10

Building Queer Infrastructure: Trajectories of Activism and Organizational Development in Decolonizing Vancouver

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Six decades of LGBT activism in Canada have transformed laws, decision-making frameworks, and a range of institutional practices at all levels of government leading to today's queer-friendlier metropolitan political economies. But with these obvious gains, local activist strategies have garnered few additional resources for service programs. Today, LGBT politics overlays increasingly volatile configurations of pressure for better social spaces and service programs. A focus on services and spaces as "queer infrastructure" provides an alternative lens for understanding local LGBT politics only partially centred on narratives of expanding rights and protections (which remain incomplete for trans communities).[1] Today, LGBT and queer coalition politics in Canadian cities is less and less focused on correcting remaining legal inequities and increasingly preoccupied with appropriating resources for diversifying social spaces, support programs, and strategic facilities upon which more vulnerable demographics remain dependent (see also Chapters 8, 9, and 11, this volume).

This chapter explores the queer organizational politics of Canada's third largest metropolitan region, Vancouver, and its suburbs in British Columbia's Lower Mainland, and it poses questions about the adequacy of theoretical and strategic capabilities for maintaining and developing organizations, service programs, and facilities. Metropolitan Vancouver is undergoing a shift in conversations around sexual minority vulnerability, needs, and entitlements from earlier activist challenges to inequities (and subsequent constructions of rights

and protections) to building expanded and truly inclusive social spaces, entertainment establishments, service programs, and facilities. This emerging politics of service provision and "space-taking," while at times confrontational, is less defined by the half century of strategies of constructed visibility and appropriating public "spectacle" (Debord [1967] 1994). The resulting shift in electoral narratives reflects demographic and cultural changes across the Lower Mainland, with huge implications for LGBT stakeholders, organizational formations, and political actors.

The growing concerns for infrastructure in contemporary LGBT politics parallels the emergence of sexual minority populations that have not been dependent upon the historic central Vancouver neighbourhoods that were crucial to initial gay and lesbian feminist rights activism. Centres of queer metropolitan political economies throughout North American cities are shifting from historic inner-city enclaves, such as Vancouver's West End (Ingram 2010; Ross and Sullivan 2012) and Commercial Drive (Bouthillette 1997; Lo and Healy 2000), to outer neighbourhoods and municipalities with more affordable housing and rapid growth in jobs – communities that still have few services for LGBT populations. This urban migration, in large part a response to intensified gentrification in central Vancouver, represents a reversal of a century of sexual minority concentration in pedestrian-oriented urban cores and has only been possible because of the institutionalization of a raft of rights and protections.

This chapter theorizes queer infrastructure as the sum total of protections, organizations, social spaces, and service programs for overcoming homophobia and transphobia, along with intersecting inequities rooted in misogyny, racism, neocolonialism, cultural chauvinism, and anti-migrant xenophobia. I consider methods to identify pressures for new forms of community development and respective programs, which are often articulated within older conversations about rights and protections. I sketch historical factors that formed cultures of sexual minority resistance and reflect upon a half century of LGBT activism. I then describe three incomplete LGBT "community development projects" and follow this with an inventory of the diversifying models of agency, organizing, and service provision that have been initiated.

Historical Background

Urbanization of Indigenous populations in much of British Columbia, and the cultural crossroads around Vancouver and Victoria in particular, were intrinsic to colonial expansion and concentration of settler populations. Indigenous com-

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

munities were often highly mobile, making cultural adaptations and trade links and engaging with an array of colonial actors. Diverse, multiple-gender Indigenous networks provided a poorly policed alternative to the onslaught of the late Victorian heteronormative project. On the West Coast, Indigenous populations were present at all phases of the formation of urbanizing LGBT communities, although "Indian" groups remained cordoned and marginal until the 1990s.

Indigenous bodies and sexual minorities soon became targets of the new state apparatus. First enabled through section 3, first written in the Indian Act, 1884, federal policing of Indigenous networks that neither conformed to neocolonial gender expectations nor suppressed homosexuality became con-flated with the suppression of potlatch gatherings, along with virtually all trad-itional ceremonies, religious observance, and material culture. One of the more substantial records of alternative gender expression, homosexuality, and lethal repression in the late nineteenth century is contained in the biography of Chief Charles James Nowell of the Kwakwaka'wakw of northern Vancouver Island, a community whose members were increasingly working in, trading with, and depending on services provided in Vancouver (Ford 1941, 34, 38, 69, 130–32). The mass incarceration of Indigenous children in residential schools was preceded by decades of assaults on extended tribal families, especially of sexual minorities. By the turn of the century, one of the few places where Indigenous sexual minorities could partially escape detection, policing, and incarceration were the larger towns, most notably Vancouver.

For over a half century after Vancouver's incorporation in 1886, diverse populations were cordoned by language, origin, and citizenship (Ingram 2000, 2003). In large parts of the Lower Mainland, native English-speakers and populations primarily of northwestern European heritages barely formed majorities. After extensive repression during the Second World War, the social spaces that prefigured LGBT activism coalesced soon after civil rights, most importantly enfranchisement, were restored to East Asians and South Asians in the years 1947 to 1949. Early organizing and organizations in British Columbia were exclusive, along neocolonial and language lines, whereby priv-ileged white groups defined "gay" and "lesbian" as well as the notions of social equity upon which subsequent rights struggles were based.

