Nothing is more helpless than a city street alone, when its problems exceed its powers.
– Jane Jacobs, from The Death and Life of Great American Cities

9. Beyond Silos and Stovepipes: Community Vitality and Governance
In this, our final chapter, we’ll be exploring the connection between governance and community vitality. Critical thinkers have, as of lately, begun to acknowledge the need for new relationships between citizens and governments. Diana Mitlin defines governance as “the institutions and processes, both formal and informal, which provide for the interaction of the state with a range of other agents or stakeholders affected by the activities of government”. This broadens the concept of government to include a larger set of institutions and organizations that influence the processes of government, as well as what are known as institutional intermediaries.

Participatory governance emphasizes the need for the inclusion of diverse groups of people to participate in decision-making, especially marginalized groups and ethnic minorities, and “emphasizes the need to introduce mechanisms to encourage the involvement of those who do not find it easy to participate in state structures and processes because they are generally far removed from their own cultures and practices.” Voting turnout for municipal elections in Canada has generally shown to be less than 50%, a trend that reveals that an election victory does not necessarily represent the greater vision or decision of the population. New relationships between citizens and government need to be explored, along with new models for engaging experts, organizations and citizens in policy-making and expanded decision-making processes.

Let’s begin with the question of public engagement. Increasingly, global dialogue is identifying the need for new approaches that encourage and support two-way interactions between decision-makers and the broader public, in order to shape healthier and stronger policies and to close the “implementation gap.” Implementation gaps occur because modern-day issues tend to extend beyond any one level of government, any one sector or discipline, and thus demand unprecedented levels of co-operation and collaboration.

“[C]omplex decision making processes require a more informed citizenry that has weighed the evidence on the issue, discussed and debated potential decision options and arrived at a mutually agreed upon decision or at least one by which all parties can abide”. Involving citizens in deliberation and dialogue is fundamental to implementing policies that meet the needs of diverse communities. And effective public participation can not only transform and improve governance models but also strengthen existing social capital. One key challenge is to ensure that a diverse representation of citizens are informed and involved so that a wide range of perspectives are on the table. This not only helps to bridge ‘silos’ and ‘stovepipes’ but also introduces options that might not have been considered previously. In his
paper *Place-based Public Policy*, Neil Bradford quotes one Canadian citizen living in poverty in urban Canada who was asked to participate in a public policy dialogue: “we, the people in poverty, have a role to play, as we are the experts of being there, what is keeping us there and how to keep our children and their children out of there”.\textsuperscript{285}

The urban landscape is currently facing major sustainability and public policy issues including growing income inequality, climate change and environmental degradation, ageing infrastructure, insufficient affordable housing, and traffic congestion to name but a few. Many of today’s current policies reveal what planners call “wicked problems,” problems that “cross departmental boundaries and resist the solutions that are readily available through the action of one agency”.\textsuperscript{286} Such problems “represent large coordination failures in terms of channeling the appropriate resources to the right target. They cannot be solved through off the shelf solutions”.\textsuperscript{287} Special arrangements are necessary to ensure the following: that all key actors sit around the same table to articulate a clear vision for their community, that outcomes-based strategies and plans are set forth to implement the vision, that a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of each actor have been laid out, that a robust accountability and reporting arrangement is put in place to monitor progress, and that citizens are kept engaged throughout.\textsuperscript{288}

**The theme running through** all of this is collaboration. The business-as-usual practice of governments working within departmental silos and rigid hierarchies isn’t sufficient to solve wicked problems and it doesn’t particularly support community vitality.\textsuperscript{289} We have reached a critical time, when “many of society’s greatest challenges – from achieving ecological balance to creating meaningful employment for all citizens – equally demand new thinking, organizational creativity, and institutional adaptation.”\textsuperscript{290} Different forms of knowledge are needed, including tacit knowledge, and specifically local knowledge. Local knowledge involves on-the-ground knowledge of communities, statistical data tracking trends in a community (health and poverty concentrations, for example), and tapping into this is essential for implementing social change in a meaningful way. Governments need to excel in gathering all of these (the lived experience, the technical mapping and action-based research) if they hope to embark on truly informed policy-making.\textsuperscript{291}

David Wolfe suggests that effective policy development not only requires collaboration and coordination, but also needs to involve more decentralized, open and consultative forms of governing. “This emphasis on the role of governance, as
opposed to government, stems from the recognition that policy outcomes depend on the interaction among a wide range of social and economic actors, including provincial or state and local governments, the private sector, voluntary, business and not-for-profit organizations”. Local initiatives across the globe are beginning to integrate collaborative strategies to nurture a dialogue between government and citizens.

The City of Vancouver’s Think City project is one example. A non-profit, non-partisan organization created in 2002, Think City involves citizens in an ongoing dialogue on the challenges Vancouver is currently facing and provides a platform to discuss practical solutions through forums, conferences, deliberative surveys and online discussions. Another approach, Talk Vancouver is a website, also created by the city, to encourage citizens to discuss key municipal issues including the municipal budget, the capital plan, transportation and housing. And finally, Vancouver’s Open Data, Open Standards and Open Source is a website that provides citizens information in an accessible, free and downloadable format. The site also has developed a feedback mechanism for citizens to request the data they would like to be able to access, helping to ensure overall transparency and dialogue.

