments still deal with housing issues quite separately; the WHHI is seen more as a “single-window access point” through which Winnipeggers can find what services they need amongst the housing programs of the various levels of government (WHHI 2010). The federal government’s Urban Aboriginal Strategy, meanwhile, is delivered separately from the WHHI, and thus has little housing focus, despite the high need determined by the Aboriginal community. There are also few Aboriginal initiatives coming out of the municipal government.

The situation and field structure is different in Edmonton. Since 2008, Edmonton's housing field has been significantly reorganized and is now very much centred around Homeward Trust, a "community-based, comprehensive housing organization that provides leadership and resources towards ending homelessness in Edmonton" (Homeward Trust 2010). Funded by all three levels of government, it has dispersed over \$30 million dollars to date. Most significantly, of the organization's nine trustees, four must be appointed by an Aboriginal nominating committee made up of representatives from local Aboriginal organizations. Further, Homeward Trust includes an Aboriginal Advisory Council that helps guide the trust's priorities, provide cultural perspectives, and ensure that it focuses on projects that are deemed most appropriate for the needs of Aboriginal communities in Edmonton.

Like Winnipeg, Edmonton's housing field is spread across three competing levels of government. While Alberta remains one of only a couple of provinces that have not accepted the downloading of CMHC's affordable housing portfolio, both Alberta and Edmonton have approved ten-year plans to end homelessness, with Homeward Trust coordinating their implementation. Further, many interview participants, including both representatives from Aboriginal organizations and government employees, noted how influential the current mayor of Edmonton has been in pursuing affordable housing strategies and setting up the city's Aboriginal Relations Office. One person in a key position of power can influence the field greatly. As for Aboriginal housing providers, the Métis Urban Housing Corporation (MUHC), which is owned by the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), dominates Edmonton's Aboriginal housing field and the lives of many of its players. It has over four hundred units, many of which are being rolled over to their Métis Capital Housing Corporation.

In Edmonton and Winnipeg, different levels of government play very different roles in Aboriginal housing, and their power to influence habitus will create different ideas about what people should expect from state governments. No government will take responsibility for housing, nor does any one order of government want jurisdiction over off-reserve Aboriginal people; this puts urban Aboriginal housing in a policy vacuum. The complex "jurisdictional maze" (Graham and Peters 2002, 9) makes urban self-governance and the pursuit of the good life difficult.

When Aboriginal research participants in focus groups were asked what they considered good or adequate housing, they provided a variety of answers, but common themes emerged. Although cost was the top consideration, aspects that are not immediately recognized as economic were also very common. For example, safe housing was identified as one of the most important factors, especially by women who disproportionately had the role of caring for children. Safety meant, to many, physical safety from harm,⁷ but was also defined as proximity to people that are known; housing that maintains family and community connections was highlighted by most female respondents as crucial to maintaining social

networks (or social capital). This has potential economic (as cooperative living and sharing resources becomes more possible) and other benefits, such as the creation and maintenance of social networks that help develop and maintain, in turn, cultural capital.

A common cultural consideration tied to participants' ideas of adequate housing was that having more space is vital. This was identified by most Aboriginal respondents, and some non-Aboriginal participants who had more awareness of their Aboriginal tenants' needs. Many noted how important it is for Aboriginal people to be able to offer living space to family who are passing through town, or who suddenly find themselves without housing. In addition, many Aboriginal participants wished that their landlords were more understanding about this type of situation, and felt that if sufficient housing space could not be found, exceptions to government/bureaucratic regulations (the conditioning rules of the field) would allow them to practice what they considered an important part of their way of life.

Dealing, then, with a (foreign) bureaucracy that is often not understanding of Aboriginal cultures, and that many Aboriginal people lack the capital to take on, was a major issue for numerous Aboriginal participants. Navigating state regulations and structures takes time, money, acquired talent, and patience. People who arrive in the city from reserves are often left feeling like "fish out of water" if their habitus and capital do not match the structures of the urban housing field (Kalpagam 2006, 84). How, then, can urban Aboriginal people organize to take back control and live the good life in the city?

Two Examples Of Urban Aboriginal Self-Governance

There are numerous urban Aboriginal organizations in Edmonton and Winnipeg that work to contribute to the good life and help urban Aboriginal people bring about some level of collective control or self-governance in the housing field. This section looks at two groups in detail and talks about how they differently fulfil the criteria developed above.

