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Coordinating Multiple Plans: What Canadian cities are doing

Summer Research Report
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August 2013

Background

In this report I discuss the first stages of a multi-year project which seeks to understand how planners in Canada are coordinating the growing number of plans that cities have been adopting. Led by Jill Grant at Dalhousie University, a team including Ahsan Habib, Patricia Manuel, and Eric Rapaport from Dalhousie, and Pierre Filion from University of Waterloo, received a three-year grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to identify the strategies Canadian communities are using to ensure that they coordinate policies and plans. I was employed as the summer research assistant in summer 2013 to initiate project activities.

The research proposal:

> **Coordinating land use planning in the context of multiple plans**
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> Canadian communities have developed myriad plans and policies that affect the use and development of land. Official or community plans set the long-term vision and overall direction, and typically promote sustainability, smart growth, and urban efficiency. At the same time, governments adopt other policies in reaction to specific circumstances: some respond to demands from community interests; some follow regional trends; some are driven by conditional funding made available by senior government. In the heat of the moment within short windows for decision-making, policy-makers may not consider the consequences of new policies on existing plans and land use objectives. Hence policies created at different times for diverse purposes may be overlapping, inconsistent, untimely, or even contradictory: e.g., official plans may support greenways and wildlife corridors while hazard plans may recommend removing undergrowth or clearing fire breaks. Local government departments have divergent—sometimes competing—interests in setting policies: e.g., urban planners promote narrow streets for walkability while traffic engineers insist on wide lanes for safety; cultural plans may call for empty institutional buildings to become cultural venues while municipal real estate policies may require open tenders for reuse. Many municipalities lack capacity to coordinate rapidly proliferating plans, policies, and regulations. Issue-targeted administrative units and policies make it difficult for planning departments to pursue comprehensive planning objectives with consistency over time. Residents feel frustrated when implementation fails. Ineffective coordination undermines the effectiveness of local land use planning and confidence in government. This study promises insights into the dilemma and possible resolutions.
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> We propose to investigate strategies local planning departments are using to develop and coordinate myriad policies that affect land use outcomes intended to enhance sustainability and urban efficiency. In developing and implementing official plans planners have to coordinate sometimes competing influences from policies on diverse topics such as integrated community

sustainability, transportation, climate change, urban design, hazards and risks, open space, energy, and economic development. Our major research question asks: How are Canadian communities coordinating their land use planning activities in the context of rapidly proliferating plans and policies? With a mixed-methods three-year study we will assess the state of the field, examine the issues faced and approaches used, and try to identify best practices.

The proposed research investigates a critical emerging problem for land use planning that has not previously been documented. We will add to the growing body of scholarly knowledge about the dynamics of community planning practice and the challenges of policy development, coordination, and implementation in local government. Such findings are useful not only for planning, but for policy and urban studies, urban sociology, transportation modelling, and urban geography.

Our partners, the Canadian Institute of Planners and DalTRAC (transportation lab), will help us develop practical applications for the findings. The research will prove useful to professional planners, municipal governments, community groups, and others interested in exploring ways to more effectively develop and implement plans and policies. DalTRAC will draw on the findings to improve transportation demand models.

Land use planning affects the spaces where Canadians live, play, and work: finding innovative ways to make it more effective in achieving the aims of sustainability can make an important contribution to Canadian society.

Summer research activities

In summer 2013 my research goal was to identify a sample set of cities that warranted investigation as the team prepared an initial inventory of plans. I searched for examples of cities or plans where specific efforts had been made at plan coordination. I started by browsing online journals for peer-reviewed articles from the last ten years. I used Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, SCIRUS, and JSTOR to find articles. I tried different combinations of multiple keywords to maximize results. The key terms used were ‘coordination’ and ‘implementation’ of ‘official plans’ or ‘planning’. Other terms searched for included ‘planning process’, ‘best practice’, ‘innovation’, and ‘integration’. Throughout my search, I was attempting to gather articles about Canadian planning examples. I often narrowed the search to strictly Canadian planning, but also found some articles that gave an international perspective.

The initial stage of the research yielded fewer results than I expected. The articles were often about major cities or were studies of multiple cities. Policy integration was a common subject. Several articles discussed how to better incorporate a particular policy into planning in a city. Literature on smart growth came up repeatedly when I was researching the topic of planning coordination. One of the most relevant articles was about the challenges of integrating cultural planning in the Queen West neighbourhood of Toronto (McDonough & Wekerle, 2011).

