COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

THE CHALLENGE OF PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH

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I

I have a complaint to voice concerning the appreciation and practice of public policy research in this country. Although my comments may initially appear to be nothing more than ill-tempered ramblings, I hope that it will become evident that they are expressions of legitimate con-cern over a whole set of issues having far-reaching consequences for both the university and the body politic.

Policy has to do with vital matters - life and death matters. It has to do with jobs and the price of wheat and oil, with opportunities for young people and the dignity or lack thereof of the old, and with the choking phlegm in the Baie Verte miner's lungs. It has to do with sorrow and celebration, with the forces that expand or constrict our life chances. And so, above all, whatever it is, policy is not a dull subject. I therefore feel some obligation in attempting to approach my theme in a somewhat systematic manner, not to beat the life out of it. But considering where I come from that may be difficult.

On the subject of policy research we have had an auspicious development in Canada: the formation a few years ago of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, with headquarters in Montreal. It is of some significance to note, and the reason will become more apparent as my comments unfold, that this institution has its origins in the dawn of Trudeau rationalism. It was first floated as an idea in the Throne Speech of September 12, 1968, and subsequently was brought into being with the helping financial hand of the federal government. Its gesta-tion was long and deliberate. It was not finally established until mid-summer 1974, and it is only now (after having established from both public and private sector sources an endowment fund of $11.5 million) beginning to give us the benefit of some of its initiatives [19, p. 12]. One of these is a publication called The Canadian Condition, A Guide to Research on Public Policy, by Professor Raymond Breton [5]. It is the latest, treatment of policy research (indeed, one of the few) which interprets the subject in conceptual terms, and as such serves very well as an initial basis for definition.

"The language of policy research is a language of influence." Its distinctive feature is that it originates in "the world of action" and its results are destined for the world of action. It is concerned with making an impact on the wielders of power and influence and through them, on policy decisions. In our society one such centre of power is

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political, another, private economic. Both, however, might be concerned with public policy. As Breton expreses it, "If we consider policies as public if they are policies affecting the state of society - its economy, the distribution of its production, the character of its cities, the utilization of resources and so on - then there are many 'public' policies which are in fact formulated by 'private organizations'." Public policy, then, is not synonymous with government policy. It is as much a concern of Northern Electric, the Royal Bank of Canada, and the Canadian Regional Science Association, as it is of the Province of New Brunswick and the City of Chicoutimi. Its subject is "societal governance", which encompasses "all institutional structures and processes" affecting the way society responds to its shaping forces, economic, technological, and social, and meets both individual and collective goals [5, pp. 5-7].

With these perspectives in mind, Breton constructs a typology of public policy research in terms of two dimensions: (a) the different forms that the language of influence may take, and (b) the different levels of institutional functioning. The first takes the form of indirect and direct expression, of monitoring conditions (What is happening to the best farmland around our cities?) and of intervention (If the rate of farmland depletion is too high, what should we do about it?).

The second dimension devolves into three operational levels: (1) instrumentalities: routinized laws, rules, procedures, administrative tools and techniques; (2) organization: the structures and processes of prevailing work units such as government departments or corporations; and (3) the system of ideas and values: the underlying perspectives on "man, nature, society and the purpose of human existence." The relationship of the two dimensions in matrix style - two forms of research language by three institutional levels - results in six types of policy research, ranging from background information at one end of the continuum to searching examination of cultural values, the questioning of prevailing wisdoms and the exploration of fundamental changes at the other. Simply stated, the progression is from "what?" and "how?" to "so what?", "why?" and "what next?" [5, pp. 11-13; 45-49].

II

Having cleared away some definitional underbrush, let me explore a thesis concerning the rise and then the decline and fall of policy research in one of Canada's more noteworthy institutional experiments, the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA). My reason for doing this is both objective and personal - objective because it is one of the few examples we have in Canadian government experience in which the conduct of research is part of an agency's primary mandate; and personal, because of my involvement in two of the formative years of the Ministry, 1972 to 1974, mainly as Director General, Research. Like other ex-participants, and we have become quite a numerous, notorious fraternity, I find myself the bearer of a double jeopardy. On the one hand, I am perceived by some as an unregenerate establishment figure. On the other hand, I suffer privately the reality of seeing concepts, which in other times I have espoused with some passion, going steadily down the drain.