In the 1960s, the tiered neocolonial social services delivery system, which ensured that First Nations and Asian immigrants often faced exclusion and substandard support, was effectively readapted for sexual minorities. People of colour had limited access to or control over LGBT-related services. This effect-ively racialized and dual character, embodied in the queer infrastructure of the Lower Mainland, hobbled activism and obstructed services, institutionalizing

Building Queer Infrastructure **229**

inequities that continued into the following health crises. Even after subsequent challenges to racism, and under the rhetoric of early multiculturalism in LGBT activism, an effectively dual system of program development persisted, along with unequal articulation, leadership, and service access.

The first homophile organization in Canada, the Association for Social Knowledge, was formed in Vancouver in April 1964 after a year of intensifying police harassment in the city's gay bars (Kinsman 1996, 230–48). "ASK supported law reform and sponsored public lectures and discussion groups, coffee parties (Gab'N'Java), social events and outings, a lending library, and, eventually, a drop-in and community centre" (McLeod 1996, 7–10) By mid-1966, three years before the partial decriminalization of homosexuality, Canada had its first queer metropolitan infrastructure thanks to one small organization, barely a collective, that coordinated a score of initiatives and service programs. The majority of the nascent leadership consisted of males, while well over half of the organizational work was carried out by women.[2] In a city in which perhaps over one-third of the population was struggling with English literacy, ASK members were all English-speakers from a demographic that was largely unilingual. Even so, some understanding of disparities within LGBT populations and some nascent knowledge of trans experiences and identifications did appear in early ASK discussions.[3] However, it would take another generation to articulate ideals of feminism, decolonization, and anti-racism that today are central to contemporary notions of functional organizations and effective service provision. It would take another generation to envision the support needs for the range of trans experiences. As Canada's first homophile organization, ASK's history has been neglected because it was primarily a *service* organization, more concerned with self-education and care-giving than with advocacy. ASK disbanded during 1969 and the partial decriminalization of homosexuality, but police repression of public intimacies (including kissing) continued to intensify. New, more visible and combative organizations, more squarely challenging homophobia in public space, were forming by and for a wider set of LGBT demographics.

In 1970, lesbians and gay men formed the short-lived Gay Action Committee (Q.Q. aka Kevin McKeown 1970). In November 1970, over a year after the Stonewall Riots in New York City, the Vancouver Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed around a drop-in centre (shared with Yippies [Youth International Party]) on Carroll Street near Pender Street in Chinatown, and, in 1971, it operated a switchboard (Georgia Straight 1970, 1971; Q.Q. aka Kevin McKeown 1971). However, the Vancouver GLF did not find a support base in the emerging gay male ghetto in the city's West End and was defunct

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

within a year. The GLF was succeeded by the centrist Canadian Gay Activist Alliance and the specifically socialist Gay Alliance Towards Equality (GATE). Linked to activism in Toronto, GATE developed local strategies for challenging inequities and violence, coordinating the 1971 We Demand demonstration, the first act of constructed LGBT visibility on the West Coast. GATE was the first LGBT organization in Vancouver to engage in a wide range of tactics around demonstrations, publicity, and the appropriation of public space. The first local Gay Pride rally, in commemoration of the Stonewall Riots, was organized by GATE in June 1972 at Ceperly Park, a historic cruising area (Hill 1987a) on the edge of Stanley Park.

GATE challenged the state at all levels of government while confronting conservative business interests associated with the growing number of gay bars. Municipal politicians on both the left and the right were unapologetically homophobic. Not coincidentally, the conservative Non-Partisan Association, with direct ties to real estate speculation, was already exploring the role of white gay males in gentrification. GATE's first demonstration in front of the provincial legislature in Victoria was on 9 November 1973 (McLeod 1996, 142),[4] little more than a year after the election of British Columbia's first New Democratic Party government. The protections advocated by GATE that day were not achieved until the second social democratic provincial government was elected two decades later. The GATE campaign with the most national impact involved the legal action against the *Vancouver Sun,* which, in 1973, refused to print a GATE advertisement . The subsequent campaign, though unsuccessful in the short term, was eventually taken to the Supreme Court of Canada (Smith 1999, 301–3) and influenced a decade of Canadian legal interpretations around sexual orientation protections. Struggling due to a lack of participation from women and men whose ethnic heritages were not rooted in northwestern Europe, GATE dissolved in late 1979.

Lesbian feminism in British Columbia begins in the Women's Caucus in 1969 and 1970. New Morning, calling itself "a gay women's collective," played an important organizing role in the 1971 Indochinese Women's Conference.[5] Vancouver's first resource centre exclusively for lesbians opened in 1972. By 1973, lesbian feminism emerged as a political movement consciously divergent from male-oriented gay rights activism. Lesbians began organizing within a broader feminist coalition known as the British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW). In its founding convention in 1974, the BCFW established a lesbian subcommittee with a lesbian caucus specifically comprised of self-identified lesbians. The organization soon developed policy related to lesbians around education, civil rights, age of consent, custody, health, and immigration.

That caucus existed for a decade and, throughout the period, was a central source of education and theory on sexuality and homophobia and intersections with gender inequities.

Lesbian separatist communes, camps, and retreats came to be seen as manifestations not only of a political movement but also of a cultural movement. There was a lesbian workshop at the 1975 British Columbia Women's Festival. In 1981, the first National Lesbian Conference supported numerous workshops, including one on rural organizing and bisexuality. Two years later, a regional follow-up conference featured, for the first time, workshops on violence between women and sadomasochism. In 1984, a series of annual provincial gay and lesbian conferences was initiated, and it laid the basis for the institutionalization of more inclusive public policy along with new service organizations and programs.