Other articles on economic development planning being tied to policy in Canadian municipalities and environmental policy integration in Europe are examples of how the literature offers general and theoretical studies rather than articles on best practices of implementation and coordination of official plans (Reese, 2006; Simeonova & van der Valk, 2009). Examples of articles on planning implementation in particular Canadian cities included a study of implementing a congestion charge on the Halifax peninsula and implementing a greenway in Ottawa (Althaus, Tedds & McAvoy, 2011; Erickson, 2004). The search also produced articles about the international context, including a study of regional planning around the Yangtze River

and the coordination of local and national planning efforts in Sweden (Li & Wu, 2013; Tornberg, 2012).

As the first round of research produced academic and theoretical articles, I moved on to *Plan Canada*, the professional magazine of the Canadian Institute of Planners, to find articles about current Canadian planning practice. Most articles discussed the strengths of individual plans rather than integrating multiple plans. The growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGHS) in Ontario was a recurring topic (Newbold & Scott, 2012; Gibson, 2011; Filion, 2010; Graham & Westfall, 2007; Ontario Growth Secretariat, 2007). *Places to Grow* is an integrated and coordinated planning effort in Ontario that has been both lauded and criticized. The plan came up many times over multiple issues, indicating it should be investigated further. The land use plan for Edmonton International Airport involved implementing an 'aerotropolis' in Leduc, Alberta, which could be studied along with other Edmonton plans (Woitt & Sugita, 2012). Collaborative regional planning methods in the Okanagan Valley (BC) and Wood Buffalo (Alberta) have been touted as ways of improving implementation (Kittel, 2012; Utz & Frigo, 2007). Other planning practice highlights include the proliferation of planning initiatives in Atlantic Canada following municipal amalgamations (Heseltine, 2008), Calgary's Brentwood Station Area Redevelopment Plan utilizing transit oriented development (Hall, 2009), and the implementation of a sea level rise adaptation by-law in coastal New Brunswick (Doiron, 2012). Lastly, the publication mentioned CIP awards for planning excellence. The CIP website documents past winners, and many of these award-winning plans could be good candidates for further research to determine the extent to which they promote coordination across plans.

The next stage of the research was to review presentations from Canadian planning conferences. PDFs of presentations can be found online for recent CIP conferences. This is not the case for all the provincial planning conferences, which have varying levels of online access. The 2012 CIP conference in Banff contained the greatest number of relevant presentations, likely due to the conference's emphasis on implementation and practice. The growth plan for the GGHS and its integration with a greenbelt plan was presented as a regional planning framework that directs local planning efforts. Calgary has a Regional Partnership to coordinate growth management. The process of Plan-It Calgary and the Municipal Development Plan include several points on implementation, monitoring, and alignment with a corporate plan. Edmonton's Capital City Downtown Plan was presented as a model for planning implementation. Within the Quarters Plan area, many small catalyst projects were used to gradually implement the plans in four neighbourhoods of downtown Edmonton. Regina is currently putting together a new official community plan with policies that are realigned with a corporate strategic focus. Saskatoon is integrating growth and transportation plans to improve transit. Mobility corridors, appropriate development, and more housing and offices downtown are concurrent efforts of Saskatoon's plans. Examples of interesting developments in smaller communities include the City of Vaughn's series of interlocking active transportation and health plans, Barrie's efforts to integrate a heritage plan, and the implementation of Jasper's ICSP with targets and indicators. As was the case with academic articles, most presentations were on larger cities, especially Toronto and Edmonton.

I also searched the online blog Planetizen, Spacing magazine and Municipal World for additional less formal content, but these searches did not provide much novel information. Both Planetizen and Spacing primarily provide stories about urban issues rather than discussing specific official plans. Neither of these publications presented information about current planning coordination or implementation in Canada. Municipal World provided articles on Ontario's

Places to Grow as well as *ImagineCalgary*, the city's public participation initiative to develop a plan for urban sustainability. The plan resulting from this process should be included in the study due to its extensive preparation, public involvement, and sustainability targets.

