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 MANITOBA OFFICE

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FAST FACTS

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MANITOBA CITIES: HOW DO WE REALLY RANK?

In August 2007, the CCPA- Manitoba published “Canada’s Best Cities?” based on a report in the April 2007 edition of **Money Sense Magazine** that ranked 123 Canadian cities in terms of their desirability as places to live. The article noted that Manitoba had three cities ranked in Canada’s top 25: Winnipeg (13); Brandon (19); and Thompson (25). In 2008, the same magazine published an update in these rankings, adding 16 additional variables and ranking a total of 154 cities.

How Manitoba Cities Compare

In the 2008 report, each of Manitoba’s three cities improved its ranking: Winnipeg from 13th to 7th; Brandon from 19th to 18th; and Thompson from 25th to 19th.

Eight Ontario cities ranked within the top 20 (with Ottawa-Gatineau at number one), followed by Manitoba and Quebec with 3 each, British Columbia and New Brunswick with 2 each, and Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia with 1 each.

Many Manitobans will, as they should, view these results with some skepticism.

The following table shows that the Manitoba cities in the top 20 do not score

well with respect to some of the variables included in the calculation of rankings. Most glaring are the poor rankings in terms of the quality of life variables. One of the variables in the quality of life category is the rate of violent crime; all three

Ranking of Manitoba Cities for Selected Variables*			
Variable	Winnipeg	Brandon	Thompson
Prosperity 25pts	Ranking out of 154 Cities		
Household Income	65	102	33
Discretionary Income	22	16	3
New Cars	101	142	85
Unemployment Rate	39	52	63
Affordable Housing 20 pts			
Avg House Price	47	8	30
Amt of time to buy house	38	31	10
Weather 18 pts			
Rain/snow	28	14	49
Precipitation	33	26	35
Below Zero C	124	142	154
Quality of Life 15 pts			
# of Doctors	39	64	93
Crime	101	119	153

** Each of the above rankings show where cities placed in comparison with other cities in the study, with 1 being the most favourable ranking and 154 the poorest ranking. The variables not shown in the table account for 22 points.*



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FAST FACTS continued ...

Manitoba cities have among the highest rates of violent crime. Surprisingly, the quality of life score accounts for only 15 points of the overall ranking, opposed to 25 points for the prosperity variable.

The choice and weighting of variables is likely reflective of the values and priorities of the readership of **Money Sense Magazine**, a readership that is hardly representative of Manitoba's population. The perspective of people with six figure incomes is very different from the perspective of people who are homeless, living hand to mouth on social assistance, or trying to sustain themselves and their families on minimum wage and part-time jobs in the service industry.

Issues of concern to many low-income Manitobans do not figure prominently in the selection and weighting of variables. While on average, the study shows that 25% of our income is discretionary, 11% of us have new cars, housing prices are comparatively affordable at an average of \$114,000, and unemployment is 4.7%, there is a much darker reality for many families.

Statistics present a different picture

The reality for many families is reflected in other sources. For example, Canada Mortgage and Housing data show that rental vacancies are among the lowest in Canada, hovering around 1% in all three cities. This has resulted in a steady increase in rental rates, and a precarious living situation for many low-income households.

Census data on employment and earnings for 2006 reveal, for example, that poverty rates in Winnipeg are high in comparison to many other cities. For the cities in the **Money Sense** top 20, Winnipeg, with a before-tax, low-income rate of 13.9%, ranked ahead of only Vancouver, with a rate of 17.1%.

For female lone-parent families the low-income rates were higher both before and after tax in all three Manitoba cities than in other cities in the top 20 rankings. These rates were: Winnipeg,

41.1% and 32.8%; Brandon, 42.4% and 34.4%; and Thompson, 49.6% and 33.1%. The rates for children under six years of age who live in low-income conditions are also appallingly high in all three Manitoba cities.

High poverty rates have been a characteristic of Manitoba and its cities for many years. The situation is particularly serious for Aboriginal families – the fastest growing population in Manitoba cities and a group that continues to be over-represented among those who are poor. That poverty persists at such high levels even after nine years of a social democratic government ostensibly committed to reducing poverty, inequality and social injustice is perplexing.

In contrast, **Money Sense** readers will be interested to know that corporate taxes in Manitoba are comparatively low (Hudson, 2008, forthcoming). Indeed, our governments have done a fine job creating an environment for middle/upper income earners and corporations. And while, based on the methodology used, it would seem on balance that “Winnipeg, Brandon, [Thompson], and Manitoba as a whole provide average citizens with the means and conditions required to create decent lives for themselves and their families”, much more is needed to improve the quality of life for low-income Manitobans.

We believe that a good start would be to set targets that will allow us to measure progress on poverty and homelessness as an additional indicator of progress in Canadian cities.

Canada's Best places to live study can be viewed at
<http://list.canadianbusiness.com/rankings/bestplacelive/2008/Default.aspx?sp2=1&d1=a&sc1=6>

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