The 1970s saw the articulation of, and constructed visibility for, culturally specific lesbian and gay networks. In Vancouver, the recovery of the experiences and queer histories of Aboriginals, Chinese Canadians, South Asians, and African Canadians began to be publicly articulated (Ingram 2000). In the early 1980s, lesbians of colour began to organize caucuses. Indigenous LGBT organizing in Vancouver began in 1977 (Hill 1987b). Much of the focus was on providing peer support and creating networks for better health, ensuring protection from violence, and challenging racism. A decade later, Healing Our Spirit, the British Columbia First Nations with AIDS Society, initially focused on gay male experiences, and the Greater Vancouver Native Cultural Society nurtured a wider range of social spaces outside of the bars.

Since 1991, the use of the term "Two-Spirits" in British Columbia has had some currency for self-identified individuals reconnecting to older, localized gender and sexuality traditions.[6] But the majority of the comparatively large Indigenous demographic in British Columbia, and in Vancouver in particular, experiences two or more different heritages, with one often being settler. For these individuals, the Two-Spirits label represents another, though not always a dominant, aspect of self-healing and another concern in cultural recovery. In the 1990s, the Vancouver Gay and Lesbian Centre began providing space for a Two-Spirited youth drop-in meeting (for more details on Two-Spirits activism, see Chapter 2, this volume).[7]

Vancouver's first trans organization, Transsexual and Transvestite Info, formed early in the 1970s and was initially focused on male-to-female individuals. Throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s, female-to-male individuals tended to seek support in lesbian spaces. In the 1990s, the Foundation for the Advancement of Trans-Gender Equality (FATE) was founded as a monthly meeting. Vancouver saw its first demonstration for transgendered human

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

rights protections in June 1998, with 150 people marching along Davie Street (Efron 1998). The Transgender Health Program was established by the local health authority, Vancouver Coastal Health, in 2003.

The first public LGBT Jewish observance in Vancouver occurred during the High Holidays in 1973. In subsequent years, gay networks defined by Chinese, Italian, and Asian cultures emerged, though networks stayed relatively private. The Lotus Root Conference for gay, lesbian, and bisexual East Asians was organized in 1996. In early 1998, a separate space for queer East Asian youth was established (Yueng 1998). In the following decade, a host of new organizations and support networks, for a wider range of ethnic and language groups, has coalesced. Vancouver's Trikone chapter, for South Asians, began meeting in 2005. Since the early 1980s, workplaces and collective bargaining have been arenas for discussion of sexual orientation and related equity and protections.

Throughout the proliferation of LGBT activist groups and service organizations, history, heritage, and contemporary culture have played central roles in articulating a wider range of experiences and unmet needs. The British Columbia Gay and Lesbian Archives was founded in 1976 and began collecting newsletters, newspaper articles, and documentation.[8] Video Inn, Western Front,[9] and the Grunt Gallery were established in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood in 1970, 1973, and 1984, respectively. These alternative spaces were crucial for LGBT cultural groups in Vancouver, such as artists of Asian and Aboriginal heritages, historically designated as "outsiders."[10] In 1983, one of the early figures in Vancouver video, Paul Wong, saw his installation and nine hours of programming on bisexuality, *Confused: Sexual Views,* removed from the Vancouver Art Gallery (on censorship, see also Chapter 9, this volume). The subsequent court battles around censorship went on for years and generated a heightened awareness of institutionalized homophobia, the importance of queer culture, continued erasures, and the need for LGBT acrtivism to focus on developing new cultural institutions.

While the needs of LGBT populations have expanded beyond that for erotic expression, Vancouver has had, and continues to have, a perennial shortage of sex-positive spaces. The brutal murder of Aaron Webster by a homophobic gang of adolescent males in a well-known public sex area in Stanley Park in November 2001 galvanized LGBT groups around violence. Since the turn of the century, several suicides and countless abusive episodes in schools ushered in the movement against bullying. But, while homophobic violence has been challenged publicly for several decades (see also Chapter 6, this volume), there has been a lack of resolve and solidarity around the defence

Building Queer Infrastructure **233**

of sex-positive spaces, both public and commercial. This after half a century of nearly continuous police harassment and amidst a marked decline of sex-positive commercial establishments (in the face of inflated rents). The solution for many gay men has been digital, involving a shift to geo-social networking applications such as Grindr and Scruff.

Queer Activism Today

Today, Metropolitan Vancouver's LGBT politics is dominated by an understated dialectic that consists of defending achievements (still incomplete) in the area of rights and protections, on the one hand, and of defending and expanding service provision (including for social contact and entertainment) and the necessary spaces for this, on the other. However, in contrast to the half century of rights victories, a cooperative politics of queer organizational development has been slower to develop in Vancouver than in other large Canadian cities. In recent years, the economic downturn combined with inflated rents has contributed to negligible growth in LGBT infrastructure. The discussion below highlights just one recent example of the difficulty involved in shifting from a local LGBT politics focused on rights and protections to one focused on providing infrastructure to better support vulnerable LGBT populations and on making service organizations and program offerings (upon which these thousands of individuals depend) more effective, inclusive, and fiscally sustainable.