Collecting Plans

A preliminary list of cities was being considered for inclusion on this project before I started in May. After some discussions with the researchers, we added a few more cities and created a final list to survey for an inventory of plans. We generally tried to have three cities per province and ultimately included two to five cities depending on the size of the province. The sample investigated included thirty-five cities from east to west:

Newfoundland and Labrador: St. John's, Mount Pearl, Corner Brook
Nova Scotia: Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Halifax, Truro
Prince Edward Island: Charlottetown, Summerside
New Brunswick: Moncton, Saint John, Fredericton
Ontario: Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Thunder Bay
Manitoba: Churchill, Winnipeg, Brandon
Saskatchewan: Regina, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon
Alberta: Lethbridge, Calgary, Airdrie, Edmonton, Wood Buffalo
British Columbia: Kelowna, Prince George, Vancouver, Victoria

Although we originally intended to include Quebec City, Sherbrooke, Trois Rivieres, and Montreal, French language skills precluded comprehensive coverage. Consequently, we developed an inventory of plans in a sample of English speaking communities. As we worked on this summary we decided to add the capital cities in the three Territories to the list. Those will be documented in a follow up report.

I gathered plans for cities on the list, trying to capture all city-wide and functional plans. I collected most plans that were available on municipal web sites. This included master plans, environmental plans, resource plans, transportation plans, cultural plans, recreation plans, and corporate or strategic plans. I did not collect draft plans that were still in development. In such cases, I made note of the website where information was available or downloaded a draft copy of the plan if one was available. I did not collect the full suite of reports and studies available from each planning department. Only relevant reports pertaining to plan coordination and implementation were collected. Most notably, I did not collect all secondary (district or neighbourhood) plans in each municipality. In some cases, secondary plans were too numerous to include. For example, Calgary has more than fifty community and area plans. We decided that it was not essential to include all these plans. (Where I found numerous secondary plans for a city, I made a note of the URL on the table of plans in case we need to use them at a future date.)

The main obstacle I faced in this stage of the project was website navigation. Some municipal websites are easier to use than others. I developed a process to comprehensively collect all available plans for each city. I began the search for plans in each city by going to the municipal planning department's webpage and collecting all plans that were available. I then searched through other municipal departments that also developed plans. For example, transportation departments are sometimes responsible for transportation plans, parks and

recreation departments develop parks plans, or public works departments may have resource plans. Lastly I would use the "search" function of the website to find any plans I may have missed. I collected several points of information about each plan for the data table and categorized each type of plan. Where possible, I noted the responsible department for each plan and contact information if it was provided.

It was sometimes difficult to determine when a plan was drafted or adopted, or whether or not it had been officially adopted. I recorded the date given for each plan and whether or not it was adopted.

The most difficult part of collecting plans was finding plans in Quebec cities, especially outside Montreal. I do not speak French. Quebec municipal websites are only sometimes bilingual, or only translate certain sections of a website. Navigating the websites was difficult and it is virtually impossible to know if I have collected all plans. Also, most plans I was able to collect, especially outside Montreal, were exclusively in French. I was unable to complete my search for Quebec plans and will require assistance to collect the rest of the plans.

In total, I collected 269 plans by August (excluding the plans from Quebec). The table is not exhaustive, but is reasonably comprehensive. Some municipalities may not publish all their plans online, or I may have missed a plan as I searched each website. My search methods improved as I moved from east to west. This may partially account for why I found more plans in Western Canada than in Eastern Canada. I will validate and complete the table in September by going back through the websites and doing additional Google searches for plans I may have missed the first time. I will also contact planning department staff to confirm that I collected all available plans from each municipality.