In Winnipeg, Aboriginal Visioning for the North End (also referred to simply as Aboriginal Visioning or AV) began when a group of Aboriginal elders and community leaders brought forward the idea for the organization in 2003. Following a community consultation process, it was established in 2005 as a community-driven, grassroots organization. It operates out of a former business and home that it rents on Selkirk Avenue.

Aboriginal Visioning is a "community renewal project" based in one of Winnipeg's poorest neighbourhoods that also has one of the highest concentrations of Aboriginal residents (AV website; Peters 2005). Its mission is to "provide the means and opportunity for Aboriginal residents of the North End to become directly and meaningfully involved in renewal efforts within their community, to build capacity, and to continually develop leadership roles within these efforts" (AV website). Improving Aboriginal housing is among the organization's primary

objectives and it is one of the primary issues that members deal with on a daily basis. Aboriginal Visioning's belief is that by increasing Aboriginal participation and leadership in housing, members can increase awareness of housing initiatives as solutions. This is part of a larger plan to increase the voice of the Aboriginal community through culturally appropriate initiatives for leadership and capacity building (AV website).

Aboriginal Visioning works because it is community driven and has community support. Rather than rely solely on economic capital (which is not always there), it relies on the social capital of Aboriginal residents (especially women) to keep it going. Although it is focused on one particular neighbourhood, some focus group participants from outside of the North End had heard about it, as had many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations across the city.

AV housing meetings generally attract eight to ten people. Central to their success is that the Aboriginal people at the meetings help each other by collectively dealing with issues, instead of leaving them as individual problems. This means that once someone learns how to deal with a particular issue, they can pass on that acquired information (cultural capital) to someone else. The more they can build up their social and cultural capital, the more autonomous (or self-determining) they will be from dominant forces in the housing field, such as (government) regulatory bodies. AV's meetings with the Residential Tenancies Branch and with landlords have achieved success as well.

The former coordinator of Aboriginal Visioning stated that while she did believe AV would one day be involved in "politics" (meaning the field of politics that influences behaviours in all of the fields it dominates), it would not be until collective action had built up the necessary trust and leadership from the community. Being neighbourhood-based makes AV, and the issues it deals with, closer to home; it is not dealing with the "high politics" of constitutional accords or land claims agreements, but the "on-the-ground" politics of how people interact with the various levels of government and with each other in the public and private spheres (Abele and Graham 1989). This approach to self-governance (invisible under many self-government lenses) transcends into the home and takes into account that power structures are reproduced both in the open and in the family (Bourdieu 1986). If resistance to oppressive field structures and domination can only be achieved by working collectively, AV offers the localized venue and culturally appropriate processes for urban Aboriginal community members to take control of an important part of their lives by addressing housing issues together, rather than as isolated individuals acting against the state and bureaucratic forces. Acting individually and outside Aboriginal culture would encourage the adoption of the housing field's inherently non-Aboriginal habitus.

That said, Aboriginal Visioning has also met with its share of barriers, including some barriers to autonomy. For its first few years, it had to apply for project funding often, and faced decreasing levels of economic capital, with no core funds. Like any non-profit, a lack of core funding kept it reliant on outside support.⁸

However, very recently, AV secured long-term (three years, which is very long for a non-profit) core funding from the United Way. It also receives project funding from the Province of Manitoba and the Winnipeg Foundation (one of its original funders). This will allow it to focus more energy on its projects and less time on applications for more funding (which requires substantial time/economic capital and cultural capital that many community members lack).⁹ Although it is far from self-sustainable (members do share supplies with other members in need), it is doing better than some community-driven ventures in Winnipeg that have since burned out (Silver 2007).

In Edmonton, the Wicihitowin Secretariat (also referred to as Wicihitowin) is the result of a long, formal process that involved both the Aboriginal community and municipal government of the City of Edmonton. The process began in 2004 when the city approved the launch of the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Accord Initiative; through a community consultation process, a public report was released, highlighting the priorities of Edmonton's urban Aboriginal population, and in 2006, the community approved a "'Traditional/Stewardship' community mechanism model" as a "new way of working together," both as a community and with the three levels of government. In 2007, Edmonton became the first major city in Canada to open an Aboriginal-specific civic office, the Aboriginal Relations Office, and that summer, the Wicihitowin Secretariat began operating under the direction of the Wicihitowin Circle (Wicihitowin 2009).

