

Embodying the Local and the Transnational: A Critical Review of  
Approaches to Gender and Social Infrastructure

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Paper prepared for presentation at the Canadian Political Science Association  
meetings, Edmonton, June 2012

## **Introduction:**

As economic development in Northern Canada begins to reshape regional economies engaged in oil sands, mining and hydro-electric development projects, many communities are being fundamentally transformed without the necessary supports to ensure that economic growth will result in equitable development, sustainability and the full participation of women, in particular. These latest developments are just the most recent in a raft of restructuring that is altering much of the Canadian landscape. In response, and in particular through federal programs to mitigate the 2008 financial crisis, investment in infrastructure has become a key policy tool.

This paper reviews a range of literature in an effort to reflect on the different ways in which social infrastructure is seen, especially from a gendered and intersectional perspective. We seek to apply a northern lens to this enquiry. If the main focus of Northern development is on production, what is happening to social reproduction? What are the implications of maintaining the distinction between physical and social infrastructure? Why do some prioritize social capital as an approach to infrastructure provision, while others maintain a focus on the state and public provision? Does social infrastructure tend to imply social services for the needy or public services for all? What are the implications of a political economy approach versus a social capital approach, and what potential impact does this have on the political demands made in support of the diverse needs of women with disabilities, migrant women, Aboriginal women, or women who are working class, immigrants, LGBT, racialized, young or older?

## **FemNorthNet**

These questions arise out of the work of FemNorthNet which was created with the successful application by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) and the University of Manitoba to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Foundation (SSHRC) Community-University

Research Alliance (CURA) granting program. The five-year project began in 2010. The project was conceived as a way to increase knowledge about the experience of women in Canada's North in light of both the persistence of long-standing social and economic injustices, especially those confronting Aboriginal populations, together with rapid economic restructuring in mining and other forms of northern resource extraction. There are three communities involved in the project, including La Loche Saskatchewan; Thompson Manitoba; and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador. The project involves the examination of four cross-cutting themes – community infrastructure and economic development; community engagement and governance; community inclusions and exclusions; and migration, immigration and mobility.

FemNorthNet includes university researchers from six Canadian universities across the country, and eight community organizations with either a local or a national perspective. The network aims to bring an intersectional analysis to this work by reflecting the diverse experiences of women including:

Aboriginal women in the North, racialized women (in particular recent immigrants and those with temporary work permits), women with disabilities (diverse disabilities, including those acquired as a result of the transitions), women working in the home and outside it, women living below the poverty line, single women and those with children, as well as women of various ages and from different language groups.

Our work on community infrastructure and economic development is part of the effort to:

provoke the broader discussion on economic restructuring and healthy communities. Tough questions about social infrastructure and social issues like poverty, violence, and housing have to be asked. And answers must include and involve women.

This paper forms part of the work of the community infrastructure and economic

development theme which we share the responsibilities as community/university co-leads. Together with Jane Robinson Jane Robinson, of the Bay St. George Status of Women Council, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Judy White, University of Regina From the CRIAW –CURA application:

This team will examine the priority infrastructure issues identified by our community partners - childcare, housing and physical infrastructure such as water and sewage or schools. They will lead the development of a new wholistic, gendered perspective on infrastructure that bridges the false division of social and economic infrastructure to see them as integrally related. From this perspective, childcare, for example, is seen as a necessary part of economic growth and development to attract and retain a growing labour force, not a fiscal drain.

As a first step towards developing this wholistic perspective, we have decided first to clarify for ourselves, the key debates on “ways of seeing” social infrastructure in order to ascertain the political and policy implications flowing from them.

### **Approaches to Gender and Social Infrastructure**

Usually we think of infrastructure as the underlying productive apparatus that makes our society function. As Steve Pomeroy describes it, “Infrastructure is the platform or conduit for other functions”(Pomeroy, 2007, p. 2). It is a resource that generates value in the market and also creates public goods that benefit everyone. Some definitions of infrastructure stress ‘bricks and mortar’, and are almost exclusively defined as “hard” infrastructure. Other definitions of infrastructure stress the importance of ‘social relations” or ‘human capital’, and are considered “soft”. Traditional definitions stress objective, external, physical entities while others stress the importance of social relationships, networks, and norms of reciprocity and the development of human capital (Pomeroy, 2007). Both are gendered by the

separations governing divisions between production and social reproduction as they are reproduced in the labour market, and by the politics of neoliberalism that continue to redefine the role and spatial relations of the state.