Preliminary Analysis: August 2013

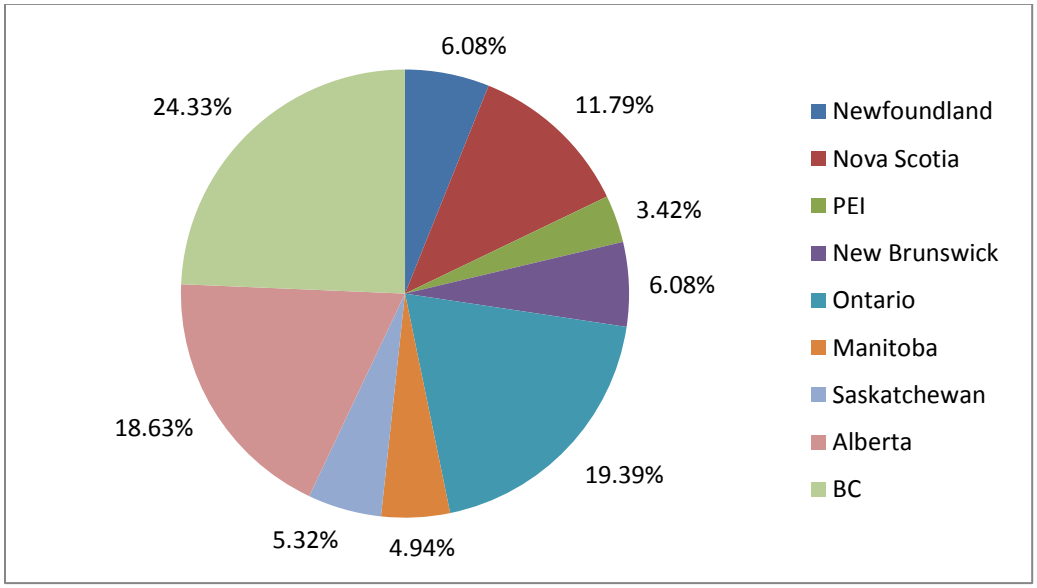

Figure 1: The proportion of plans from each province, excluding Quebec.

I began my analysis with some initial observations. As seen in Figure 1, I found more plans in Western Canada, especially BC, than in Eastern Canada, especially in the Atlantic provinces. Halifax, Toronto, and Vancouver stand out as having many plans with more than twenty each. However, the large number of plans found for Halifax may reflect my familiarity

with planning in the city: I knew how to find the plans. Almost every city has at least three plans with the exceptions of Churchill and Moose Jaw. The dearth of plans for these cities seems anomalous and will be confirmed with a follow up to their planning departments.

In some regions, many plans were prepared in whole or in part by private consultants. About 28% of plans collected had involvement of private consultants.

I categorized the different types of plans I collected and calculated how common different types of plans were. This information is displayed in a graph in Figure 2 that shows the frequency of each type of plan.