Wicihitowin's purpose is to "create a way in which the diversity of the Aboriginal communities in Edmonton and the many stakeholders can come together and implement solutions to address the most pressing issues of the day" (Wicihitowin 2009). It is the voice of Aboriginal Edmontonians (though it stresses that nothing in its role should abrogate from any treaty or existing Aboriginal agreement in Canada), and it is responsible for the process for deciding how the federal government's Urban Aboriginal Strategy funding is to be spent. Wicihitowin's funding comes from the three levels of government and the United Way.

Seen more as a "process" than an organization, Wicihitowin's strategy for relationship building and decision-making includes community circles (such as the women's circle, men's circle, elders' circle and youth circle), as well as eight action circles that are centred on the key priorities of the community. Much of Wicihitowin's visible work, so far, has been in these action circles; participants from Edmonton said that the Aboriginal Housing and Shelter Action Circle is in the middle of the pack as to how much progress it has made in establishing an action plan. It meets to share information between different organizations (including, for example, housing support organizations, public housing corporations, and provincial health representatives—people with lots of capital, not necessarily community members).

As can be seen, Aboriginal Visioning and Wicihitowin are quite different organizations. Though one can argue that they are both involved in self-governance, the dissimilarities between the two make comparison difficult unless one accepts

a broad and fluid concept of self-governance. Wicihitowin is attempting to fill a vacuum left when Aboriginal political organizations are forced to focus on their on-reserve (and Métis settlements, in Alberta) membership base. In Winnipeg, the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg attempts to fill some of these roles. The vacuum there is in the lack of a municipal response to Aboriginal issues.

The process for establishing Wicihitowin and then incorporating it into partnership with government has been an attempt to keep the Aboriginal community in the driver's seat, so to speak, and not leave control up to powerful organizations (including local Aboriginal political organizations and state governments). Wicihitowin's slow start (albeit purposefully slow, so as to be as inclusive as possible), succession of executive directors, and fluctuating participation level (by both government and the community) mean it has far to go in capturing the support of its purported membership and government. As such, it lacks some of the cultural capital—in the form of community credibility—that Aboriginal Visioning has managed to gather. With this, and its relative institutionalization, one could claim that it is more an example of self-government (and not necessarily “good government,” if it is not connected to the community), than self-governance.

With ties to people who have the capital to dominate the housing field (or others), Wicihitowin also experiences the drawbacks of being identified as political. For example, one Edmonton focus-group participant (the only one who had heard of Wicihitowin) had been involved in the process, but left because she felt it was being forced to fit into parameters set by the government. This example of field domination is also seen in Wicihitowin's plan, which has to conform to the federal government's Urban Aboriginal Strategy priorities. The strategy's priorities were refocused in 2007 to emphasize primarily economic concerns, including life skills, job training, entrepreneurship; and women and children's issues (which essentially boils down to protection from crime, incentives to deter people from entering into crime, and a plan to provide self-esteem counselling so that they can get jobs); all of this leaves little room for housing issues (INAC 2007; Wicihitowin 2009–10).

To be fair, it is too early to write off Wicihitowin. Its annual report shows how it, through its accumulation of social and cultural capital, has gained recognition on many important bodies and boards (2009). As for urban Aboriginal community members outside the process, building up social capital takes time, especially for people with less access to economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). The Wicihitowin process was, and is, being undertaken in most inclusive, positive, and traditionally appropriate manner possible in an urban setting with diverse, and sometimes conflicting, Aboriginal populations. Some participants said that they thought Wicihitowin's next year will determine its practicality and, good or bad, will serve as an example to cities across Canada.

In contrast, Aboriginal Visioning is hampered by a lack of support from its municipal government. The City's own website for its largely abandoned urban Aboriginal strategy has not been updated for years. One City of Winnipeg employee stated that the “strategy” is all but dormant, albeit for the city's youth

strategy, and that little is likely to happen under the current mayor, a sentiment echoed by many other participants in the focus groups.¹⁰