Some very good work has been done by Peter Aucoin and Richard French (in a background study for the Science Council of Canada) on the Ministry of State instrument in the federal system. It is a concept grounded in the government philosophy of the early seventies. Whether as a long overdue corrective to the premeditated disorder of preceding regimes or for intrinsic reasons, the Trudeau government sought "to enshrine rational analysis and planning in place of the traditional interplay of traditional sources of power in Cabinet." The two ministries established at that time, one in Science and Technology and one in

Urban Affairs, were both seen as "administrative mechanisms which would increase flexibility and the Cabinet's capacity to make policy decisions. Ministers of State were to be agents of the rational pursuit of government goals and coordination of at least some of the policies and programs of departmental fiefdoms, although they were not to become massive bureaucracies themselves. Rather, their influence was to be brought to bear through the excellence of the information, analysis and policy developed by their staff" [1, pp. 13, 19, 24].

The order-in-council setting out the mandate of the MSUA, which took the from of a Proclamation to Parliament in June, 1971, appeared to fully express the predominant ethos of the times. The Ministry was to coordinate between federal agencies; at last the left hand of housing would be in touch with the right hand of transportation. It was to initiate policy proposals and evaluate both established federal policies affecting urban Canada and proposals for change. It was to foster "cooperative relationships in respect of urban affairs with the provinces, and, through them, their municipalities, and with the public and with private organizations." And, certainly not least, it was to initiate, conduct, coordinate and recommend research related to urbanization [9].

These seemingly unarguable and patently reasonable propositions were, in reality, a powder keg. On the one hand, to be effective the new agency had to become a fully accredited and accepted member of the federal "club", ingratiating itself with both central agencies like the Privy Council Office and Treasury Board, and with line departments with primary or subsidiary urban functions. And on the other hand, the MSUA was impelled to look outward, to build links to other government levels, to be sensitive to interest groups and voluntary forces, and generally to create a new and more constructive ambience for consultative policy development.

These two sides of the MSUA personality called for two distinctly different institutional styles. Membership in the federal fraternity demanded a high degree of circumspection and discipline in the service of the Minister's portfolio. It is a Kafkaesque world of cloistered conferences, little red urgent tabs and stickers, and injunctions to keep one's own counsel at the risk of no one quite knows what. The boat must not be rocked. By contrast, the outreach role implies an uncommon degree of openness and flexibility. Rapport with external constituencies depends on a judicious mix of give and take. Overall, this dual role of the MSUA represented an unprecedented challenge, and the ability to meet this challenge became the touchstone of its effectiveness.

III

This perspective of the Urban Affairs Ministry forms an essential background to understanding the initial research strategy that I had a hand in formulating in the early seventies. An opportunity for placing this on the record was provided at the end of April 1973 at the annual meeting of the Canadian Council on Urban and Regional Research (CCURR). It was a thirty-page paper, but its essential message can be summarized in relatively few sentences. What I said on that occasion was, let the Ministry, with its extraordinary mandate and relatively ample financial resources, become the base for formulating and initiating a broad research program that would be of interest to the major actors in the Canadian urban process [16].

That program would be flexible - "the research system must be able to respond to the maturing policy process" - but we had to start somewhere, and we would start with the issues that had the widest currency; for example, the worry about financing the costs of urbaniza-

tion which had already surfaced at the first national tri-level conference, held in Toronto in November 1972. In structuring a program around issues we would build on two of the main findings of the Andras-Lithwick <u>Urban Canada</u> studies; namely, the interdependence of problem areas, such as poverty, housing shortages, and escalating land costs, and the centrality of the urban system as a fact of life and a conceptual framework.

These ideas were translated conceptionally and organizationally into ten themes (such as urban growth, the inner city and urban public economy), which became the basic building blocks of the research function. The concern in each would be both with diagnosis (the what? and why? of problems) and with strategies (resource and institutional mobilization to overcome problems).

The theme statements would be instrumentally important, as they would be a kind of charter, representing, on the one hand, the commitment of the Ministry to certain lines of policy investigation, and on the other hand, a firm basis for engaging the interests and talents of the users and doers of research throughout the country.[1] A substantial part of the research was to be conducted externally by people in universities, institutes, provincial and municipal agencies, and other competent groups. The specific projects would be formulated on the basis of dialogue and negotiation. And the Ministry would undertake to ensure that output was published and made generally available. It would be an "open research program".

In addition to its own efforts, the MSUA would give financial support to autonomous research agencies like the Canadian Council on Urban and Regional Research, which would continue to have a uniform role in the conduct of independent research, "critical and hard-hitting", with a strong evaluative slant.