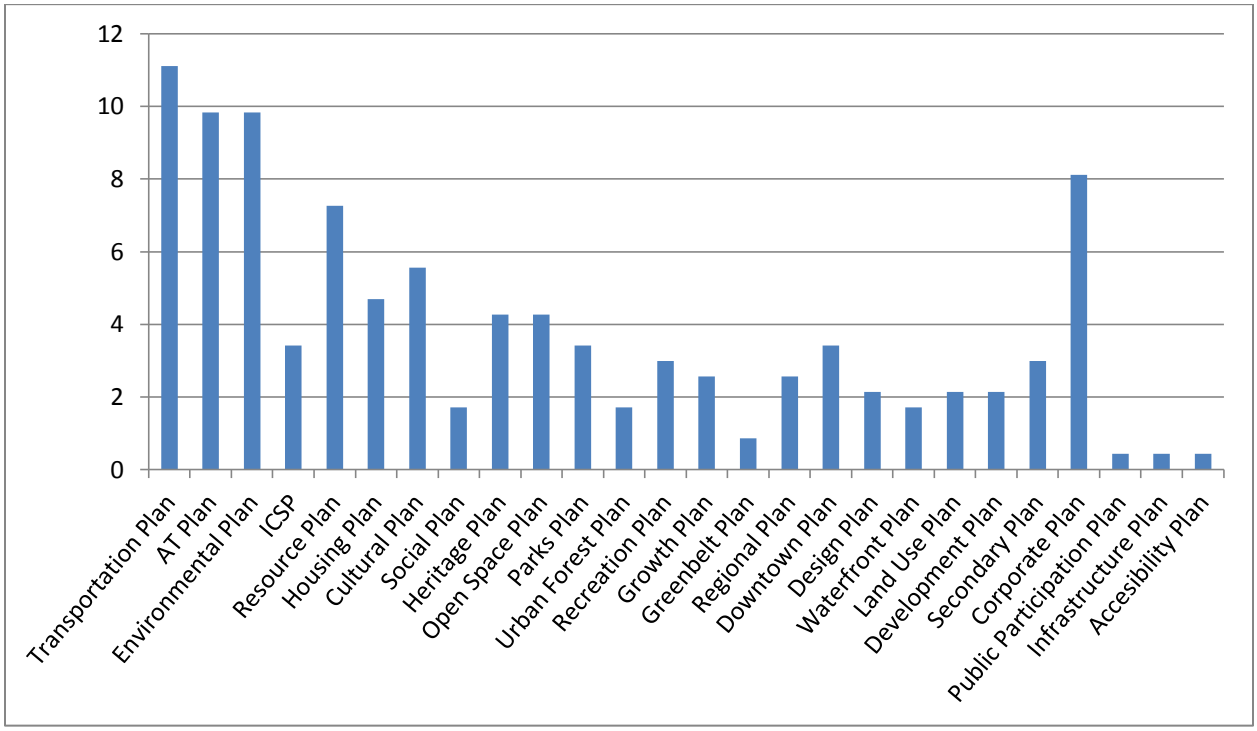

Figure 2: The proportionate number of each type of plan as a percentage of the total number of plans.

Every city had some form of a master plan. This includes a Municipal Planning Strategy, Official Community Plan, Official Plan, Municipal Development Plan, and others. After master plans, transportation plans were the most common. I categorized active transportation (AT) plans differently because there were so many of them. AT plans include any plans about cycling, walking, or trails. Environmental plans were counted separately from Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs) because of the frequency and specificity of the latter. Environmental plans along with resource plans, which include any plans about garbage, recycling, waste, wastewater, or other municipal resources, were also quite common.

Corporate or strategic plans were common. Most city councils have prepared a short-term strategic plan that addresses their goals. These plans are always recently produced and are frequently updated. Some of the least common plans were urban forest plans, waterfront plans, and growth and greenbelt plans. I used the terms land use plans and development plans as general terms to describe types of plans that could not otherwise be easily categorized. I also only found one each of a dedicated public participation plan, infrastructure plan, and accessibility plan.

I created a graph in Excel to show when most plans were prepared, adopted, or most recently amended depending on the information available online. Figure 3 shows the proportion of plans I collected that were prepared in each year.

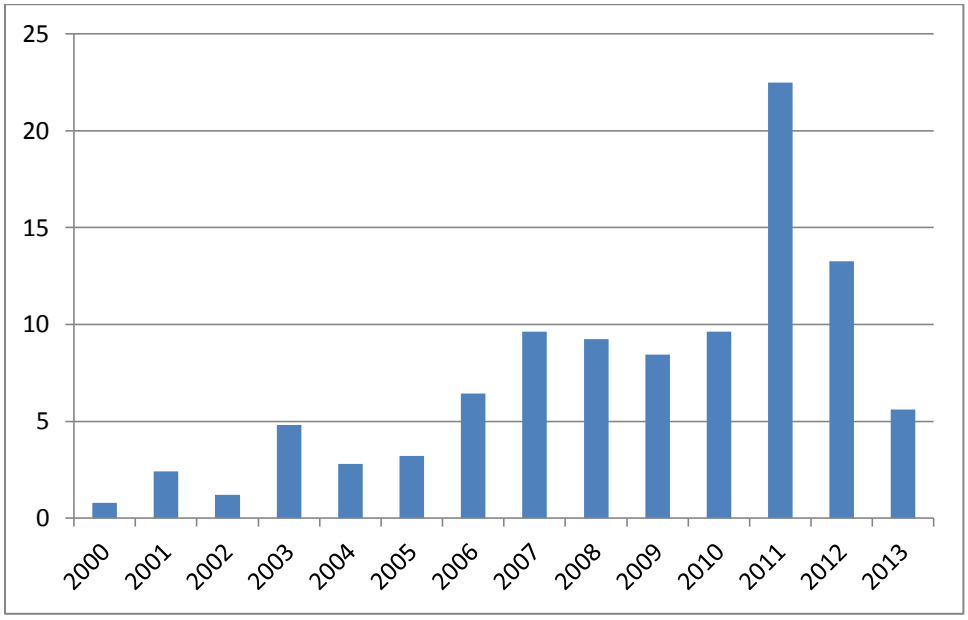

Figure 3: The percentage of collected plans prepared in each year.