We are interested in the contested character of these definitions. In Canada, economic crisis and ongoing restructuring, increasing inequality and the rescaling of economic activity has created new political dynamics in the country. Labour markets as well as public services and social programs are being reshaped. Women continue to participate in the labour force in high numbers, yet their ability to gain access to important programs such as Employment Insurance is markedly less than men's. Mobility issues are on the rise. Women are arriving as temporary foreign workers to work in areas where there is an apparent labour shortage, but good jobs for women are scarce even in these regions and structural unemployment remains high for women in northern communities. Meanwhile, municipalities are asked to take on greater responsibilities even when have a very limited revenue stream and few resources to do so. Given this context, we are curious about the meaning of the debate over infrastructure, social capital and social infrastructure and what this contested terrain signifies, and why we are talking about the social provision in the language of infrastructure at all.

### **The Politics of Federal Infrastructure Financing**

As the U.S. 2008 financial crisis was well on its way to becoming a global catastrophe, the Canadian government immediately allocated \$75 billion to purchase mortgages held by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in order to protect the financial sector (Canada, 2009), but refused to accept the International Monetary Fund's urging to allocate 2% of GDP in stimulus spending to maintain demand and avoid recession (Stanford, 2009). This refusal caused a major political crisis in the country resulting in a formal alliance between the Liberals and the NDP with enough seats to establish the government. However, before the Conservatives faced a vote of non-confidence in the House, Prime Minister Harper succeeded in asking the Governor-General to prorogue Parliament until early in 2009 when the budget was introduced. In the end, the 2009 Budget did contain

stimulus spending, but critics pointed out that this represented only 1.1% of GDP and even when contributions from other levels of government were added in, it was much less than the 2% of GDP governments were being called on to commit by international financial institutions, and the 4.0% demanded by Canadian civil society groups (CCPA, 2009).

The federal infrastructure stimulus program involved a three year \$18.5 billion expenditure in federal funds in a cost-share basis with provinces/territories and municipalities. These funds were set aside for spending related to water, wastewater, transit, roads, culture, parks and trails, and a very few community services. The government estimated that infrastructure spending had maintained or added 82,000 jobs by December 2010 (Annex, Table A4, Canada, 2011, p. 152). The program allocated what amounted to \$45 billion in federal stimulus spending over three years; \$6.2 billion of which was dedicated to tax cuts (Table A2-2 Canada, 2012c, p. 290). Women's organizations pointed out that by choosing to focus on the physical infrastructure needs of the country, the government excluded support for sectors in which women work. The national child care crisis was studiously ignored, as were the need for social services and other areas of social reproduction such as housing (Equality, 2009).

Investment in social infrastructure is one way to recognize that both women and men have been affected by the crisis as well as economic restructuring. In the Canadian case, however, federal funds went disproportionately to fund physical infrastructure construction projects disproportionately privileging construction and the trades which are highly masculinized sectors where very few women work. No gender equity requirements were included in the infrastructure spending programs and none was allocated to child care facilities (Lahey, 2009).

The political decision to define infrastructure so narrowly continues the "recoding" of the public and private that has been carried out in the neoliberal period. As Brodie explained some years ago, aspects of social provisioning were said to be "'re-privatized' to the market or the home, thereby creating the illusion that they are being returned to some place they naturally belong." In addition, "re-commodification" rests on the claim that public services and assets are best

delivered through market forces. She identified the “reconstitution of the domestic” which rests on claims about the role of the family, or rather women, in taking on a greater role in care work, and the reregulation and surveillance of those who would make claims on the state (Brodie, 2008, pp. 389-390). To this we can add the spatial restructuring or the ‘re-scaling’ of social reproduction to spaces other than those specifically bounded by the nation state (Keil, 2009). As Mahon argues, there have always been hierarchical, inter-scalar funding relations governing social policy in Canada, but the neoliberal rescaling of child care services gave provinces a great deal of leeway in the development of their programs, without ensuring a role for municipalities. In this context, networks of local actors may be to promote equality in child care provision where there is “a ‘social democratic’ policy regime operating at the national/provincial scale is supplemented by institutions of democratic control at the neighbourhood level and by a planning structure capable of working towards equity at the municipal scale.” (Mahon, 2009, p. 226)

