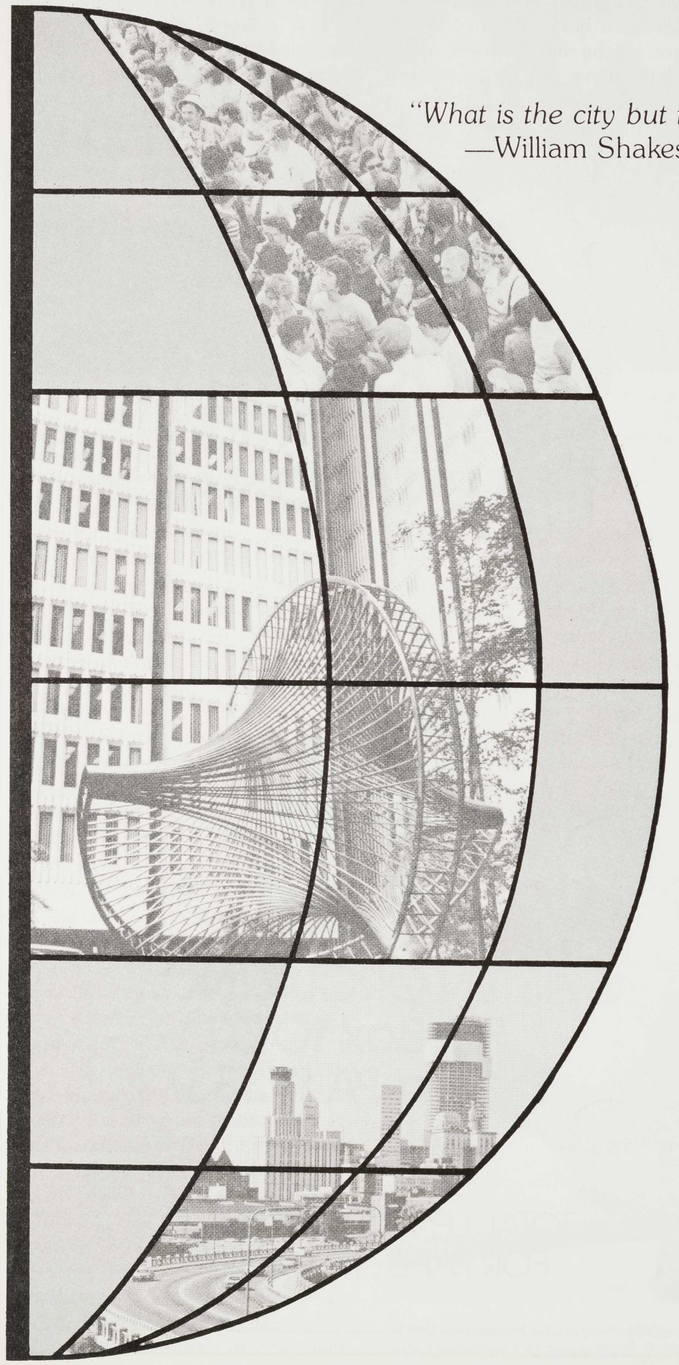
Your City and the World

By Raymond L. Bancroft



"What is the city but the people?"
—William Shakespeare, Coriolanus, Act III, Scene I.

International boundary lines pose no barriers to urban problems. For developed and developing nations alike, the growth of cities and metropolitan areas follow similar patterns and present the same challenges to government officials and citizens.

As the 1980s unfold, it is encouraging to see more cities in the United States and in other countries cooperating with each other to work toward solutions to common problems. New groups have been organized to stimulate this international municipal cooperation in recent years. Study tours, exchanges of city officials, international conferences, and exchanges of ideas in the form of reports and publications abound.

Sister Cities International, with 25 years of solid accomplishment, offers a perfect foundation and a springboard for cities and their residents to expand their horizons internationally. The potential is great for increased international urban cooperation in the decades ahead, not only in the traditional social and cultural endeavors but also in commercial and municipal personnel exchanges as well.

Cities in the developing nations of the world also present an opportunity for American cities to increase understanding of their problems and perhaps to help them achieve their goals through technical assistance programs such as those facilitated by Sister Cities International.