Most plans collected were developed quite recently, usually within the last five years. This may be because official plans are constantly being prepared and replacing earlier plans. Only a small number of plans are more than a decade old and few were made before the year 2000. Almost a quarter of all plans collected were passed in 2011. It is not clear why 2011 produced so many more plans than 2010 or 2012. The trend of recent plans is repeated when only studying the dates of adoption of master plans for each city. Most master plans are quite recent with 2011 an anomaly year. Master plans tend to be a little older in Eastern Canada compared to the recent master plans of Western Canada.

I conducted some analysis on a province by province basis to illustrate some regional differences. For Newfoundland and Labrador I did not find any dedicated transportation plans and found fewer plans in general. ICSPs appeared important to cities there. ICSPs either operated as the central master plan for a municipality or as an important supporting plan.

In Nova Scotia, Halifax has a lot of plans. The city currently has 23 plans and that number will continue to grow as more are underway. Heritage plans appear to be quite prominent here. Plans in Nova Scotia tended to be a little older than in some regions. Whereas most plans across the country were prepared in the last five years, many plans in Nova Scotia were made in the decade from 2000 to 2010.

In Atlantic Canada, waterfront plans and cultural plans are common. ICSPs are prominent throughout the region. Urban design plans and transportation plans are less common, though AT plans are common. I also noticed that private consultants are used frequently, especially in smaller communities.

Every type of plan can be found in Ontario. Planning initiatives cover a wide range of activities and plans are prepared for many municipal issues. Ontario produces a large number of plans relative to other provinces. Also, most plans found were prepared recently. Very few plans

were a decade old. As in Atlantic Canada, private consultants are commonly employed in plan development, especially in smaller communities.

In the Prairies, I found far fewer plans than other areas of the country. Moose Jaw and Churchill had the fewest plans of all cities in the study. Most plans that I did find were produced recently. Private consultants appear to be less commonly employed in this region of the country as most plans are produced entirely by municipal planning departments.

I found the greatest number of plans in Western Canada. In Alberta, cities had numerous recent planning initiatives. Many plans were prepared in 2010 or more recently. I found fewer environmental plans in this province than other provinces but did not find cultural plans. I found more plans in BC than in any other province. Even the smaller towns of Prince George and Kelowna produce a lot of plans. Vancouver was the only city where the master plan was not immediately apparent by its name. The Official Development Plan Regional Context Statement functions to give overall guidance to a suite of secondary plans. The *Greenest City 2020 Action Plan*, appears to be an environmental plan that plays an important role as well. Vancouver is also notable for having many plans prepared by Metro Vancouver region.

London, Lethbridge, and Kelowna stand out as being smaller towns with a proportionally large number of plans. Despite the small population of these communities, they have a high number of plans comparable to much larger cities. It could be interesting to investigate how these smaller cities are able to coordinate so many plans with presumably smaller staff numbers and budgets.

Larger cities tend to use private consultants less often than smaller towns. About 31% of plans in Atlantic Canada involved private consultants. Most privately prepared plans came from smaller communities. In Newfoundland and Ontario municipal planning departments were often responsible for preparing the master plan but would outsource smaller plans, such as recreation plans, open space plans, or ICSPs to private consultants. The largest cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver have relatively few plans prepared by consultants.

I tried to identify any current trends in Canadian planning that were apparent in the data set. It seemed that design plans, sustainability plans, transportation plans, and strategic plans are in fashion. These types of plans are common and were usually produced or replaced recently. Heritage and growth plans may be going out of fashion. Though there were fewer of these types of plans, when I did encounter them, they tended to be older. Perhaps municipalities decide that heritage plans don't need to be updated as frequently as other plans once heritage guidelines and protection measures are in place. I found a lot of AT plans, but many are at least four years old. Some AT plans were prepared in 2011 or 2012, but most were produced between 2000 and 2010. The cultural plans in both Halifax and Toronto are quite old now. However, St. John's, Summerside, London, Saskatoon, and Kelowna all prepared one in the last few years. Thunder Bay produced their first ever cultural plan in 2011.

Next Steps and Plan Coordination

Moving forward, my next step is to validate and finish the table of plans. I will begin by revisiting the municipal websites and conduct a search to find any plans I may have missed. I will then contact planning departments to confirm that I collected all available plans. I will continue to work on data analysis and data visualization of the table of plans.