For northern communities this spatial-relational understanding of infrastructure is important, not just because of the history of centre-periphery relations within the context of the Canadian nation state, but also because of the global investors who are demanding access to northern energy and mining resources. As defined by Summers, “(e)conomic development is a continual process of opening new areas, spatially and sectorally, while closing others.” (Summers, 1984). The Canadian government is highly tuned to this dynamic. For Infrastructure Canada, “Canada must compete globally for investments and a skilled labour force. Investments in safe drinking water and access to cultural and recreation facilities are vital to building prosperous communities where people want to live.” (Canada, 2012a, p. 8). Here, infrastructure is not meant to be created in response to the needs of the local people, or the community in which, or through which it is placed. The Government of Canada’s infrastructure priorities are externally driven and locate communities in a globalized, competitive space demanding the opening up new territories for the commodification of natural resources and capital accumulation. In addition, the government is clear that the government wishes to reprivatize public infrastructure. On June 1, 2012, Denis

Lebel, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, announced that a new long-term plan for public infrastructure would be guided by the priorities of the private sector:

The new plan will focus on investments that support long-term economic growth and prosperity, while encouraging greater private sector involvement and public-private partnerships to generate better value for taxpayers, and ensure affordability and sustainability over the long term.” (Canada, 2012b, pp. 81-82)

In this government’s view, public funding is the means to support private delivery.

### **Physical Infrastructure and Service Provision**

The traditional definition of infrastructure is best captured by Statistics Canada’s inclusion of roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water systems in “core public infrastructure”(Canada, 2012a, p. 6). Harchaoui, Tarkhani and Warren suggested that for Statistics Canada, public infrastructure may be thought of as “categories of assets that ultimately reflect the variety of ‘services’ provided”. (Harchaoui, Tarek M.; Tarkhani, Faouzi; and Warren, Paul. “Public Infrastructure in Canada” [prepared by Statistics Canada for Infrastructure Canada, May 28, 2003] as quoted in Pomeroy, 2007, p. 3). Even in this narrow understanding as infrastructure as a physical asset, a broader set of assets could exist outside of “core public infrastructure”, including other forms of municipal assets such as libraries, child care centres, museums, recreation centres and homes for the aged.

If we look at infrastructure in this way, we see an array of physical resources representing a social inheritance. These are public testaments within the built environment to the collective decisions societies have made, or have had imposed upon them. They are sites of struggle over the meaning of access and inclusion in a liberal-democratic society and these meanings are not fixed. For example, disability rights activists have long struggled for the design of public buildings to embody the principles of “universal design” which would give greater access and ease of use, not just for people with disabilities, but for everyone. Where sidewalk curbs once denied people in wheelchairs their mobility rights, “curb cuts” now allow the whole

population to move more freely within the urban environment (Stienstra, 2012, pp. 81-82). This is a relatively simple change, but one which embodies a history of political contestation. In the north, railways, roads, ice roads and airports have been and continue to be sites of contested development. Northern transportation infrastructure first set down the physical infrastructure of colonialism, disrupted traditional Aboriginal social relations and practices, and provided the means for the massive extraction of natural resources. These physical entities were the means by which Aboriginal- settler social relations were created and transformed in terms of space and power. As Northern municipalities were created as transportation and productive hubs for surrounding territories, subsequent struggles emerged over the inadequacies in the provision of infrastructure, who was meant to use these resources; whether ownership would be public or private; control over decision-making; and whether or not the physical infrastructure would be abandoned, left to decay or renewed (Ross, 2011). From a gendered perspective, we must ask whether and how the diverse needs of women are reflected in the design, location, substance and adequacy of the physical infrastructure of northern communities (FemNorthNet, 2012).