I have attempted a synoptic view of the baseline research program of Urban Affairs, because I wish to establish the link between the research function and what I have called the "touchstone" of the Ministry's mission: the capacity to turn inwards to the federal system and outwards at the same time. The inference I draw is that a research program embodying the foregoing principles could go a long way towards serving both "gods". While steadily building the capability to meet the in-house coordination and policy development needs, the research program, in the way it would be both reported and used, would contribute substantially to creating the sought-for consultative climate. Everyone concerned would have a "piece of the action". And whenever the participants in the consultative process would assemble around a table to explore problems or strategies, they would appeal to a common information base, drawn from investigations across the country, and would share the benefits of enhanced insight on basic issues. This is not to say that harmony would prevail. There would, of course, be controversies and conflicts, but those based on differences in research capability and access to information would be minimized, although never eliminated.[2]

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[1]The concept took the form of a publication concisely spelling out the scope and approach of each research theme. By midsummer 1974 work was well advanced on the preparation of all of the theme statements, but only three (urban public economy, inner city, and urban government systems) were authorized for printing and publication. The latter subsequently received only limited distribution.

[2]In his four country comparison - Great Britain, Sweden, Australia and Canada - Bourne [4] has identified "public policy research" as one of the preconditions for policy effectiveness.

Much of the research program was, at the time of my declaration, under way and gaining momentum, but it was not to be sustained. The story does not have a happy ending. The reasons for this will now be examined.

IV

Consider the following as an hypothesis, grounded in experience and disciplined observation, but not yet substantiated. The decline and fall of policy research in the MSUA, between 1971 and the present, has been due to a set of four interrelated forces: (1) the limited support from external constituencies interested in urban and regional research; (2) the internal conflict and confusion about the research role and mission; (3) the reluctance of the Canadian academic establishment to understand and meet the challenge of policy studies on Canadian urban issues; and (4) certain endemic frailties in political leadership. Let me explain each of these.

For me, the first omen of malaise among Canada's non-federal government and non-government groups concerned with urban research was the response to my exposition of the Ministry program at the aforementioned meeting of CCURR in April 1973. People with whom I, as a founding member of the organization, had been long associated, got up and expressed alarm that the ambitious program I had presented - I believe one man used the word "monopoly" - would spell the demise of an autonomous agency like CCURR. There was virtually no response among the assembled academics, administrators and community activitists to the questions raised about the proper aims, themes and uses of policy research. Only one person, as I recall, spoke positively - the first Chairman of the Council, the Montreal architect and planner, Peter Dobush.

He welcomed the Ministry research initiative as a fulfilment of one of the Council's primary goals, namely to foster a better knowledge base for urban and regional policy. And in his remarks on this he demonstrated, in my view, a profound understanding of the dynamics of government and non-government relationships in research. The static concept of the budget as a pie of fixed size - the more <u>you</u> have the less is left for <u>me</u> - is not appropriate. The relationship is, in fact, just the opposite: the stronger the research function in government the greater will be its support outside government. This occurred in the case of Urban Affairs. From 1972 to 1974, when the research program was in full swing, funding for CCURR increased substantially; with the waning of the internal emphasis on research, the fortunes of CCURR fell on evil days. And recently we have had an all too lugubrious demonstration of this connection in general Research and Development trends. The severe pinch currently felt in the funding of all kinds of independent research has been accompanied by an overall decline in federal research and development expenditures from a level of 5 per cent of federal expenditures in 1968-69 to 2.4 per cent in 1975-76 [20, p. 8].

I would suggest that the underlying process governing the fate of research in this country, an amalgam of intellectual, institutional and political forces, is a symbiotic rather than a competitive one. In the case of research in urban affairs a mutually supportive relationship between the major components never took hold, and the entire enterprise, in and out of government, suffered.

V

This difficulty in a crucial external relationship was matched by certain internal stresses. Commenting on the Urban Canada writings of Harvey Lithwick, the first Assistant Secretary for policy and research in the Urban Affairs Ministry, David Bettison [2, p. 253] emphasizes Lithwick's commitment to a rationalist concept of policy-making. He states:

> Dr. Lithwick envisages the necessity of obtaining a clear notion 'of society's objectives' if the public sector is to perform its task effectively. This unattainable consensus enables him to conceive the possibility of the rational allocation of resources, of devising appropriate means to ends, and of reducing costs to the public good. Men's decisions could then be guided by objectively acquired evidence, the intrusive elements of politics be pushed aside, and the careful calculation of repercussions and effects be made before the decision was taken. This is the utopian condition of perfect knowledge . . . . It is blatantly unrealistic.