On the cover of the 29 November 2012 issue of Vancouver's *Xtra! West* is the headline, "QMUNITY SHAKEUP: Four Staff Gone in Six Months." The article by Natasha Barsotti (2012) describes the organizational implosion of the largest and longest functioning LGBT service organization in British Columbia, Qmunity, whose origins go back to a tactical alliance with Trudeau-era federal Liberals in 1976. In this 2012 article, readers are informed of a recently appointed director, conflicted labour conditions, and the invocation of a collective bargaining agreement. What is less clear to readers is that this director has succeeded more than a score of others over the last three decades of "the Centre," which the organization had operated under a number of names. Only at the end of the article does Barsotti mention that the new director is under considerable pressure from her board to "find[] a new location" for the organization, which is currently based in Vancouver's rapidly gentrifying West End, and "ensuring" Qmunity's "financial stability" in a time of wavering government funding and foundational support. The Barsotti article highlights deficiencies in community vocabulary and activist theory pertaining to

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

organizational development. British Columbia's LGBT communities may have rights and protections, but resources allocated to services organizations are well below the basic needs of populations at risk, particularly populations facing factors compounding those related to identity and sexuality.

Queer Activism and Public Policy Changes: Case Studies

Today's deficiencies in Vancouver, particularly the lack of popular engagement in imagining more effective service organizations and extending their operations to suburban communities, are rooted in the legacies of only partially achieved decolonization along with a host of social and political projects initiated in the 1970s. Three incomplete LGBT projects in Vancouver have relevance to other Canadian regions: (1) the building of alliances with state actors, including agencies and sources of support outside of partisan patronage; (2) the expansion of service allocation during historic crises, such as the AIDS pandemic; and (3) diversifying policy goals for serving populations outside of central Vancouver.

LGBT Organizations Building Alliances with Overlapping State Actors

On the West Coast, the first political alliances between LGBT service-oriented organizations and the state were funded through federal governments led by the Liberal Party. The centrist partisan nature of this alliance was only partially transformed in the mid-1990s with a series of NDP provincial governments. The federal Liberal Party's dominance over the first two decades of funding and provision of services to LGBT populations, in contrast to equality and rights advocacy (which, in British Columbia, was nearly always allied with provincial New Democrats), was effectively a reiteration of the neocolonial social division on the West Coast. Sexual minority populations with a strong command of English and a northwestern European heritage articulated goals for middle-class rights and protections, and directed service allocation that, more often than not, identified with federal Liberalism. The other half of LGBT populations received those services but had little agency with regard to their allocation – except through engagement with the BC NDP. Given the different funds dispersed by federal and provincial agencies, partisan changes in government generated peaks and dips in funding over generational cycles. The province of British Columbia never accepted a public mandate for the needs of specifically LGBT communities, except for health and sometimes (as with recent work against bullying) education.

Vancouver's pioneering LGBT organizations were driven to alliances with the federal Liberal Party because, until the early 1990s, the two other levels of government, provincial and municipal, would rarely engage with them. For a number of reasons, virtually no public funds went to the early gay and lesbian organizations from British Columbia's 1972–75 NDP government. GATE embarrassed that government as it struggled to fashion itself as the most socially equalitarian and progressive in Canada history.[11] Just before his fall, homophobic premier David Barrett travelled to China during the Cultural Revolution, congratulating local politicians on their supposedly successful suppression of "homosexualism" (*Body Politic* 1975; *Province* 1974). As well as more centrist government ministers being at odds with the new lesbian and gay groups, a split emerged within the provincial caucus, where MLAs representing Vancouver, notably pioneering black feminist Rosemary Brown, squarely allied with lesbian feminist and gay rights groups, who were major supporters and electorates in urban ridings (on allies, see also Chapter 4, this volume). A second reason for the lack of funding from the first NDP provincial government is more complex. At that time, most of the gay and lesbian organizations in Vancouver were not oriented towards receiving high levels of service or ongoing budgets. These groups would not have qualified to administer government funding as they were operated as collectives, were not transparent, and were not legal societies. While more often preoccupied with political developments in Quebec and Ontario, Pierre Trudeau's cabinet in Ottawa viewed the leftward shift in Victoria and Vancouver with a mixed sense of concern and opportunity.[12] Small amounts of federal funding generated considerable political currency for that central Vancouver riding. Federal Liberal support for programs for LGBT populations, while ungenerous, was well-calculated.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, funding for initiatives for social programs, crucial to the LGBT demographics most at risk, nearly all involved the approval of the office of Vancouver Centre MP Ron Basford, who represented the area from 1963 to 1979. More than any other individual in Vancouver's LGBT history, Basford, as the major advocate for this urban core neighbourhood in the Trudeau cabinet, laid the basis for the strengths and weaknesses of the region's current LGBT infrastructure. Basford began his work in the Trudeau cabinet as the minister of state for urban affairs from 1972 to 1974. He went on to be minister of justice and attorney general of Canada (1975–78), in which capacity he was responsible for the obstruction of the first proposal for federal protections for sexual orientation (Lamb 1977; Thompson 1977). Ron Basford's bisexuality was well known in the Liberal cabinet, and the

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

Liberal Party effectively assigned him the task of denying federal human rights protections to sexual minorities. Not coincidentally, it was in that same year, 1976, that federal funding for services to LGBT populations at risk commenced in Basford's riding. This was the first federal funding for LGBT services on the West Coast, and only Vancouver Centre saw that money.

The Basford funding of Vancouver's LGBT organizations was not entirely opportunistic. It was in keeping with a critique of the preoccupation of gay liberationists, lesbian feminists, social democrats, and some socialists with gaining rights and government protections without improvements in economic conditions and access to social services. Rooted in a century of Canadian nationalist ideology that advocated ministering to (and maintaining neocolonial relationships with) vulnerable and abject populations, socially progressive centrists were compelled to provide programs and benefits to increasingly visible populations often scarred and under-served by the homophobic and transphobic state. And, at the same time, marginalized populations were often more organized around obtaining basic services for survival, especially for sexual health and social contact, than around obtaining legal rights and protections. For many impoverished members of Vancouver's LGBT communities in the 1970s, the human rights and workplace protections proposed for federal civil servants were not especially relevant because few of them expected to obtain such middle-class jobs and benefits.