In addition, we must remember that physical infrastructure assets are by definition linked to some kind of service provision. Because the Conservative government had decided that infrastructure funds would not cover ongoing operating costs, the definition of “infrastructure” did not include support for social programs or services, beyond the \$1.8 billion over three years in training delivered through the EI program. These are false dichotomies, however, since the physical asset must be tended to and municipal capital budgets are accompanied by operating budgets to pay for service delivery and upkeep. For example, roads must be maintained and cleared of snow and even road kill. Water pipes must be installed and the water they deliver must be clean. A municipal government provides residents with sewers instead of septic systems, but it must also have a waste water treatment facility with skilled workers to run it. Conversely, the provision of child care services requires a facility of some sort. A library needs a building. Recreation programming is delivered at a community centre. This linking of the physical asset

with the service provided may be a useful way of thinking about social infrastructure. For example, Zizys et al. sees social infrastructure as “those institutions which are the building blocks of civil society, the places where the community sector functions (community centres, meeting places), where there is support for organizations to form and grow and where social capital gets created.” (Zizys, Tom, Mitchell Kosny and Jennifer Bonnell. (2004). A Review of Social Planning Activities in the City of Toronto. Toronto: Community Neighbourhood Services Department of the City of Toronto as quoted in Rothman, 2005, p. 3)

We are reminded of Marx’ way of seeing a tools as the physical embodiment of workers’ collective skill and knowledge over time. Tools, for Marx were not objects, but “products of previous labour” (Marx, 1867). Similarly, physical infrastructure is in its very essence the manifestation of social conflict over ideas and decision-making, and the struggle to control resources. These community “assets” are by no means objectively constituted and they are inherently social simply by the fact of having been built with public money in order to create a public good, as well as being intertwined with the labour of those who would provide the service associated with the “asset”.

### **Social Infrastructure as Social Capital**

The concept of social capital rests on the idea that the groups that people form and the associations they make, create the shared meanings that have an impact on the organization of society and of individuals’ prospects within it. In other words, through our networks and social relations, our individual beliefs about the world we inhabit, our ways of doing things and our key values are shaped. Social capital is a concept linking the creation of these shared ideas to the ongoing re-creation of the economic sphere by means of collective action. Macinko offers a concise definition:

Through these networks, people share information, provide and receive support, and work together to achieve collective goals that could not be accomplished by an individual working in isolation”

(Macinko, 2001).

The concept of social capital has been embraced by many social scientists working on issues of community renewal, local economic development, as well as urban and rural studies and has gained political weight in policy circles during the neoliberal years.

The concept of social capital first gained prominence in the social sciences after the 1980 publication of Bourdieu's article on the subject in *Actes recherche science social* (Bourdieu, 1980). In making that point that power is not reducible to purely economic forms, Bourdieu argued that capital may be economic, cultural or social and that all three are symbolic. They are also convertible to one another and become powerful resources allowing one to exercise control over one's life and that of another (Bourdieu 1986:241 as cited in Schulman, 1999, p. 352). Moreover, capital does not stand alone. It is always situated in a larger context or "field".

Grenfell explains that in Bourdieu's view,:

Capital belongs to the field and it is the field that sets its value, but it is individuals who possess it. Although open to all, its distribution is by definition unequal – it would not perform its functional logic if it were not" (Grenfell, 2009, p. 19) .

Bourdieu's research on cultural capital and education led him to this pessimistic understanding but others have come to quite different understandings.

For Robert Putnam, social capital refers to "features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (R.D. Putnam, 1995, p. 67). His optimistic view of the role of social capital is based on the results of a twenty year research project in Italy. Putnam concluded that a region's political and economic success depends upon its level of civic engagement leading to higher levels of trust, common norms and social networks and in turn, to improved governance and economic prosperity (R. D. Putnam, 1993). Putnam sees social capital as residing, not in individuals, but in regions or communities and he links it quite closely to demonstrated, measurable indicators of citizen participation in the collective life of the community.

Putnam's definition became widely popular in the 1990s and has had an

impact on the way in which policy innovations are seen at the local level. For example, for Sharp et al. social infrastructure is defined by the existence of active community organizations, businesses that support local community projects, community-wide fund-raising capacity, and extra-local linkages to peer communities and state government. They see the presence of social infrastructure in terms of social capital's measurable indicators: ie. levels of trust, norms of reciprocity, social linkages and networks, personal influence, voice and access to decision-makers (Sharp, 2002).