With no formal government and a flexible institutional structure, Aboriginal Visioning does not fulfill the criteria of self-government; perhaps it is the common misuse of this word that caused many of the research participants there to deny that they are “doing self-government” in Winnipeg. However, Wicihitowin’s structure is also traditional/anti-institutional in nature, based on fluid community circles and open dialogue processes. In this light, Aboriginal Visioning can also be seen as a basic instrument of self-governance because it allows community members to meet, set priorities, collectively make decisions, and then strategize how to carry them out. This can have an influence on the housing field when non-Aboriginal/state actors recognize that working with the Aboriginal community will improve their positions in the field as well (or when Aboriginal people become employed in the state without having to change their habitus to match). Key here is that AV’s “membership” is inclusive to anyone who wishes to be a member; AV does not claim to speak for Winnipeg’s Aboriginal community, just its members. Participants bring with them the credibility offered by their social and cultural capital, lending power to their voices and improving their chances of strategically dealing with recurring housing problems in the urban Aboriginal community. Like Wicihitowin, its success will be based on the collective capital of the members, whether these forms of capital are valued in the field, and whether members have the dispositions (habitus) to work against structures of domination rather than give in. In this analysis, it is essential to recognize that the focus on the economic (promoted by neo-liberal field structures and habitus) masks and enables domination.

Because of a lack of economic capital, both organizations are in a dominated position in the housing field, which limits their autonomy. While providing funding to urban Aboriginal self-governance initiatives helps, economic capital—and the tools it affords—is still of little use when its holders lack the cultural and social capital to use it to its full potential (Bourdieu 1986). Further, most Aboriginal forms of cultural capital, while useful in Aboriginal networks, are not as valued in the wider housing field. Although this is changing (during research, public servants and politicians who were prepared to value Aboriginal knowledge and processes—perhaps for the credibility it offered government—were encountered), it has a distance to go, as the field (as all fields are) is still designed to favour the cultural and social networks of the dominant members of society who, consciously or not, wish to retain their power. What will work best for urban Aboriginal self-governance initiatives is for non-Aboriginal actors to engage in more self-reflexive questioning. They must ask how their actions and beliefs privilege their ways of being in the city (ways that privilege, for example, institutionalized government), their own ideas of good housing, and why they may differ in the urban housing field. It is the recognition of the field structures habitus, and vice versa, that will show how ideas of good housing are (re)constructed to privilege domination of field actors.

Conclusion

Aboriginal self-governance does happen in Canadian cities. To see it, we must focus broadly, acknowledging what Aboriginal people are doing without trying to fit ideas of self-governance or self-government into the rigid government or outsider definitions of governance. Self-governance comes from communities that have their own forms of cultural and social capital, but need economic support from governments to counter a history of systemic barriers resulting from the destruction of local Aboriginal economies and ways of life. If urban Aboriginal people and communities are to build upon existing strategies and realize the good life by accumulating valuable Aboriginal capital, then it will require, in part, changes to the field structure in which non-Aboriginal people learn about and value Aboriginal forms of capital: the different ways of doing things, hidden social networks, traditional economic activities, and the ways these are all tied together.

Aboriginal people in both Edmonton and Winnipeg have clearly identified housing as a priority and have asked that governments step up and work with locally driven Aboriginal governance strategies to meet these needs. Edmonton's culturally sensitive ten-year plan to end homelessness and the establishment of Wicihitowin are examples of a change in attitude. Most people in the housing fields recognize, however, that it is the federal government, with its greater capital, that must do its part and develop a housing strategy, once again, for off-reserve Aboriginal housing. This must be done in partnership with urban Aboriginal communities. Organizations such as Wicihitowin and Aboriginal Visioning may well prove to be the vital pieces of the puzzle that will enable urban Aboriginal people to take control of their housing situation and act collectively to empower their communities.