While this characterization of Lithwick's influence is to a degree a caricature and in no way meant to detract from the man's impeccable scholarship, it does provide a clue to a disturbing legacy. By the time of Lithwick's precipitous departure from the Ministry in the first year of its life, the new organization was staffed by a legion of fellow-believers, and, as sometimes occurs, the disciples are more dogmatic and rigid than their master.

In any case, from the very beginning the seeds for serious internal disagreement were sown, and this was to prove costly. What was and is at issue is the concept and role of policy research and how it should be conducted in a political setting like the MSUA. The divergence of perspective is wide. One view, expressing traditional academic biases, is unswervingly devoted to what Bonneau and Corry have called "frontier research" [3, p. 30]. Its trademarks are the search for new knowledge, new primary data, empirical observation, analysis, and the esoteric monograph. It tends towards a disciplinary bias and a non-rigorous time-frame.

Another view of the research mission is the fire-fighting approach, sometimes perversely referred to by its practitioners as "quick and dirty". It grabs information wherever it can find it to respond to the problems that explode on the minister's desk. Because the realities of the front line are its preoccupation, it is almost wholly addressed to the first level of Breton's typology, to instrumentalities: how to solve problems with the tools we now have. This activity, proceeding from deadline to deadline, is conducted in an atmosphere of permanent crisis. And its results must be capable of being condensed in a two-page executive summary, expressed in clear, terse governmentese.

It should be quite apparent that these two variants of research are not compatible bedfellows. The potential for mutual antagonism is profound. The Lithwick influence in the MSUA was not wholly in, but leaned strongly towards, frontier research, with the important qualification that its centrepiece was the "program impact predictor" - large-scale, empirically adjusted models of the Canadian urban system and its parts, designed to predict the consequences of government programs and in so doing illuminate decision-making. This did not help the reconciliation of the disturbed humours very significantly, because the model-building process is complex, even mysterious, and yields results slowly. Five years is not considered an unreasonable time for attaining a fully operational model of this gradiose type. In the MSUA context

this only served to accentuate the different mind spaces and tempos of the policy researcher and the policymaker.[3]

There is another perspective on research, which in my view represents a valid stance for the policy researcher, and that is research as a critical "language of influence". Since I have defined this in the first part of this paper, I will not dwell on its features, except to stress that such research if it is to be useful must fill in much of Breton's third ground: the challenging of existing ideas and values, of the assumptions underlying prevailing policies and institutions. This is the route to creative policy development. For an illustration of the potentials of this approach, I refer you to the MSUA work on the "inner city" [21] which in its thrust towards linking diagnosis and strategies reflects what was being attempted post-Lithwick.

VI

This brings me to the third set of influences shaping the course of Urban Affairs research: namely, the response of university scholars. With a few conspicuous exceptions, the academic person saw the facilities and funding of the MSUA as merely an opportunity to do his own thing, and most often that was following the time-honored paths of frontier research. If the test of the policy researcher is the ability to synthesize pertinent knowledge from a variety of discipline and experience streams; to apply that knowledge to a diagnosis of conditions and issues; and to express the results, including the action or implications in clear and vigorous language, then the MSUA-funded program produced very few examples of policy research.

I am not going to indulge in the invidious business of giving you a litany of horrible examples. I rest my case on circumstantial evidence. In response to a lunch-time wager with the then Secretary of the Urban Affairs Ministry, Jim MacNeill, I ended up writing a book [17], with my colleague Ron Crowley, which had as one of its explicit aims the demonstration of the vocabulary of policy research. In the process we reviewed the entire corpus of Ministry-sponsored work up to the end of 1976 and faced in full measure the problem of crossing the Rubicon (from theory to policy).

The matter at issue has been clarified by Amitai Etzioni [14]. "Policy researchers", he writes, "have tried to move too directly from highly analytical social science theories to policy recommendations. The necessary intermediary discipline which records and evaluates the actual programs and options available is developing very slowly - thus this is a major area on which policy research as a discipline must focus now." These strictures fit the Canadian "case". Policy as a distinct species of investigation does not have deep roots in our academic soil.[4] And

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[3]On this aspect of MSUA activities, my former colleague, Ron Crowley, provides some important insight: "I wonder to what extent that once in place the model building activity didn't take on a life of its own. There are many examples of models which took considerably less time than MUPIM (Macro Urban Program Impact Model) to develop and there are few examples where so little time was spent on developing 'external constituencies', that is, either other government departments or academics'" [13].