One of the inequalities of the neoliberal bargain insists that local communities take on greater responsibilities for their own economic and social well-being in exchange for more freedom for institutional design. The result is that municipalities have fewer resources than had been dedicated to these tasks historically. The neoliberal context of this devolution of state responsibilities is not lost on social capital theorists. Flora and Flora argue that communities must, however, mobilize social capital in order to facilitate collective action. To social capital, they add "entrepreneurial social infrastructure" (ESI)- a process encouraging constructive controversy within communities, the mobilization of resources including local private capital and local taxation, and the development of networks to link horizontally with others in similar situations, and vertically as sources of diverse experience and knowledge. For these authors, ESI adds to social capital the notions of equality, inclusion, and agency (C. B. a. F. Flora, J. L. , 1993).

This use of the concept is clearly a response to the deficiencies of neoliberalism as experienced at the local level. It tends to be a conservative response in which the role of the state and the provision of public services themselves is accepted as necessarily diminished. It is up to individuals within the community to become self-organized in the public sphere. In this Durkheimian view, economic behaviour is embedded in social structure and people make decisions, not as an accumulation of individually constituted rational actors, but as members of a social whole, located within the community (J. L. Flora, Sharp, J., Flora, C., and Newlon, B., 1997). Cattell also notes Durkheim's as well as de Tocqueville's concern with associational participation but also argues that one can see the

influence too of Owenite notions of cooperative communities, including in the workplace. Cattell is aware that social capital explanations may individualize or pathologize the poor themselves by encouraging public policies focussing on cultural, value-based or behavioural change, but she also sees potential in the concept to bring awareness to the need for access to resources. In other words, she considers the concept to play a mediating role in debates over structure and agency. Cattell's view is that stability, integration, solidarity and tolerance are sources of social capital potentially available to poor neighbourhoods that could become part of their regeneration. (Cattell, 2004).

There is a political aspect to local economic development that optimistic views of social capital cannot explain. Binns and Nel explore the efforts of a once-important coal-mining community in South Africa to shift towards tourism-led economic development. Support from the federal government led to the improvement in provision of social services, but not to employment. Neither were high levels of social capital, together with a legal mandate sufficient to assure "political cohesion, and the accomodation of diverse interest groups, including the traditional leaders" (Binns, 2003). While tensions and divisions within the community itself must be acknowledged, one wonders what sorts of political spaces are needed to address the conflicts facing communities with, among other challenges, high levels of unemployment.

Clearly, voluntary organizations and social capital alone cannot overcome the development problems faced by communities (Warner, 1999, p. 389). To suggest otherwise is to willfully ignore the role the state has played in creating the current problems faced by communities and to reject any possible alternative conceptions of the state and its potential to encourage democratic participation. Warner argues that in places with horizontal levels of social capital and democratic governance, government intervention can reinforce a positive synergy between state and society, which increases both. The inverse is also true, and public sector intervention in places with hierarchical social capital and weak democratic structures can diminish citizen involvement in service design and delivery. Warner's conclusion is that local government must see itself as the catalyst and facilitator, rather than acting as the

controller.

In the social capital literature, communities are places where capacity can be built and social capital created. Communities are never seen unfavourably. From an Australian Aboriginal point of view, however, the concept of “community” is highly problematic. The “very reason for existence” of these communities “...was the *extinguishment* of identify, culture, agency and even (through child-stealing), social existence.” (Morrissey, 2006, p. 237). In current policy discourse “communities” of Aboriginal people imply a forcible process of dispossession. The discourse of community building and social capital marks a departure from previous policies of overt racism, notes Morrissey, but it is still a vehicle for the management and control of ethnic and cultural difference. The fact that Aboriginal communities’ deficiencies or lack of capacity are seen as the problem, excludes issues of chronic underfunding and lack of structural autonomy from the political discussion. No matter the level of social capital within Aboriginal society, it does not have an impact on the structural inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies. “The problem, in short, is not that Aboriginal people lack human, social or cultural capital; but that, in relations of social and cultural subordination, none of them translates into financial capital.” ((Morrissey, 2006, p. 242) Instead, the Aboriginal people call for mutual recognition of governance structures, sharing of power and fiscal autonomy.