The initial conduit for federal government support for sexual minorities was SEARCH. Organized in late 1974, the Society for Education, Action, Research and Counselling on Homosexuality was a response to city police efforts to close several gay bars. In 1975, SEARCH was one of the first of the new LGBT groups to incorporate as a society. A significant portion of SEARCH's early clients were male sex workers.[13] In subsequent years, the organization allied with, and eventually was absorbed by, the Vancouver Gay Community Centre (VGCC). In the mid-1970s, SEARCH established the West Coast's first gay switch-board, which provided information and peer counselling. The downtown SEARCH office soon housed a gay resources library and bulletin boards for employment and housing. SEARCH operated and staffed a clinic for sexually transmitted diseases and another for counselling. It responded to and was organized around providing services for the most marginalized, and, compared to more confrontational organizations such as GATE, it was "much more focused on the bars and helping street people, hustlers, etc."[14] By 1986, SEARCH was fully absorbed into VGCC, and the entire organization was renamed "Qmunity" in 2009 as it continues to be the province's major LGBT service organization.[15]

Basford's legacy remains enigmatic with regard to the formation of Canadian LGBT politics and the development of services programs. The political calculus in Vancouver Centre was focused on a trade-off between little expansion of rights in the 1970s and minimal levels of funding for portions of a fractured voting group that was coping with the worst impacts of homophobia and transphobia, along with the marginalization of youth. The small amount of federal funding for LGBT organizations in Vancouver clearly excluded the involvement of NDP-allied advocacy groups such as GATE. If there is a single reason for the two decades of political longevity of Vancouver-Centre MP Hedy Fry, briefly the minister of state for women in the Chretien cabinet, it is the four decades of tying the bulk of federal funding of LGBT social programs to accommodations with, and benefits from, government agencies led by the federal Liberal Party.

AIDS Activism: Organizing and Providing Services during a Crisis

With the AIDS pandemic, much of LGBT activism in Vancouver began to bridge struggles for equal treatment and protections, the rights of vulnerable groups to urgently needed resources (including nutrition and housing), and the need for public health policy to extend to access to medicines and treatments. The region's first AIDS services organization, AIDS Vancouver, was formed in 1984. As AIDS infections on the West Coast soared (Rayside and Lindquist 1993, 55–57), there was inertia in Mulroney's federal Progressive Conservative cabinet and hostility from the provincial government. These were the last years of the nearly continuous four-decade rule of British Columbia's ultra-conservative Social Credit Party. To avoid being seen by fundamentalist Christian groups as engaging with and supporting LGBT groups, provincial agencies moved modest amounts of federal funding, ear-marked for medical care, through organizations such as AIDS Vancouver. But this collaborationist strategy could not keep pace with needs for basic services.

The south-east edge of Vancouver's Downtown, on the edge of gentrifying Yaletown, the early gay entertainment area from the 1960s and the major historic location of most of the region's gay bathhouses, became British Columbia's major site for the first AIDS service programs. The neighbourhood became an interzone for provision of care, with government funding a step removed from the malevolent state. Not coincidentally, the neighbourhood's bathhouses stayed open and became major testing-grounds for providing sex-positive information on HIV prevention (Bolan 1987).

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

The limits to collaborating with a hostile provincial government became clear with the passage of the Health Statues Amendment Act. "Bill 34" was intended to provide the basis for putting into quarantine individuals with HIV. The bill conflated sexually active gay men with HIV transmission and saw them as threats to public health. Social Credit Party politicians not-so-privately called for "a special ghetto" in Vancouver and the use of a former leper colony for quarantine (Baldrey 1994). The legislation was first tabled in 1987 and met with tremendous resistance. There was additional concern that health status and treatment information would be made available throughout and beyond the provincial government (Baldrey 1987; Canadian Press 1987). Resistance to enactment of the legislation became the focus of the early August Lesbian and Gay Pride March as well as demonstrations on 26 September 1987 (Pollak 1987) and 2 December 1987 (Flather 1987). The civil disobedience before and as the bill was passed in December 1987 prefigured the tactics of ACT UP Vancouver by two years. For five years, the provincial government effectively blocked new housing for people with AIDS as shortages intensified (Monk 1990; Myers 1986). Finally, in 1991, the government supported Helmcken House in Vancouver's Downtown South, which provided only thirty-two units.

ACT UP Vancouver formed in response to the failure of the collaborations and the provincial government's refusal to fund expensive anti-retroviral medications such as AZT (Persky 1989, 181). ACT UP Vancouver was the first LGBT coalition in British Columbia *not* dominated by white middle-class males, and it was in marked contrast to the early leadership of the AIDS service groups that obtained provincial funds (Buttle 1990). The participation of women in ACT UP Vancouver expanded from caregivers, as had been the case in previous AIDS service organizations, to leadership, especially as female groups were increasingly afflicted by HIV (Marin 1992). On 11 July 1990, the first meeting of ACT UP Vancouver was announced in a full-page article in the *Vancouver Sun* (Shariff 1990). On 23 August 1990, ACT UP Vancouver held a demonstration in front of a fundraiser for the Social Credit Party of British Columbia (Buttle 1990) as that party was struggling to prepare for the upcoming provincial elections, which it would lose – a public repudiation that would be that party's death knell. Fifty activists confronted the homophobic premier of British Columbia, Bill Vander Zalm, at an opening performance of Hugo's *Les Misérables*. The event became legendary because of accusations that several activists, notably John Kozachenko, spat on the premier (McIntyre 1990).