Endnotes

1. The word “Aboriginal” is used to refer to the First Nations (status or non-status), Métis, and Inuit peoples who live in Canada (Peters 2007, 208), with acknowledgement that the word itself is recognized as a foreign, government-given term that was not traditionally used by Aboriginal groups themselves. This word is used in place of the increasingly more common “Indigenous” as the former was used by most of the research participants, though it is noted that some people, including some who participated in focus groups, took exception to this for the reasons above.
2. Data referred to in this paper is drawn from PhD dissertation work undertaken from 2009 to 2010, consisting of community-based focus groups and individual interviews in Winnipeg and Edmonton. Interviews targeted (government) decision-makers (those who create and carry out housing policy) and community (housing) practitioners. Focus groups were conducted with women and men from local Aboriginal communities (Silver 2007; McCracken 2004).
3. It is, therefore, something more powerful than mere self-administration, which is only specific delegated or “downloaded” authority, with no resources of power, dependent on colonial structures (Coates and Morrison 2008).
4. Even the RCAP stated that in the spirit of treaty federalism, Aboriginal people possess inherent rights to self-government and self-determination, as part of a nation-to-nation relationship (Turner 2006, 8). So, while Aboriginal self-determination entails the “right to take control of their destinies at political, economic, social, and cultural levels,” self-government is but the “political expression of this demand for control” and it will, therefore, vary in practice (Fleras and Elliott 1999, 441).
5. However, self-government can also be co-opted and used to legitimize dependent Aboriginal governance that maintains the privileges and interests of colonial powers (Alfred 2005).
6. It is important to note that self-government does not necessarily lead to self-determination (Gombay 2005).
7. Safety was also defined as safety from landlords; a number of women shared stories of being harassed or abused by the men who own or work in their buildings.
8. Most participants from the non-profit organizations that participated in this study spoke about how they must get by on project funding that is of a smaller amount, is short-term, has targeted guidelines, and often has strings attached, limiting what they can do.
9. Most, if not all, of the non-profit organizations highlighted the stress of having to apply for project funding every year and that core funding was so rare. One director of a non-profit estimated that the organization spends about a third of the year, and a third of its energy, applying for funding.
10. This contrasts with Edmonton where the majority of Aboriginal research participants were, to a degree, impressed with the current mayor’s long-time support and interest in improving Aboriginal relations.

References

- Abele, F., & Graham, K. (1989). High Politics Is Not Enough. In D. Hawkes (Ed.), *Defining the Responsibilities: Federal and Provincial Governments and Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.
- Aboriginal Visioning for the North End (AV). (2010). Website. <www.aboriginalvisioning.com/aboutus.htm> (accessed May 20, 2010).
- Alfred, T. (2005). *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Belanger, Y. (Ed.). (2008). *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- Bourdieu, P. (2005). *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- . 1998. *On Television and Journalism*. London: Pluto.
- . 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 1986. The Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cassidy, F. (1991). Self-determination, Sovereignty, and Self-government. In F. Cassidy (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-determination*. Halifax: Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2005). *An Exploration of Housing Options for Aboriginal People in Edmonton, Alberta, and Winnipeg, Manitoba*. Ottawa: CMHC.
- Chisholm, S. (2003). *Affordable Housing in Canada's Urban Communities*. Ottawa: CMHC.
- Cronin, C. (1996). Bourdieu and Foucault on Power and Modernity. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 22:6, 55–85.
- Coates, K., & Morrison, W. R. (2008). From Panacea to Reality: The Practicalities of Canadian Aboriginal Self-Government Agreements. In Y. Belanger (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- Cowie, I. (1987). *Future Areas of Jurisdiction and Coordination Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Governments*. Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations.
- Denetdale, J. N. (2006). Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses. The Navajo Nation, Gender, and the Politics of Tradition. *Wicazo Sa Review* 21(1), 9–28
- Falkenhagen, D. (2001). *The History of Canada's Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program*. Ottawa: CMHC.
- Falvo, N. (2007). Addressing Canada's Lack of Affordable Housing. Halifax: Canadian Economics Association Annual Meeting.
- Fernandez, C. (2003). Coming Full Circle: A Young Man's Perspective on Building Gender Equity in Aboriginal Communities. In K. Anderson (Ed.), *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival*. Toronto: Sumach Press.
- Fleras, A., & Elliott, J. (1999). *Unequal Relations*, 3rd ed. Scarborough: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon, Canada.
- Friesen, J., & Friesen, V. L. (2008). *Western Canadian Native Destiny*. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd.
- Gombay, N. (2000). The Politics of Culture: Gender Parity in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. *Inuit Studies* 24(10), 125–148.
- Government of Canada. (1995). *Aboriginal Self-Government: Federal Policy Guide*. Ottawa: INAC.
- Graham, J., Amos, B., & Plumtre, T. (2003). *Principles for Good Governance in the 21st Century*. Ottawa: Institute on Governance.
- Graham, K. (1999). Urban Aboriginal Governance in Canada: Paradigms and Prospects. In J. Hylton (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- Graham, K., & Peters, E. (2002). *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, Inc.
- Green, J. (2005). Self-Determination, Citizenship, and Federalism: Indigenous and Canadian Palimpsest. In M. Murphy (Ed.), *Canada: The State of the Federation 2003. Reconfiguring Aboriginal-State Relations*. Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Hanselmann, C. (2003). *Shared Responsibility: Final Report and Recommendations of the Urban Aboriginal Initiative*. Calgary: Canada West Foundation.
- . (2002). *Uncommon Sense: Promising Practices in Urban Aboriginal Policy-Making and Programming*. Calgary: Canada West Foundation.
- Homeward Trust Edmonton. (2008). A Count of Homeless Person's [sic] in Edmonton. <www.homewardtrust.ca/uploads/2008%20Final%20Homeless%20Count%20Report.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2010).
- . (2010). Website. <www.homewardtrust.ca> (accessed May 20, 2010).
- INAC. (2007). Canada's New Government Refocuses Urban Aboriginal Strategy to Promote Job Training and Entrepreneurship. Press release 2-2881. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- Jenkins, R. (1992). *Pierre Bourdieu*. London: Routledge.
- Kalpagam, U. (2006). Thinking the State with Bourdieu and Foucault. In R. Lardinois & M. Thapan (Eds.), *Reading Pierre Bourdieu in a Dual Context*. London: Routledge.