Thirty years on, the profound and ongoing restructuring of the global economy has had unmistakable impacts on the spatial relations of production and social reproduction and on the re-scaling of responsibilities between different levels of government (Keil, 2009) The impact on communities has been direct and many have had to juggle complicated sets of relations with other levels of government, and with potential private investors. For Crowe, the quality of the environment or “natural capital” may help recruit outside investment, but private investment itself does not have an impact on the self-development of a community. Based on a study of six communities in Washington State, Crow argues that it is the combination of a community’s natural and social capital which positively affects a community’s ability to recruit industry and self-develop. Crowe prefers the term “social infrastructure” to define the presence of active civic organizations, engaged local businesses and

community fundraising capacity, together with strong linkages with other communities and levels of government (Crowe, 2006). Whether industrial recruitment depends upon strong external ties, or the presence of natural capital, community self-development is strongly linked to the level of inclusiveness or internal solidarity.

There is the related question of why and how social capital is absent or declines within societies such as the United States. For Putnam, the “loosening of bonds with the family” may help explain the “social decapitalization” of the United States in the years since the 1960s. He notes the possible impact of the movement of women into the labour force and the sharp decline in women’s civic activism in the 1970s, but argues that this does not explain the decline in men’s participation ten years later. He then reflects on the possible impact of increasing mobility, demographic transformations, and the individualization of leisure time.

Apart from the possible circularity of the argument (ie that a region’s civic engagement depends upon its political and economic success), Putnam also betrays a rather optimistic view of a post-class society. He concludes that these dense networks are able to blur class divisions in the service of economic innovation. He mentions incidentally that “married middle-class parents are generally more socially involved than other people”, but this point is not developed, nor does it take on the appropriate analytical weight, especially in relation to the implications of the unequal distribution of social capital, and how and why this is the case. This remark certainly raises Bourdieu’s question of the relationship between social capital and other forms of capital, and the extent to which the norms of white, middle-class, heterosexual America are the ones actually in play here. For example, it is not surprising that traditional indicators of women’s civic engagement declined in the 1970s, but the intensity of second-wave feminist political activity could presumably also have been measured as well.

The critiques of the social capital approach to social infrastructure suggest that there is an inequality in the way social capital is distributed in society corresponding to the inequalities of other forms of capital accumulation. Where there are under-developed social networks, there are fewer resources for

marginalized individuals or communities. In Bourdieu's view, social capital is experienced by people in different ways, depending on where one is located in liberal capitalism. Szreter adds that the social power of the poor is more likely to be the bonding, rather than the bridging variety (Szreter, 2002, p. 577). For different reasons, elite networks do not extend beyond their class location and in Szreter's view civic engagement must include "linking social capital", bringing considerations of power, inequality and the role of the state to the centre of the theory. Thus, the role of the state cannot be ignored, especially when its role at the local level is evident in providing infrastructure as well as regulating and planning in support of economic development.

Similarly, for Schulman and Anderson, relationships and norms of how things should be done are grounded in social relations of domination and class power. These authors analyze the negative impact of paternalist social capital expressed in a Southern U.S. textile community where production and social relations were restructured during the 1980s-90s (Schulman, 1999). Efforts to create new forms of horizontal social power between workers through unionization drives were defeated by employers' symbolic appeals to the past. Schulman and Anderson make the point that the tragedy of this community was not that expressions of paternalistic social capital were destroyed, but that they lasted too long. In particular, "the ties that bind people together may also constrain and prevent alternative futures" (Schulman, 1999, p. 369).

### **Social Infrastructure as a complex of care**

According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, social infrastructure is: "the support system provided by municipal governments and made up of direct social services, such as affordable housing, emergency shelters and subsidized childcare, as well as public services like transit, recreation and libraries."