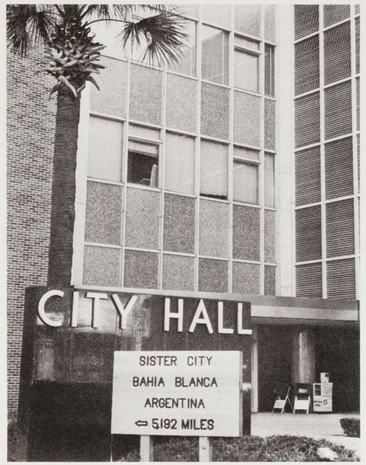
The need for international cooperation in urban affairs is evident in these statistics from David B. Lewis of Cornell University:

- By the year 2000, the majority of the world's population will live in urban areas.
- In 1950 there was only one supercity (Shanghai) in a developing country. By the year 2000 there will be 47.
- Bombay will grow to 19 million by 2000 from 3 million in 1950. Mexico City will grow from 13 million to more than 30 million to become the world's largest urban settlement.
- By 2000, a dozen of the world's 15 largest cities will be in the developing world.
- There are more than 250 million people in countries where the gross national product grew by more than 6 per cent per year during the 1970s.
- The demand in developing nations for housing, transportation, social services, and other urban public works and industrial development will be enormous.

It is particularly important to realize the importance of the developing nations to America when these facts also are considered:

- U.S. national security and economic growth increasingly depend on developing countries for essential raw materials. For example, 85 per cent of our bauxite (vital to our aircraft industry), 79 per cent of our cobalt (needed by our steel industry and power plants), and 93 per cent of our tin (essential to our electronics industry) come from developing nations.
- U.S. exports to developing countries make up more than 35 per cent of our total exports. This is more than the U.S. exports to Europe and three times the amount exported to Japan.
- One of every four acres of U.S. farm land produces for export to the Third World and these markets are growing. Without this expanding market in developing nations, U.S. farmers would suffer a 20 to 25 per cent loss of gross income.
- Almost half of all private overseas U.S. investment is in the developing countries.
- Approximately 1.2 million American jobs depend on exports to the Third World.

Sister cities already are involved in assistance to cities in developing nations under the Sister Cities International Technical Assistance Program.



It's a simple concept. The American city provides local experts to help solve a specific problem the sister city has identified. Helped by small (average size: $3,500) grants provided by funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), American technicians travel to the foreign city and stay only a short time—usually a few weeks to a few months. Their salaries are paid by their own employers; the grants cover only travel and living expenses. The program also sponsors trips to American sister cities by foreign city representatives for specialized training. They then return home and pass along what they've learned to others.

Rochester, New York, and Oakland, California, are two such examples:

- Rochester, New York, collaborated with Bamako, Mali, on urban sanitation problems. Results include the construction of 35 refuse collection enclosures in low-income areas, organization of volunteer sanitation teams, and a general expansion of sanitation services provided to low-income areas. A sanitation worker from Bamako came to Rochester for an on-the-job training program.
- Oakland, California, provided a technical assistance team for Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana, to investigate what vocational training services and/or job creation activities would be needed to meet the skilled labor requirements of the area. The team also studied ways the existing government and private agencies in Sekondi-Takoradi might provide training opportunities to both the handicapped and the non-handicapped youth in the area. The result of the project was a detailed five-year plan and funding strategy (involving tapping private resources) for the handicapped in Sekondi-Takoradi.

The Sister Cities International/Technical Assistance Program (SCI/TAP) is a potential activity for many American sister cities. Particularly intriguing are the possibilities for additional funding from large corporations that have direct links to the cities or countries that need assistance. More than 46 SCI/TAP projects have been undertaken in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean since the program began in 1977.

In addition to technical assistance, another program for sister cities in the 1980s offers practical economic returns through international trade agreements.

Louisville, Kentucky, and Montpellier, France, recently signed a joint agreement "to increase import and export capabilities and to promote economic growth in each community." Several steps were agreed to by the two cities and by the two Chambers of Commerce:

- Coordinate the exchange and dissemination of available business information, including identification of various business markets.
- Identify industries and enterprises with import and export potential.
- Provide increased technical assistance and actively encourage businesses which are interested in developing and maintaining international trade relationships.
- Coordinate and maximize aid available from government, public, and private agencies and entities for such activities as cross-licensing and the establishment of trade shows.
- Encourage an on-going working relationship among staff members of the cities and chambers involved.
- Exchange trade missions to build economic ties.