Other cities are following suit. In 2005, the City of Edmonton created an office of public involvement to build internal capacity to conduct on-going public involvement. And Quebec City has created neighbourhood councils in response to development projects that were seen as corrupt. There are twelve councils, each covering a geographical area of between 9,000 and 15,000 residents. Each council receives a small amount of funding ($2,000–5,000) from the city, and is legally obligated to deliver annual financial reports. Their primary purpose is to provide input and opinion on City Hall proposals and to organize community projects.

**Part of the transition to new forms** of governance is expanding the base of decision-makers to allow for ongoing discussion – essentially expanding what we define as government and governance. This requires a move from traditional consultation to dialogues, where governments are mandated to educate people as well as solicit feedback on existing and new government policies and programs. Fundamental to expanded decision-making contexts are principles of openness, transparency, inclusivity and a commitment to diverse forums for public participation, both face-to-face and virtual. This doesn’t just happen because we want it to. It requires active planning and strategic identification of the stakeholders needed, both to diffuse knowledge and to provide leadership for the implementation process.
How do we get to a place of coherent policy when overlapping mandates, duplication and competing jurisdictions further exacerbate gridlock and implementation gaps? In British Columbia, for example, the Fraser River is “protected” by no less than sixty-two different government agencies. As well, policies, codes, and standards vary enormously across and between governments, and often are simply inconsistent, meaning that initiatives at the community level are stymied by a lack of policy alignment between regional, provincial, or even national levels. All too often planning is disconnected from actual implementation and is undertaken without regard for wider consequences and impacts. Cross-cutting issues such as sustainable development require policy integration, along with more amicable relationships between government and non-government institutions, and the creation of longer-term planning horizons.

None of this will happen without innovation, specifically social innovation, to address today’s challenges and support community vitality. Social innovation, which is inherently collaborative, depends on engaging a diversity of people with a wide range of expertise and experiences. Social learning is an integral component of community vitality, and cities can be rich hubs of social innovation due to their density, diversity, potential for social interactions and institutional capacity. Social networks and human interactions make for social learning and stimulate innovation, and social capital is what spreads new innovations and allows them to find traction in a community.

Artistic practice in particular can inspire dialogue and can help shape or reinvent a city’s sense of place. In The Creative City, Charles Landry discusses the concept of culture and how it can be used to explore the social, economic and environmental aspects of urban regeneration. Each city is unique and cultivates its own creative and cultural language that gives it its heritage and identity that should be used as a foundation to rethinking the future of that city.

Although they are undoubtedly critical hubs, cities tend to contain polarized and segregated islands within them, and not all residents have equal access to the same resources for innovation. We must explore new ways of fostering social capital in less connected, more vulnerable neighbourhoods. Limited and/or homophilic social capital alongside inadequate service provision increases the stress and constraints on individuals living in difficult circumstances. Furthermore, children who grow up in such neighbourhoods are at risk of continuing to live in poverty as adults.
Urban problems, especially those related to climate change and sustainability, require particular attention. Returning to Bradford’s paper, “knowledge-based innovation is the critical ingredient for prosperity and well-being in the 21st century, and it seems to thrive in local places that value diversity, encourage the flow of new ideas, and include all residents in the economic, social, and political life of the community”. Across Canada and the world, we are seeing creative hubs being developed, such as the Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto, that bring together unusual mixes of people in one space to try to achieve large-scale transformations.

Participatory governance is an excellent model on which to build community vitality, as it places a particular emphasis on the inclusion of people. A strategic way to create more democratic cities that truly involving citizens and support community-building is through participatory budgeting. First tested in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, this strategy has emerged as a successful way to involve city residents in deciding how to allocate a portion of the public budget at the municipal level of government. Over the past two decades since, hundreds of cities in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America have been exploring this model. In 1999 Guelph, Ontario, launched one of the first participatory budget processes in North America. The process begins with community residents identifying local needs and generating ideas to address these. Delegates are then elected to represent each neighbourhood and to discuss local priorities and develop projects. Residents then vote or negotiate which projects to allocate resources to in order to finalize the budget. Once the projects are implemented, residents monitor them. The entire process is rooted in democracy, equity, access, community participation, fairness, education and transparency – tenets shared with other participatory processes.

Community land trusts (CLTs), insofar as they engage people in creating their own sense of belonging and place, represent another transformative governance model relevant to our discussion of community vitality. There are many different types of community land trusts, each with different legal models, but their common purpose is to provide affordable housing and access to land controlled by the community. They complement mainstream affordable housing through the creation of housing associations and can secure vital assets including local shops, community halls and open spaces. There is a need right now for agencies at the local level to transform urban management and offer practical solutions for affordable housing and sustainable communities, and “CLTs have the potential to play a major role in managing urban change and connecting the process of physical change with the achievement of wellbeing outcomes in particular places, through the engagement of communities in the process, in individual and collective behavior change, and retaining the intrinsic value of their assets for reinvestment in that place”.
New models of governance are essential in order to address today’s fundamental social, economic and environmental problems. Over the last fifteen years, a prominent shift has been taking place among Western democracies towards more horizontal forms of governance. Citizens want a better understanding of and control over decisions that affect them, their families and the overall well-being and vitality of their communities. In the face of problems like poverty and climate change, governments need to reinvent decision-making processes. ‘Wicked problems’ require a spectrum of ideas and thoughtful collaboration. As Gabriel Sékaly, CEO of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, states “what is required is a new and open ethos that combines public input and expertise”. In order to achieve the level of public engagement and social innovation that coincide with truly vital communities we need more collaborative governance models that make room for dialogue, expand to include a greater diversity of stakeholders and work to achieve policy alignment. Silos and stovepipes will not get us there.