Part of the data analysis I will work on will be studying the primary research question of plan coordination. I will highlight some cities that we may want to investigate further for evidence, or lack thereof, of plan coordination. Given the graphic presentation and titles of their plans I believe that Winnipeg and Edmonton appear to be making concerted efforts at plan coordination. In Winnipeg, the city drafted and adopted five plans together on the same date in June 2011. The plans consist of one master plan and four supporting plans about land use, transportation, resources, and sustainability. There is a visual continuity between all plans in how they are presented. The covers and content of the plans are clearly using the same visual style. Edmonton has six complementary plans that were drafted and adopted at different times. They all employ the same naming style with *The Way We Grow* for their MDP, *The Way We Move* for their transportation plan, *The Way We Green* for their environmental plan, *The Way We Live* for their social plan, *The Way We Prosper* for their economic plan, and *The Way We Finance* for their corporate strategic plan. The plans have a common visual identity in their presentation. Both of these cities clearly made attempts to appear to be coordinating their planning efforts. It will require further investigation and deeper analysis to determine if this coordination is only on the surface or if there are indeed strong efforts at coordination between multiple plans.

Based on this preliminary analysis I found that some cities appeared less coordinated in their activities. Upon reaching the planning department website in Vancouver, for instance, I was immediately presented with many urban planning projects. I required further searching to actually find the plans. We might investigate whether Vancouver is emphasizing small, individual planning efforts and district level plans rather than focussing on coordinating city-wide planning activities. Vancouver seems to have a range of plans with different departments responsible for them. Multiple departments working on different plans may affect the ability to coordinate planning goals. Vancouver is involved within a regional planning process which could be investigated to understand how regional plans coordinate with the municipal plans.

Sample: Plans found for Vancouver

Greenest City 2020 Action Plan	Master Plan/Env	July 2011 (adopted)
Transportation 2040 Plan	Transportation Plan	October 31, 2012 (adopted)
Stanley Park Cycling Plan	AT Plan	October 15, 2012 (adopted)
Economic Action Strategy	Economic Plan	December 22, 2011 (presented)
Vancouver Food Strategy	Resource Plan	January 30, 2013 (approved)
Housing and Homelessness Strategy	Housing Plan	July 28, 2011 (approved)
Culture Plan for Vancouver 2008-2018	Cultural Plan	2008 (adopted)
Cultural Facilities Priorities Plan	Cultural Plan	2010 (prepared)
Gastown Heritage Management Plan	Heritage Plan	November 2001 (prepared)
Cambie Corridor Plan	Land Use Plan	May 9, 2011 (approved)
Hastings Park/PNE Master Plan	Parks Plan	January 2011 (adopted)
Southeast False Creek Official Development Plan	Development Plan	April 2007 (adopted)
Regional Context Statement Development Plan	Development/Growth Plan	June 2013 (amended)
Capital Plan 2012-2014	Corporate Plan	September 2011

		(approved)
Corporate Business Plan 2012-2021	Corporate Plan	February 2012 (prepared)
Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping Our Future	Growth Plan	July 29, 2011 (adopted)
Corporate Climate Action Plan	C.C. Action Plan	June 2010 (adopted)
Integrated Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Management Plan	Environmental Plan	October 2011 (adopted)
Regional Homelessness Plan	Housing Plan	November 2003 (updated)
Regional Food System Strategy	Resource Plan	February 25, 2011 (adopted)
Metro Vancouver Affordable Housing Strategy	Housing Plan	November 30, 2007 (approved)
Ecological Health Action Plan	Environmental Plan	October 2011 (prepared)
Regional Parks Plan	Parks Plan	October 2011 (updated)
Integrated Solid Waste and Resource Management Plan	Waste Plan	2011 (approved)
Integrated Liquid Waste and Resource Management Plan	Waste Plan	May 2010 (prepared)
Drinking Water Management Plan	Resource Plan	June 2011 (updated)

In London, various plans were prepared at different times by different departments; almost half the plans were prepared by private consultants. Judging from the website I concluded that planning efforts did not appear to be coordinated or integrated.

These are only initial observations, and only a deeper analysis will reveal the actual extent of plan coordination.

This preliminary investigation confirmed the challenge that municipalities face in trying to coordinate their plans. While 20 years ago many communities made do with a single master or official plan, today cities have two to twenty or more plans to implement and coordinate. The next stages of the research involve beginning to explore some of the plans in greater detail to understand the challenges of coordination, and a survey of practitioners to understand their experience and strategies for trying to coordinate plans.

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