

“Towards a Sustainable and Authentic Canadian Urbanism”

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Canada is a big country, a very big country. Its built environment is differentiated by vastly separated regions of unique geography, culture, climate, indigenous architectural styles, building materials and governance.

Our ability to learn from one another and to share best practices in community building has often been far easier through a north-south dialogue with our American neighbours, who are within a couple of hundred kilometers, than with our Canadian colleagues spread out across five time zones and 7,000 kilometres. As a result, we end up adapting planning and design solutions generated in the United States that may or may not fit our particular needs in the Canadian urban context.



While each region of Canada has its unique characteristics, it is also true that communities across the country share common approaches to the design and building of places. There is a unique Canadian protocol of how the planning and design process is managed, where growth should go, an understanding of inclusion, and what relationships and partnerships should exist between short- term private needs and longer term public needs. Despite geographical proximity, in many ways Canada has more in common with Australia than with the United States when it comes to managing growth and determining its final form and location.

The need to share information, to learn about exemplary urban design initiatives, and to understand the means and barriers determining what is built led a group of Canadian Planners and Designers to bring forward the idea of an emerging “Canadian Urbanism” and create a new organization called the Council of Canadian Urbanism (CCanU).

Canadian Urbanism

The concept of “Canadian Urbanism” came to be from a few key observations:

- Canada is increasingly an urban country.
- There is a distinct Canadian Urbanism, a shared approach and perspective to cities and city-building that has evolved over time within our Canadian constitutional, political, social and cultural history. Canadian cities and city-regions share challenges and opportunities unique to our Country. At the same time, Canadian Urbanism shares characteristics and challenges in common with progressive urbanist movements in other countries and global regions.
- Canada’s cities and city-regions face significant challenges and urgently require a more progressive, creative form of urbanism, to become more sustainable, livable, healthy, and resilient.

Council for Canadian Urbanism

The Council for Canadian Urbanism is a movement of Canadian city planners, urban designers, architects landscape architects, engineers, developers and other urbanists operating across Canada, in urban design leadership positions within city governments and the private or community sectors.

CCanU strives to connect urbanists across Canada and has actively promoted the inclusion of all regions with representation in both English and French, in the use of best practices and in sharing experience in the building of great communities.

Principles

CCanU believes in a few **Principles** for a sustainable and authentic Canadian Urbanism:

- **The 4 pillars of sustainability:** ecological, social, cultural and economic sustainability
- **A new Canadian urban model:** based on mixed-use, higher-density, complete, walkable neighbourhoods, supporting sustainable movement choices, with corresponding approaches and standards replacing the separated, low-density, car-oriented model of the past.
- **Regionalism, diversity and authentic sense of place**
- **Place Making**, with an emphasis on high quality physical city-shaping, urban.
- **Flexibility**, resilience and designing for change
- **Integration:** professional integration and silo-breaking
- **City leadership** and community **collaboration**

Objectives

CCanU has established a few **objectives** for its work:

- To **Advocate** for Canadian Urbanism and its core principles
- To **Educate** city-building professionals, political representatives, the public at large about the importance of CanU, of urban design, the sustainable

- To **Communicate** and partner with other professionals
- To **Lead** the movement towards a more sustainable future
- To **Promote Change** within our cities and professions

Activities

Established in 2006 at the Vancouver World Urban Forum and World Planners Congress, CCanU has successfully partnered with national and local professional organizations: Canadian Institute of Planners - CIP, Royal Architectural Institute of Canada - RAIC, Canadian Society of Landscape Architects – CSLA and the Canadian Urban Institute – CUI.

CCanU has initiated a series of presentations under the banner “**Canadian Urbanism from Coast to Coast**”. Presented by a national panel of CCanU members at various conferences and seminars in Canada and the U.S, the “Coast to Coast” was a means of showcasing not only best practices but also educating ourselves through sharing our experiences. Evolving from best practice examples of urbanism and urban design across the country, these presentations have raised the awareness of what we call “Canadian Urbanism” and started the debate around the key concepts and ideas that define it.

At the **CIP Conference in Quebec City** in 2007 the group organized a series of presentations expanding the Coast to Coast idea in more depth on a series of key issues in Canadian Urbanism – Big Cities issues, Urbanizing Suburbia, Urban design and Heritage, etc. (http://cip2007.cip-icu.ca/english/prog_schedule.html)

Recently, at the **Winnipeg CIP Conference** the group organized an entire “Celebrating Canadian Urbanism” (CCU) stream touching on a whole spectrum of issues ranging from sustainable and healthy development, City-region, Prairie and Big Cities urbanism to Case Studies and Urban Design Methods and Tools (http://www.cip-icu.ca/2008winnipeg/english/tracks/concurrentsessionstracks_ccu.htm)

Conclusions

Although initiated in 2006, until recently this initiative was seen as “a movement in search of an organization.” With a vision, experience and commitment, the soul searching of the group ended with a draft Charter (soon to be released) and the registration as a not-for profit organization.

Immediate plans include a revamped Web site and discussion group, a public event (perhaps a Symposium and discussion on the Canadian Urbanism theme) and of course the continuation of the successful collaboration with the professional organizations involved in urbanism.

With a broad and at the same time elusive idea of “a sustainable and authentic Canadian Urbanism” CCanU believes that more “candid dialogue and debate is required, but must lead to meaningful action”. It is up to all those involved in planning and