The *Les Misérables* episode marked the coalescence of queer nationalism in the weeks after the Gay Games in Vancouver (a series of events that transformed

public spaces in the city) and just before Queer Nation's skirmishes around the ejection of two women kissing each other at Joe's Café on Commercial Drive. Later in 1990, there were demonstrations at the constituency offices of the provincial minister of health (Vancouver Sun 1990). There were several more actions, less publicized, in 1991, but ACT UP Vancouver soon saw most of its demands met. In the autumn of 1991, Michael Harcourt's NDP provincial government was elected and quickly fulfilled campaign promises for increased levels of funding for HIV education, health care, and social welfare benefits for people living with AIDS. This new support for people with AIDS and HIV did not make ACT UP Vancouver entirely redundant. But most of the activists involved soon had other preoccupations as the new options for treatment took more and more of their time. The last ACT UP Vancouver demonstration was on 1 December 1991, International AIDS Day, and it "protested mandatory testing of health care workers and the lack of access to new drugs to battle HIV"(West Ender 1991).

Diversification, Diffusion, and Institutionalization
of LGBT Activism and Public Policy

After the first decades of LGBT organizations, businesses, and cultural institutions, most of the earlier "strategic sites" (Ingram 1997) and spaces in central Vancouver, so important for surviving the criminalization and early decriminalization periods, were gone. Those early establishments and services transformed communities, giving rise to pressures and opportunities for new constellations of entertainment and social spots, along with better meeting places and facilities. As more rights and protections came into place, governments were effectively required, by public pressure and laws, to provide and manage additional and better services. These developments made some early programs offered by LGBT organizations less important and, eventually, redundant. Similarly, the strategic roles of the neighbourhoods of the 1950s and 1960s – Vancouver's Downtown South (with its early gay bars) and the butch/femme spaces along Main Street's Skid Road – were usurped in the 1970s and 1980s by the West End and Commercial Drive, respectively. And today, the roles and relative importance of these enclaves are shifting again.

Few of the older LGBT organizational models, going back to ASK, have disappeared – especially for suburban communities and outlying cities. The building of the AIDS organizations signalled a further institutionalization of LGBT non-governmental organizations, extending to life support, with

increasing compromises with government actors. But many personal and collective projects, involving just a few individuals or small memberships, continue and proliferate. A raft of services for youth, elders, families, and, most recently, to educate about and to counter bullying have reiterated those early service models pioneered by ASK and SEARCH.

Social networking has changed the organizational calculus for both small and large organizations. Two examples of new organizations with primary operations grounded in digital transmission and interactions are Our City of Colours and Cancer's Margins. Our City of Colours presents imagery of "different linguistic and cultural communities" providing information and imagery across digital appliances.[16] Similarly, Cancer's Margins: LGBT Community and Arts Project provides information and support across a diversifying set of venues.[17] Both organizations operate as much, perhaps more so, in the suburbs than in central Vancouver.

How can we imagine new policy goals, programs, and spaces based on and increasingly diverging from a half century of organizational models and modes of redistribution of social resources? How can badly needed LGBT infrastructure for suburban communities be envisioned and established in a time when sexual minorities have new opportunities and fewer constraints? The recent discussion around Qmunity (see above) highlights local difficulties in shifting from a politics preoccupied with rights and protection advocacy to a politics more linked to service provision for an increasingly diverse but fragmentary array of LGBT populations. To envision functional organizational models for the future, we can revisit the modes of organizational and spatial development that successfully confronted homophobia/transphobia (and its intersections with misogyny, neocolonialism, racism, cultural chauvinism, and xenophobia) but that have been less effective at appropriating badly needed funding.

1 **Small projects** involving one or a few individuals, such as the BC Lesbian and Gay Archives,[18] are centred on public conversations, such as the need to safeguard historical material and to make it available. Policy goals are operational, such as secure storage, adequate cataloguing, and a secure facility. Funding for this organizational model is limited, personalized, and based on volunteer work and private funding. There is no formal governance and accountability. Spatial allocation is limited to homes and temporary meeting rooms.

2 **Political collectives** are in their fifth decade of providing crucial supports to LGBT populations on the West Coast because their mode of operation is

cheap and flexible. One of the longest surviving collectives was that behind Vancouver's monthly LGBT newspaper *Angles,* which operated from the 1980s to the 1990s. Policy goals are simple and often partisan. Much of the work is carried out by volunteers, and funding is often obtained through memberships and sales. Growth and service provision is often constrained by the difficulty of obtaining non-profit society status, which would qualify groups for foundation and government funding. Modes of governance are more often informal, with modest documentation and little accountability other than to memberships.

3 **Service organizations with memberships**, such as ASK, have been based around high-profile public conversations responding to problems and unmet needs. Largely member-funded, some of these organizations have stabilized and become legally recognized societies with boards administering grants from government agencies and foundations. Much of the work is still undertaken by volunteers with some paid staff. Modes of governance range from well-documented collective decision making to elected boards with appointed officers. Accountability ranges from legal frameworks, such as under the British Columbia Society Act, to ethics, and individual ambitions are linked to generating prestige for board members and officers. Spaces and facilities are rented and are rarely permanent or purpose-built.