- Lawrence, B., & Anderson, K. (2005). Introduction to "Indigenous Women: The State of Our Nations." *Atlantis* 29.2.
- Maaka, R., & Fleras, A. (2008). Contesting Indigenous Peoples Governance: The Politics of State-Determination vs. Self-Determining Autonomy. In Y. Belanger (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association. (2008). Aboriginal Housing Plan. Winnipeg: The Institute of Urban Studies in collaboration with Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association.
- McCracken, M. (2004). Women Need Safe, Stable, Affordable Housing. Winnipeg: Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2007). Introduction and Writing Off Indigenous Sovereignty: The Discourse of Security and Patriarchal White Sovereignty. In A. Moreton-Robinson (Ed.), *Sovereign Subjects*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Morse, B. (2010). Developing Legal Frameworks for Urban Aboriginal Governance. In J. White & J. Bruhn (Eds.), *Aboriginal Policy Research: Exploring the Urban Landscape*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- . (2008). Regaining Recognition of the Inherent Right of Aboriginal Governance. In Y. Belanger (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- . (1999). The Inherent Right of Aboriginal Governance. In J. Hylton (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- Mountjoy, T. (1999). Municipal Government Perspectives on Aboriginal Self-Government. In J. Hylton (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.
- Newhouse, D. (2000). From the Tribal to the Modern: The Development of Modern Aboriginal Societies. In R. Laliberte et al. (Eds.), *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies*. Saskatoon: University Extension Press.
- Peters, E. (2007). First Nations and Metis People and Diversity in Canadian Cities. In K. Banting, T. Courchene, and L. Seidle (Eds.), *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*. Montreal: IRPP.
- . (2005). Geographies of Urban Aboriginal People in Canada: Implications for Urban Self-Government. In M. Murphy (Ed.), *Canada: The State of the Federation 2003. Reconfiguring Aboriginal-State Relations*. Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Sgro, J. (Chair). (2002). *Canada's Urban Strategy: A Vision for the 21st Century*. Final Report. Ottawa.
- Silver, J. (2007). *Unearthing Resistance: Aboriginal Women in the Lord Selkirk Park Housing Developments*. Ottawa: CCPA.
- Silver, J., with Hay, J., & Gorzen, P. (2004). *Aboriginal Involvement in Community Development: The Case of Winnipeg's Spence Neighbourhood*. Winnipeg: CCPA-MB.
- Smith, A. (2005). Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change. *Feminist Studies* 31:1.
- Tully, J. (2008). *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, D. (2006). *This Is Not a Peace Pipe*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS). (2010). Background. <www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014349> (accessed October 7, 2011).
- Walker, R. (2006). Searching for Aboriginal/Indigenous self-determination: urban citizenship in the Winnipeg low-cost-housing sector, Canada. *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 38, 2345–2363.
- . (2004). Urban Citizenship and Aboriginal Self-determination in the Winnipeg Low-cost Housing Sector. PhD dissertation. Kingston: Queen's University.
- Weinstein, J. (1986). *Self-Determination Off a Land Base*. Kingston: Queen's University Press.
- Wherrett, J. & Brown, D. (1995). Models for Aboriginal Governance in Urban Areas. In E. Peters (Ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Urban Areas*. Kingston, ON: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations.
- Wicihitowin. (2009). Annual Report to the Community.
- . (2009–10). Wicihitowin Plan 2009/2010.
- Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) website. <www.whhi.ca/about.htm> (accessed May 20, 2010).
- Wuttunee, W. (2004). *Living Rhythms*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.