(Municipalities, 2010, p. 2) At the local level "social infrastructure" is the complex of municipal facilities, programs and services that are required as a result of the rescaling of the Canadian state social safety net. For the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, this involves a local response and a certain amount of burdensome

“patching” to make up for the downloading of services to local governments, as well as the under-funding of public services by other levels of government. “For a growing number of Canadians, their city is their safety net” . (Municipalities, 2010, p. i) Thus, for the FCM, social infrastructure includes both direct social services for the needy and public services for all that together form the social infrastructure that “fills the gap” left by other levels of government.

The FCM reports that the three fastest growing elements of municipalities budgets are in areas where other governments have off-loaded their responsibilities. These include housing, health and social services. Municipalities collect only \$0.08 of every tax dollar and the municipal infrastructure deficit, which was pegged at \$123 billion in 2007, continues to grow despite the impact of recent stimulus funds flowing from the federal government (Chapter 1, Municipalities, 2012, p. 3). The FCM notes that it is a remnant of colonialism that local governments receive 95% of their revenues from property-taxes.

Social infrastructure is not addressed by Infrastructure Canada, but is the purview of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) where labour market issues are dealt with. HRSDC considers the voluntary sector to be key to social infrastructure and supports capacity-building in this sector so as to improve their innovation, collaboration and networks. Here, social infrastructure is related to social services innovation in addressing social problems, building organizational capacity, sharing best practices and involving new partners. (Canada, 2012d).

The clearest definition we have come across generated by the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) as “system of social services, networks and facilities that support people and healthy communities. Social infrastructure is essential to ensuring every person the opportunity to contribute to a progressive society in a meaningful way.” (Talon, 2005). In the UK, the Bedfordshire and Luton Voluntary and Community Sector have a similar definition which includes “the range of activities, organisations and facilities supporting the formation, development and maintenance of social relationships in a community”. In particular it includes:

the provision of community facilities (e.g. community centres); community development (paid and unpaid); local networks, community groups and organisations (e.g. residents associations, mother and baby groups, specialists in mental health); small scale funding to help fund local projects; personal learning and skills development to help develop community leadership; and volunteering (both formally and informally). (Sector, 2011)

In this view, the public sector and broader public sector plays a large role, together with the voluntary sector at the local or municipal level. A similar view is shared by the Good Jobs for All – Community Labour Coalition of Toronto:

Social Infrastructure” includes the range of ‘public goods’ – education, child care, community social services, and health care, among others – that individuals need to be happy and to reach their full potential. It is both ‘hard’ infrastructure – schools, community centres, hospitals, public housing – and ‘soft’ infrastructure – the actual delivery of services like child care, education, recreation, settlement and health care.

Social infrastructure is seen to reside in the public sector expressed as both facilities and service provision. In the words of the Coalition, “From health care to education, refugee programs to libraries; public services like these form the social foundation of a livable and equitable Toronto.” (Coalition, 2009).

Over the past decade or more, the exploration and development of northern energy and mining resources has grown exponentially and without the local infrastructure that would enable northern and aboriginal communities to take into consideration the diverse needs of their populations and long-term sustainable development (Voutier, 2008). Some of these needs are rooted in long-standing histories of mal-development, neglect and other effects of colonialism. Some are newly driven by the effect of rapidly restructured environments and local economies, and with the contradictory construction of “labour shortages” and migrant labour, along with the structural unemployment of the local population. Where such dynamics have been observed in the development literature, local women and men have been subordinated to a globalised hegemonic masculinity that privileges employment for skilled white men while ignoring the reproduction of

gendered and racialized hierarchies within the development project (Braun, 2011). In a context of social crisis such as that which occurred in the United States after Hurricane Katrina, it was the social as well as the physical infrastructure that required rebuilding. Katz defines social infrastructure broadly as “elements of the social wage” and includes within it, concepts of the environment and relief infrastructure, health care, education, housing, and social justice (Katz, 2008).

Given the demands of a modern economy, Pomeroy et al argue that it is not helpful to distinguish between physical and social infrastructure. Both are necessary for the development of human capital and efficiency as the basis for global competitiveness.