[4]For example, in an otherwise perceptive paper [18], Leslie J. King, Dean, School of Graduate Studies, McMaster University, presents the choice of research modes in terms of two sharply contrasting categories: "independent research", the scientifically-based prerogative of the university investigator, and "mission-oriented research", which provides answers "to the short-run problems and questions facing the policy maker." There is no acknowledgement in this of Etzioni's "intermediary discipline".

because that was so abundantly clear in the product that flowed back from the campuses to the Ministry, it served only to deepen the two solitudes of professor and politician. From the point of view of the man in Parliament, the professor roared like a lion and produced a mouse.

VII

So enter the politician. Ever since Harold Laski's now classical studies of relationships between cabinet and public service in the British parliamentary system, the erosion of political power by bureaucratic power has been part of the conventional wisdom. In the case of Urban Affairs, however, it is not a helpful assumption. The reality of political power in Ottawa has been put very neatly by Richard French [15], formerly of the Machinery of Government Directorate, Privy Council Office. In a commentary at the 1976 Annual Conference of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, he said:

> From the bureaucrat's perspective, we should note explicitly that officials from different departments or agencies contend in policy debate with very little more than the leverage they can exercise by delegation from their Minister and their own intellect, credibility and experience. The sources of ministerial power - including capacity, ideological compatibility, regional influence, prestige of portfolio - are obviously diverse. The amount and nature of that power is the most important given in a discussion of policy coordination. If multidepartmental policy formulation is a poker game, the cards dealt the various players represent the nature of the problem as it relates to the formal responsibilities of the department, while the chips in various players' hands represent the clout of their minister. Any good poker player can beat a superior hand when he starts out with enough chips. Given the choice among the apparent merits, the formal mandate or the committed minister, I'll take the minister every time.

With this perspective in mind (which happens to confirm my own experience), it may not be extravagant to assume that the fate of the MSUA is, in a significant way, an expression of the political leadership that has been exercised. Accordingly, an appreciation of the precise character of the political challenge is important. The Science Council study on ministries of state has stressed one dimension; the proposals of such ministries "must exhibit a degree of policy expertise that is not at the disposal of the collective Cabinet's principal staff agencies or those of individual departmental ministers. To achieve this, a ministry of state must place priority on the orchestration of its research, intelligence gathering, and policy development functions" [1, p. 30]. And it should be added that, in the case of Urban Affairs, this emphasis must be pursued, for reasons already suggested, with sensitivity to requirements both within and outside the federal administration.

In appraising the performance of the Minister's Office (this term is used advisedly; there have been four ministers so far) against these criteria, it is important to bear in mind certain prime features of his political/administrative environment. One is the criticalness of his relationship to the Prime Minister and the major central agencies, the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board. This is because, to an advisor having the equivalent of a staff position in the Cabinet, these are the two principal sources of ministerial power, at least until the prescribed unfolding of his mandate provides time to transform policy Wisdom into some kind of Authority. What this means operationally is that a ministry of state needs from central agencies three kinds of reinforcement: (1) agreement on mutually determined objectives; (2) system intelligence about policies and programs, priorities and budget allocations that may

affect the particular policy field; and (3) "strong and continuing support in dealing with line departments." Those are the requirements. The performance, according to Aucoin and French, reporting in 1974, was something else: "Having created the two ministries of state with broad and open-ended mandates, the central agencies proceeded to treat them much as if they were departments with a history and resources comparable to the typical line department." And this, it is further asserted, could have dire consequences: "organization which may never recover from the trauma of rapid staffing, unending struggles over budgets, organization and job classifications, and a cruel disheartening initiation into the policy process" [1, pp. 26, 44].

In the case of the Urban Affairs Minister, this constraint was not as serious in its consequences as it must have been for his counterpart in science and technology, because the hand dealt the Minister included an important card: responsibility for two Crown corporations, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and the National Capital Commission. This offered some potential for the Minister to wield some of the traditional sources of influence, the clout arising from spending power, particularly far-reaching in the case of the facilities of the National Housing Act, and the sustaining of a reasonably high political profile. And there was the further possibility that such program responsibilities would open doors in other Ministries to the information and intelligence-acquisition essential for credible policy advice.