4 **Small businesses**, such as Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium (for more details on Little Sister's, see Chapter 10, this volume), provide goods and services to LGBT populations while trying to stay in business. In the case of Little Sister's, this business weathered several terrorist bombings in the 1980s. One of the overriding objectives is to pay staff and bills while building some owner equity. Staff members often agree to be under-paid and to forego benefits. Some businesses have been activist and exceptionally altruistic (e.g., Little Sister's challenge to Customs Canada policy in cooperation with the BC Civil Liberties Union).

5 **Grassroots advocacy organizations**, like ACT UP Vancouver, challenged institutional obstacles through policy solutions (e.g., providing anti-retroviral medications). Modes of governance are simple but responsive to immediate issues through regular meetings, combined telephone trees, and, more often, social media. Largely accountable through the laws governing the use of public space, ACT UP Vancouver, which focused on public challenges, was not actually involved with unlawful acts and was never charged with criminality.

6 **Service organizations with linked programs**, such as Vancouver's monthly *Xtra! West,* often function to provide information and to generate public

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

conversations. Policy goals centre on generating interest through information and discussion to, in turn, maintain readership and advertisers as part of ensuring fiscal viability. Funding strategies can be complex, as with *Xtra! West,* which depends on a corporate entity, Pink Triangle Press, which generates additional income in other parts of Canada. Staff members often work for more standard remuneration packages but with limited prospects for long-term employment and promotions. The mode of governance is complex, with a local editorial group under a mandate from Pink Triangle Press in Toronto. Accountability is through advertiser and reader feedback and the parent organization in central Canada.

7 **Service organizations with numerous programs**, such as Qmunity, reflect multiple convergences of public conversations focused on underserved LGBT populations, especially for mental health,[19] and project-specific collaborations with politicians, agencies, and foundations. The policy goals of such larger organizations are complex, shifting, and linked directly to partisan political and related funding climates. The overall budget is derived from support from multiple sources, involving asymmetrical "collaborations and partnerships."[20] Core funding from more dependable partners is still tenuous. Staff members often expect relatively standard remuneration packages, and Qmunity has collective bargaining agreements. As well as paid stuff, volunteers remain crucial (e.g., the centre's Gay and Lesbian Legal Clinic in the 1990s, which relied on pro bono lawyers).[21] With multiple sources of funds, the modes of organizational governance and accountability are complex. A single board relies on advisory groups, staff, and consultants. Accountability mechanisms are complex, spanning formal program evaluations and audits as well as less public feedback from politicians, government administrators, board members, and clients.

8 **Collaborative government programs with limited accountability to LGBT stakeholders**, such as Vancouver's succession of community liaison programs with law enforcement agencies, have been infrequent and volatile in the Lower Mainland. Such largely politicized initiatives are based on high-profile public conversations, such as those around homophobic and transphobic violence. Typically, government agencies are motivated by a desire to garner more public trust and electoral favour. Policy goals have been linked, in no small part, to media coverage. A range of shifting actors includes government agencies, politicians, political parties, and non-governmental organizations. Funding comes from municipal, provincial, and federal agencies. Modes of governance are complex and only partially

transparent. Accommodation with public agencies on the part of LGBT organizations can be problematic in that it provides increased credibility to public agencies while generating limited results for vulnerable populations. Accountability can span various advisory boards, administrators, and politicians.

Over a half century, the modes of organizational development described above have been combined and reconfigured in scores of ways supporting hundreds of social spaces and service provision teams. But new models and configurations are necessary in order to overcome chronic service gaps. Barriers to program development and funding persist. Consider, for example, the comments of Jennifer Breakspear, the director of Qmunity from 2008 to 2012:

> An issue that demanded a lot of my time was homophobic and transphobic violence and I lobbied hard for funding from the Province for a queer community victim services worker. While the notion received considerable attention in the media and support from at least two Solicitors General (who were both shuffled out of that role before their support could result in funds) it failed to get traction within the provincial government overall.[22]

After decades of public education on homophobia and transphobic violence, the province of British Columbia still insists that its general victim services, staffed by professionals who are not particularly focused on responding to LGBT experiences and needs, remains sufficient.

Conclusion

LGBT sexualities, subcultures, identities, and communities are not simply defined by desires and aspirations for full rights but also by networks of vulnerability, need, and mutual support. Queer organizational and spatial politics remains an under-investigated and poorly theorized field in Canada. As this discussion of BC's Lower Mainland makes evident, a framework for allocating social services and space to LGBT populations has been insufficiently expanded and only partially queered and decolonized.

This chapter examines the development of the organizations, spaces, and facilities for metropolitan Vancouver's LGBT populations as a kind of infrastructure. The myriad decisions around the development of organizations,

businesses, service development, and spaces in metropolitan regions have too often relied on poorly nuanced understandings of the synergies between political economies, activism, service allocation, and community development. LGBT activism increasingly operates within an expanding range of policy arenas at federal, provincial, metropolitan, and municipal levels, along with non-governmental organizations and commercial interests. Within this broad set of actors, there continue to be disparities between political and organizational rhetoric, operational goals, written agreements, budgets, and implementation, on the one hand, and funding and administrative support for services to LGBT populations, on the other.

