

Executive Summary

This report examines the emerging roles of BIAs in Metro Vancouver with respect to the amelioration of social issues. The research project investigates BIAs in the City of Vancouver and BIAs in nearby municipalities within the Metro Vancouver region. Literature puts Vancouver at the vanguard of social planning, but nearby municipalities, specifically those within Metro Vancouver, do not necessarily share the same progressive outlook on social issues. The hypothesis that motivates this inquiry then is BIAs in Vancouver, to some degree, likely reflect the city's ambitious social plan. Whether this hypothesis is valid, and whether or not the effect occurs across the metropolitan region, are telling indications of the overall effects of municipal social policy on the economic objectives of BIAs.

Research questions

- How do business improvement associations in Metro Vancouver (the Greater Vancouver Regional District) perceive social issues, such as homelessness, drug abuse, prostitution, etc. as involved in economic objectives?
- What differences exist between business improvement associations in the City of Vancouver and suburban municipalities within the metropolitan region with respect to the perception of and response to social issues?

Summary of Analysis

On the whole, the analysis of the survey responses shows BIAs in the City of Vancouver (hereafter VC) and BIAs in outer municipalities (hereafter OM) display some relevant differences. In terms of service areas, BIAs across Metro Vancouver are all typically highly involved in consumer marketing, but OM BIAs are significantly more likely to be involved in economic development initiatives. VC BIAs are more likely to be involved in the provision of social services than OM BIAs. With that said, the survey findings still suggest BIAs are limited in their involvement in social services even though they generally perceive social issues as relevant to their organizations. Even BIAs created to deal with encroaching social issues are not overwhelming involved in the provision of social services.

Compared to VC BIAs, OM BIAs typically claim their areas tolerate higher levels of social service delivery. Neighbourhood factors, however, suggest OM BIAs generally operate in areas

of their respective communities with indications of higher socioeconomic levels. Conversely, VC BIAs do not perceive such high levels of social service delivery in their territories but typically operate in areas of lower socioeconomic levels—areas where conventional wisdom would suggest actually necessitate higher levels of social services. Accordingly, VC BIAs might be seen to be more accepting of social service provisions.

BIAs across the Metro Vancouver region generally perceive social issues in a similar fashion. That is, property theft, vandalism, homelessness, substance abuse, drug dealing, and panhandling are all perceived as issues more relevant in the management of Metro Vancouver BIAs than the remaining six social issues on the survey. Three social issues, however, were identified that VC BIAs perceive as more relevant to their BIAs than OM BIAs: street vending, panhandling, and vandalism. Moreover, municipal policies may, interestingly enough, influence the VC BIA perception of these issues.

All in all, BIAs in Metro Vancouver certainly perceive social issues as intertwined in economic objectives and the results of the survey analysis point to differences between VC and OM BIAs with respect to the perception of and response to social issues. The differences noted among BIAs in each subsample suggest it is likely that municipal social policies have some affect on the economic objectives of BIAs. Whether municipal social policies are the primary factors that cause these differences is interesting to consider yet inclusive. An in-depth case study analysis is required in order to draw any significant conclusions about the impact municipal social policies have on the economic objectives of BIAs. Future research could evaluate the implications of municipal policies on the actions of BIAs and—as this research project demonstrates—the municipalities of the Metro Vancouver region certainly represent a unique opportunity for such an inquiry.

Recommendations

This report culminates with three recommendations to help guide the future direction of BIAs in BC. The recommendations are from the perspective of BIAs, municipal governments and, lastly, the provincial government.

- 1. BIAs should extend their policy advocacy positions when social issues are prioritized.*

BIA's do conduct advocacy for policies and approaches that address issues relevant to their organizations. However, BIA's in areas with high occurrences of social issues should make policy advocacy a higher order tool. Policy advocacy detracts little from the already limited financial resources of BIA's and functions to establish partnerships and create co-leadership opportunities.

2. *Municipalities that foster BIA's as economic development tools should consider how BIA's are involved in local social issues as well as their role in effectuating social planning goals.*

Municipalities should reflect on the democratic nature of BIA's and the manner in which they are accountable. BIA's represent private business interests and are business-minded organizations that typically lack the expertise to extend their roles into social service areas. However, municipalities can benefit substantially as BIA's emerge to take on more comprehensive roles in the community.

3. *The Province of British Columbia should enable BIA's to evolve toward becoming tools of social innovation.*

The Province of British Columbia is in the position to enact legislation that would enable BIA's to evolve into tools for social innovation. The BIA tool is required to be as adaptive as possible in order to respond to the unique social and economic characteristics of the territories in which they operate. New forms of governance would enable BIA's to expand their reach in order to affect social outcomes in the community and build the capacity to address social issues more readily. This vision for BIA's in the future recognizes the unique position of BIA's in the community and among the various sectors of the economy and sees potential for BIA's as a form of social innovation.