In addition to these major factors in ministerial effectiveness there were other considerations which affected personal influence with the Prime Minister, such as the Minister's regional political base (e.g., British Columbia or Quebec), status within the political party, rapport with ethnic groups, and so on [1, pp. 27-28].

While the Minister's dual role appeared to enhance his capacity to meet his challenging mandate, the record from the point of view of the research function which was so central to that mandate may be characterized by a slogan not unknown in the halls of Ottawa: "the urgent drives out the important". I will illustrate at the conclusion of this paper the steady march towards the erosion and trivializing of policy research in the MSUA. For the moment I wish to make some general observations concerning the role of political leadership in an urban policy Ministry. What seems clear is that something more is required than the acting out of the conventional political script: be seen as an actor and doer, keep in the limelight at all costs, but keep out of trouble. What is required is that the Minister use his leverage to become a forceful advocate of an innovative mission which has as its central purpose the transformation in the urban policy field of the decision-making environment itself - admittedly a difficult tightrope to walk. My complaint is not that the office in question has not succeeded, but that it does not appear to have earnestly tried.

Such public symptoms of ministerial attitude as we have are not encouraging. The reading of Hansard shows little attempt to use that forum for the edification of the Members, the media and the public on the new maverick Ministry. An opportunity was provided, for example, in early May 1975, when Mr. Gilbert (NDP-Broadview) asked Mr. Danson (in the Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs) whether the Ministry had been involved in the evaluation of NIP and had yielded the evaluation of the Neighbourhood Improvement Program to CMHC. Mr. Danson replied, "I am not familiar with that nor are any of my officials", notwithstanding that there was in the public domain a MSUA call for proposals on methods for the evaluation of the NIP, in June 1973, and that eight contracts were in fact awarded [12, p. 15]. And those artifacts were, of course, just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Another disquieting symptom was the handling of the Canadian Urban Demonstration Program. In March 1974, midst the anticipatory glow of the U.N. Habitat Conference, the Honourable Ron Basford an-

nounced a $100,000,000 fund to encourage innovative projects related to fundamental problems of urban development and environment, including energy use, natural resources conservation, new technology, and financial and institutional aspects of community building. His presentation to Parliament did not score high as an elucidation of the research role of his Ministry. He said, "We have been researched to death in this country. Our urban problems call for action and not for further research" [10, p. 869]. Nevertheless, this was an interesting program because it appeared to be a bold attempt to bridge the gap between the study and action components of the Urban Affairs Ministry, and it involved in its execution the cooperation of several federal departments. Transport and Environment, for example, were involved functionally and financially in the first fourteen projects, which were approved on April 15, 1975. Three months later, however, the Minister cancelled the entire program in the interest of spending restraint [6]. In the light of what has since transpired, and in spite of the pyrotechnics of Habitat Vancouver, the collapse of the Urban Demonstration Program was a symbolic dénoument.

VIII

Other significant influences on the course of MSUA may be identified: the impact of the tri-level process, the ambiguous and sometimes fractious role of CMHC, the styles of the various Secretaries and the limitations of senior personnel, including "your humble servant". But consideration of these will have to wait for another occasion. Let me conclude by very briefly reviewing the devolutionary path of the research function. In this I am aided by the graduate research of Angus Schaffenburg [22] at Waterloo, in which he usefully identifies and gives the highlights of four phases in MSUA research experience.

During the first phase, from June 1971 to Spring 1973, the Research Branch grew to a strength of fifty researchers but did not yet exhibit much direction in its program. Of the eight larger external research contracts (with value about $20,000 or over) two were concerned with the development of models. By far the largest investment was in IIPS, the inter-institutional policy simulator, a project conducted at the University of British Columbia (and also funded by the Ford Foundation) in cooperation with city, regional and provincial agencies. In those early days, project proposals were evaluated on individual merits alone, until "guidelines for external research" were published towards the end of this period, a few months after the appointment of the first Director General, Research.[5]

In Phase 2, from Spring 1973 to Fall 1974, the research program was focused on ten themes. Of the fourteen larger external research contracts signed, twelve were within the theme framework, with the subjects of inner city, urban environmental quality, public economy, and urban growth (made up of quite numerous small projects) predominating. The grouping of projects was more than fortuitous. For example, neighbourhood was the unifying concept for inner city studies: neighbourhood crowding, a study of perceived neighbourhoods in Montreal, and the evaluation projects of NIP. The two projects on the urban economy included first a monitoring study of existing municipal financial conditions and then a group of studies on ways and means