Infrastructure resources are fundamental resources that generate value when used as inputs into a wide range of productive processes. In addition, the outputs from these processes are often public and non-market goods that generate positive externalities that benefit society at large.” (Pomeroy, 2007, pp. 2-3)

Moreover, as has been argued in the European case, social infrastructure built around the premises of gender equality can recognize the dual-earning character of so many households, especially in a time of economic crisis:

Investment in social infrastructure can become a productive factor for Europe and transform economies in recovery. Encouraging a more equal division of caring responsibilities between women and men can be regarded as a counterpart to dual earning and part of the reduction in specialisation and thus risks associated with male breadwinner models...Therefore gender equality should not be a fair weather policy priority but an essential tool in times of boom as well as bust” (Smith, 2009).

While not every northern community faces the same issues, observers acknowledge that social infrastructure needs are great in large geographic areas, in which people face harsh winters, social isolation and high costs of living. Communities that are dependent on single-industries or large employers do not

easily find ways to diversify when that employer radically restructures its facilities (Peters, 2010). In a period of economic crisis and restructuring, women are expected to fill the service gaps left by lack of social infrastructure in northern communities and still must contend with their unequal position in the labour market. As Gottfried concludes:

[t]he reliance on unpaid privatized care has led to the underdevelopment of social care infrastructures and forced a trade-off for women between family formation and full-time continuous participation in the labor market" (Gottfried, 2002, p. 39).

## **Conclusion and New Beginnings**

Our collective future is unlikely to lie in a return to the post-war social compromise, but we may envision alternatives. New forms of providing social services may also become part of the re-regulation of capitalism as part of what Bode calls the "embedding infrastructure of the market", even as this process represents aspects of continuity with older forms of welfare capitalism together with social innovation (Bode, 2003) .

After conducting this initial review of the literature, we are left with more questions than answers. As we try to develop a wholistic view of the infrastructure needs of diverse women, we might tentatively conclude that physical infrastructure as well as social infrastructure are two components of a broader notion of community infrastructure at the local level. Social capital may be seen as an approach that too quickly leaves the state behind, but even in the literature, there are nuances not visible at the level of neoliberal policy, where the abdication of state responsibilities in these areas is justified in light of the 'big society' alternative.

As a network, FemNorthNet will continue to explore themes arising including the following with which we will conclude this paper:

### **Questions for FNN**

Is it social infrastructure if it is publicly funded and publicly delivered? Is it social infrastructure if services are provided by tired and over-worked

volunteers?

Is it social infrastructure if it is run for a profit, or by means of public-private partnerships?

It seems to us that there is a discursive turn by which “social infrastructure” shifts from the variously defined clients, users, consumers and citizens, to the producers or providers of the service.

What would a feminist and inter-sectional analysis of ‘social infrastructure’ include and why?

Do we like the language of social infrastructure at all? Why use it, instead of our older language about people’s needs? How much do we stress universal for all, versus targetted goods and services for the needy?

There are gains and losses in this shift, advantages and disadvantages, risks and promises

Based on the literature, what do we think is social infrastructure? – is there a gap with community definitions? What do community partners think is social infrastructure – is there a gap with the literature?

What is the infrastructure in our three communities? How did it develop? What are the gaps in infrastructure? Who names this as a gap?

Did our communities get federal infrastructure monies? For what kinds of programs?

Who labours on municipal infrastructure in our communities?

Is physical infrastructure held in public or private hands? Are social services in public or private hands?

Why do communities have some kinds of ‘infrastructure’ and not others? Is community infrastructure at risk of being privatized? Who will gain and who will lose?

Do we like the idea of producing benchmarks for infrastructure? How would we acknowledge diversity if there were standards?

How does this theme fit together with the other three themes of FemNorthNet?

Will all three communities document and inventory their infrastructure? Will we use one definition of social infrastructure, or several definitions?

Will all three communities want to analyze the same questions?

Since we want FemNorthNet to have action outcomes, how do we organize the next three years so that produce concrete action recommendations?

If municipalities play a key role in social infrastructure (in all definitions), should we be thinking about municipal government and its possibilities throughout every stage of FemNorthNet?

As a question of emphasis: as FemNorthNet would we primarily:

- Opt to support individual people to feel more connected to their communities (build their social capital) and assume that leads to more economic development?
- Focus on the need to generate more structures and services, and assume that leads to more social capital and economic development?
- Focus on the quality and character of social infrastructure and assume that leads to economic development

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