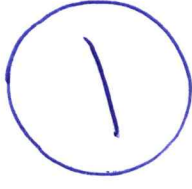


Name: _____



Urban Issues: Social

In the previous lesson, you studied urban issues that were of an environmental and economic scope. In this lesson, you will focus on urban issues of a social nature. (Social issues pertain to people.)

In 1867, when Canada became a country, about 80% of Canadians lived in rural areas. Today, almost 80% of the population lives in towns and cities. Cities drew migrants then as they do now with the promise of jobs and higher living standards. City residents have greater access to health care, employment opportunities, and social and cultural events.

For all the relative advantages of city life, however, poverty still casts a shadow over the urban landscape. A number of people in urban areas are threatened by homelessness and violence, among other things. These may affect a portion of the urban population directly, but their indirect effects are felt by the whole society.

Homelessness is a growing problem in Canada and cities throughout the world. People who are homeless or live in poor housing are often threatened by illnesses and have a much lower life expectancy than the rest of the population.

Widespread crime and violence are other urban problems. Globally, urban violence has been growing by about 3% to 5% a year over the last two decades. Poverty and social disintegration are often named as the causes of urban crime and violence.

A 2007 survey by the Canada West Foundation reported that the majority of urbanites in western Canada and Toronto rated reducing homelessness as a high priority. In seven of Canada's largest cities—Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Toronto—respondents reported feeling safe in their own neighbourhoods during the day; however, the majority were “scared to set foot in” parts of their city.

Social Diversity in Urban Centres

Another poll conducted in 2005 by the *National Post*, the Dominion Institute, and Innovative Research, asked Canadians: What makes Canada unique? In addition to “freedom” and “geography,” Canadians also cited our diverse, pluralistic population. The word **pluralism** refers to a society in which members of varied ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain their traditional culture while playing a role in the larger national culture.

Canada's pluralism is overwhelmingly urban in nature. By international standards, Canada's largest cities have very socially diverse populations. Immigrants, for the most part, are attracted to Canada's cities. According to Statistics Canada (2003), the Census Metropolitan Areas of Toronto and Vancouver have a higher percentage—over 40% in each case—of foreign-born residents than other global cities such as New York and Los Angeles.

Social diversity in Canadian cities is not limited to the presence of recent immigrants. According to the 2006 Canadian census, approximately 50% of Canada's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit population live in cities, with the cities of western Canada having a particularly visible First Nations, Métis, and Inuit population. Likewise, this same census indicated that 74% of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Manitoba are urban dwellers, with Winnipeg having the largest urban First Nations, Métis, and Inuit population in the country.

Social diversity is thus a defining characteristic of Canada's big cities. This urban social diversity enriches Canada by

- introducing new demands for cultural goods and services in areas such as tourism, food, media, and the arts
- changing patterns of communication, worship, ways of interacting with society, and political participation; all of which make Canadian cities become more a part of the global village
- promoting a cosmopolitan (international) lifestyle and a creative urban culture



Some people fear that Canada's growing, socially diverse urban landscape will result in the erosion of Canadian values; it is felt that Canadian culture and symbols are being discarded in order to accommodate other cultures. On the other hand, defenders of Canada's urban multiplicity argue that social diversity serves only to enrich Canada.



Learning Activity 5.5

Urban Social Issues



1. Define urban social issues.
2. Describe how urbanization has affected Canadians' way of life since 1867.
3. Make a list of pros and cons associated with life in the city. One example is done for you.

Pros	Cons
opportunity for higher living standards	increased levels of violence

4. Is Canada's ever-increasing urban social diversity an advantage or a disadvantage? Does increased pluralism erode Canadian identity or make it more global?

The way you answer this question depends on your values. Suppose you consider it an asset to have Canada's cities populated with a high number of foreign-born peoples. It is not likely that everyone will agree with you, since everyone has different values.

Values can be assessed by means of the following tests. These tests address principles that can provide you with a basis for making value judgments confidently and thoughtfully.

The Role Exchange Test

The role exchange test involves imagining yourself in the situation of another person. This is also called empathy. To perform this test, ask yourself, "How would I like that done to me?" After you have answered that question, you can make a thoughtful value judgment of an action.

continued

Learning Activity 5.5: Urban Social Issues (continued)

The Universal Consequences Test

The universal consequences test involves imagining the consequences of everyone performing the action that you are trying to judge. To perform this test, ask yourself, "What if everyone did that?" The answer to this question will lead you to a fairer value judgment of the action.

The New Cases Test

The new cases test gives you an opportunity to apply the action you are trying to judge to a distinct but similar situation. To perform this test, ask yourself, "Are there any other situations that are similar to this?" Once you have answered this question, you can form a thoughtful value judgment on the action you wish to assess.

Read at least two of the following dialogues and answer the questions based on the dialogue.

Dialogue 1

Scott: I don't think we should let so many immigrants come into Canada. They are congregating in cities and aren't really Canadian.

Mark: So you believe that Canada should stop all immigration?

Scott: That's right! We have our own people who are constantly moving to cities from rural areas. We don't need more foreigners!

Mark: Does that mean that you didn't enjoy our evening at the Chinese cultural festival last week? Where do you think the arts, foods, and cultural events originated? What if all immigration was stopped?

Scott: Well....that's different. Our city's "Chinatown" has been here a long time....

- What test is Mark using to challenge Scott?
- Does Scott meet Mark's challenge appropriately? Explain.
- How would you meet Mark's challenge?

continued

Learning Activity 5.5: Urban Social Issues (continued)

Dialogue 2

Maria: I spent last week in Toronto at my aunt's. What a horrible city—I don't think I saw one person who looked like a "real" Canadian. I swear that city is full of foreigners. I don't know why Canada has to let in every poor and starving person from all the world's countries....

Terri: But suppose you were really poor and starving. Suppose you had the opportunity to come and live in Canada for a better life. Wouldn't you want the opportunity for a better future for you and your family?

Maria: Hmmm, I guess so...

- What test is Terri using to challenge Maria?
- Does Maria meet Terri's challenge appropriately? Explain your answer.
- How would you meet Terri's challenge?

Dialogue 3

Kevin: We ought to celebrate the cultural diversity of our city and school by holding a culturally themed dinner and arts event once a month at school.

Shayne: You mean you want every class and every student at our school to do that?

Kevin: Sure, why not? Our school is rich with cultural heritage, as is our city. We can learn so much from each other.

Shayne: What if not everyone is for your idea? What if some classes and students don't want to participate?

Kevin: I'd only want those people who were willing to share and learn to take part, of course.

Shayne: What if people don't think this idea is so great?

Kevin: I still think that people will be enriched if they share their culture and learn about others' as well. All you have to do is walk around the streets of our city to see the cultural richness in which we all live.



- What test is Shayne using to challenge Kevin?
- Does Kevin meet Shayne's challenge appropriately? Explain your answer.
- How would you meet Shayne's challenge?