[5]This was made possible by the emergence at the end of this period of a recognized need to give more structure to the Ministry's research effort and to involve "external performers". For an appreciation of the level of conceptualization attained at the end of the first phase, see [7; 22].

of financing urban expansion. The studies on urban growth explored various aspects of the Canadian urban pattern, with attention to demographic, technological and economic forces, and so on.[6]

During the next period, Fall 1974 to April 1976, the Ministry felt the reverberations of a reorganization. The present Secretary, William Teron, was appointed in October 1975 (first on an acting basis), and presided over a previously initiated merger of policy and research functions into a single Policy and Research Branch. The ten research themes, in a somewhat truncated form, were compressed into five directorates. There was a considerable increase in the number of external research contracts, and a decidedly new trend was in evidence.[7] Of some thirty-four listed contracts of all sizes, fifteen reflected the ripening and unfolding of theme programs, four were of the navel-gazing type related to internal planning and reorganization; and another fifteen were a motley collection of unrelated items, most of them very specific and immediate in their implications. The titles included, for example: alternative uses of the Toronto Island Airport site; the development potential of certain properties in Quebec City; a cybernetic analysis of horizontal relationships in Canada; study of the abandoned Welland Canal, and so on. It was during this third phase that the Ministry withdrew financial support for CCURR, effective March 31, 1975, but buffered with a phasing-out grant.[8]

The fourth and last phase, which brings us close to the present, was marked by another reorganization, in which the term "research" was dropped from the nomenclature of the Ministry and the Urban Policy Analysis Section became the inheritor, after a fashion, of both the policy and research functions. There are eight directorates within the Section (one actually lodged in CMHC) with suitably generic terms of reference. The buzz words describing these arrangements are "urban objectives, standards and criteria" for improving the urban environment, and "urban expertise" applied to the urban-related functions of federal line departments. According to the story in the Ministry's house organ, Urbanité, the Ministry now sees itself in the intergovernmental sphere as a "broker" advancing the cause throughout the country of sound standards and planning. As far as research is concerned, it is not possible to discern a coherent pattern from a mixed bag of ten external contracts arranged during the first year or so of

[6]The Ministry's stance at the end of this period is summarized in [8].

[7]This perception of a new trend reflects, in part, a management decision to incorporate Coordination Wing projects in the Project Management System, but the overall diffuseness of the list remains [13].

[8]The seriousness of this step and its unfavourable consequences can be inferred from Leslie King's apt statement of one of CCURR's functions: "It is by no means clear, however, that mission-oriented research alone can generate the required answers for many of the so-called 'urban problems' facing our society. The wisdom and insights of many different types of urban specialists will be required in this context - those of the visionaries as well as the social science analysts, of the architect and humanist as well as the economist and engineer, of the local politican and neighbourhood organizer as well as the ivory-tower academician. What are desperately needed are the funds to support not only research by these different experts but perhaps more importantly, the channels of communication between them. This was one of the major roles that CCURR fulfilled, that of a mechanism for facilitating the exchange of views and information between the different groups of urban experts" [18, pp. 18-19].

the period. Topics included urban objectives, the journey to work, a manual on urban open space, district heating, nature and man, an urban index, and Canadian resource communities.

While I do not have the information to assess the currently advertised role of the MSUA, one thing is clear: the policy research function of the Ministry, which is central to its mandate, has been greatly diminished, if it exists at all. There is an irresistible presumption in the events of the past eight years that Trudeau rationalism, in so far as the urban policy field is concerned, has gone full circle, and we are back to politics as usual.

I have asked myself "what are the four or five most important questions concerning the experience I have interpreted?", and I have arrived at these:

1. Was the response of the academic and professional establishment to the urban research opportunity peculiar to a certain time and stage of development? or is the attachment to frontier research a chronic condition? An idée fixe from which there is no escape?

2. If one of the structural requirements of policy research is that it be accessible to decision-makers, can the policy research process retain sufficient independence to assure the integrity of its results?

3. What are the consequences in terms of this country's broad social development of the apparent alienation in critical policy fields between the professor and the politician? and, finally

4. Should regional scientists be concerned with the present status of policy research in Urban Affairs? Should we do something about it?

I eagerly await your response.

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