In this chapter, I sketch a framework within which it is possible to inventory synergies, spaces, and benefits spanning activism, policy making, program development, and implementation often conceived through grassroots activism but with subsequent support, funding, and accountability spread across several levels of government, other civil society institutions, and economic actors. Vancouver's LGBT infrastructure gestated under criminalization-era heroism, through ASK, and was then co-opted through the quasi-Keynesianism of the cabinets of Pierre Trudeau's Liberal governments. With globalization and the consequent increasing disparities of wealth in Canadian cities, especially as related to housing costs, some West Coast sexual minorities are again experiencing greater vulnerability (Ingram 2012, 67–76). Over the past decade of neoliberal policies, Vancouver's early modes of garnering social resources for LGBT populations have been eroded and have become increasingly inadequate for dealing with persistent violence and poverty (along with new vulnerabilities). While the extent of the impacts of a range of neoliberal policies on sexual minorities over the last decade and a half is a topic for additional research, what remains most lacking is a "queered" notion of gap analysis vis-à-vis current social programs and the collective imagination to conceive of and to organize new initiatives. These historical and contemporary experiences of numerous LGBT populations, especially those marked by 'minority' race and language status, in not having access to basic social infrastructure, related to being sexual minorities, have barely been acknowledged and may well warrant new expressions of anger and subsequent reconciliation. As LGBT communities diversify and diffuse throughout the metropolitan region, new initiatives to serve the most marginal and vulnerable will require more careful and innovative research, project design, and advocacy, along with a second half-century of grassroots activism.

Building Queer Infrastructure

Epilogue

In December 2013, Qmunity – British Columbia's major centre for LGBT services – was allocated a $7 million payment from developers, brokered by the City of Vancouver, in order to finally develop a purpose-built centre. The nature and amount of that funding, triggered by the approval of two huge towers that will transform and largely destroy the old "gay village," differed profoundly from the tiny grants of the past four decades. Not coincidentally, a new LGBT community politics has swiftly emerged, centred on issues of locale, space, facilities design, and service delivery.

Notes

1 "The trans community is still in dire need of attention, resources, and services." Personal communication with Jennifer Breakspear, 30 November 2012.
2 Personal communication with Cornelia Wyngaarden (an early member of ASK) in 1998 and 2013.
3 I have read every ASK Newsletter published.
4 Don Hann (a GATE member from 1973 to 1979 and present at the 1973 demonstration in Victoria), personal communication in 1999 and 2013.
5 Personal communication with Dorothy-Jean O'Donnell, 17 February 2013.
6 The scant written record of early Two-Spirit activism in Vancouver, often involving small networks, includes an announcement in the late 1991 issue of the local lesbian journal, *Diversity*, for the upcoming 1992 Native Gay and Lesbian Spiritual Gathering hosted by the Vancouver Two-Spirited Society and a 1995 handout for a "Two Spirited Group" meeting weekly at the Gathering Place on Helmcken Street. Personal communication with Ron Dutton, British Columbia Gay and Lesbian Archives, Vancouver, 18 October 2013 (e-mail message on file).
7 Personal communication with Jennifer Breakspear, 30 November 2012.
8 Personal communication with Ron Dutton, 25 September 2012.
9 Personal communication with Michael Morris (co-founder of the Western Front), 18 January 2013.
10 Personal communication with Lai Wan, 19 October 2012.
11 During the second and third year (1974 and 1975) of the short-lived Barrett government, I was a teenaged university student research intern for the New Democratic Party Caucus in the BC legislature.
12 Morris noted that the early non-commercial culture organizations, including those that were vaguely LGBT-friendly, formed in the 1970s and nearly always existed because of funding through federal Local Initiatives Projects (LIP) grants "because the federal Liberals were terrified of revolution spreading from Quebec." Personal communication with Michael Morris, 18 January 2013.

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram

13 "Vancouver [in the 1970s] had a very large hustling scene compared to [Montreal and Toronto, the] other cities I knew… a widely indulged scene of gay commercial sex workers." Personal communication with Cass (Frank) Brayton, 8 November 2012.

14 Ibid.

15 Personal communication with Jennifer Breakspear, 30 November 2012.

16 Our City of Colours was founded in March 2011 with a Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/ourcityofcolours/info.

17 Cancer's Margins was formed in 2012 with the leadership of University of British Columbia Faculty of Education professor Mary Bryson. http://www.lgbtcancer.ca/ and https://www.facebook.com/CancersMargins?ref=ts&fref=ts.

18 Personal communication with Ron Dutton, 25 September 2012.

19 Personal communication with Jennifer Breakspear, 30 November 2012.

20 Ibid.

21 Personal communication with Dorothy-Jean O'Donnell, 27 November 2012.

22 Personal communication with Jennifer Breakspear, 30 November 2012.

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CORRECTIONS

This PDF is a galley draft and the following corrections have been requested for the published book.

page 231, line 23.
There is an unnecessary space between "advertisements" and the following period.

page 246
footnote 10
'Lai Wan' should be 'Laiwan'.

page 246
endnote 12
"12 Morris noted that the early non-commercial culture organizations, including those that were vaguely LGBT-friendly, formed in the 1970s and nearly always existed because of funding through federal Local Initiatives Projects (LIP) grants "because the federal Liberals were terrified of revolution spreading from Quebec." Personal communication with Michael Morris, 18 January 2013."
should be corrected to
"12 Celebrated Vancouver and Berlin-based artist Michael Morris, an 'out' co-founder of the Western Front artist centre in the 1970s, has noted that the early artist-run cultural organizations in British Columbia, including those that pioneered in being LGBT-friendly, were formed through crucial seed-funding from Local Initiatives Projects (LIP) grants (all of which had some scrutiny by federal Liberal politicians and appointees) "because the federal Liberals were terrified of revolution spreading from Quebec." Personal communication with Michael Morris, 18 January 2013."