



# Year in Review 2020

and what to expect in the year ahead



## INTRODUCTION

In 2020, VSIR persevered through the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic and improved on the achievements of the previous year. It was a period of intense retrospection and forward-looking analysis. The pandemic-altering experiences of 2020 confirmed the importance of knowledge mobilization effectiveness and the value of strategic intelligence. In addition to welcoming new partnership opportunities, VSIR further established itself as a credible advocate of organizational learning, adaptive leadership, and foresight analysis.

For these reasons, VSIR is confident that an even bigger year lies ahead.

### 1. KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION EFFECTIVENESS

The year started on a positive note when VSIR was invited to participate on a panel discussion as part of a two-day [migration research workshop](#) in downtown Vancouver. Workshop discussions were structured around the theme of experimental evidence and community-relevant knowledge. Co-hosted by the UBC Migration Research Cluster and the United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society (S.U.C.C.E.S.S), a Vancouver-based social service organization, the event was an opportunity for VSIR to engage with immigration scholars and local practitioners in a spirit of reciprocal learning and knowledge sharing. In addition to highlighting the nexus between evidence-based decision making and effective policy research, the workshop underscored the centrality of cities to resilient migration management regimes.

Most of the world's complex policy challenges (ie., public health, cyber security, migration, UN Sustainable Development Goals) have an urban dimension. In fact, it is hard to envision multilateral action at the global level which has any hope of succeeding in the absence of intelligent urban design and city-to-city diplomacy. That is why VSIR was pleased to publish another article, "[Scaling Up City-Level Adaptation During a National Crisis](#)," in the *Canadian Government Executive* magazine (May/June). The article explores some of the policy questions requiring municipal leadership as the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, with specific attention to ways of developing the adaptive capacity of today's mission-critical infrastructure, governance institutions, business models, leadership practices. Although the COVID-19 crisis exposed the vulnerability of Canada's urban population centres, VSIR is confident that city resilience can be strengthened in the near-term with the right mix of intelligent design principles and integrated learning solutions.

More recently, divergent views about the future of the city have emerged. Two narratives that dominated the media headlines in 2020 were the so-called “15-minute city” and the urban exodus. To deepen the public understanding of urban planning, VSIR released new issues of [Urban Dispatch](#). Regular visitors to our web page will know that this knowledge product summarizes and clarifies contemporary city-related trends, strategic management issues, and research questions. It is intended to provide VSIR clients and interested readers with relevant insights for use in making prompt and informed decisions. Examples of topics covered in recent issues include knowledge diplomacy and urban resilience.

## 2. Strategic Intelligence Value

In a hypercompetitive and interconnected world, the pressure to be relevant, resilient, and future-ready is unrelenting. This is especially true in times of profound political and economic uncertainty. The end-of-year discovery of a new COVID-19 variant reinforced the profound importance for public and private sector organizations to scale their situational awareness of high-impact risks emerging anywhere in the world.

In that regard, VSIR demonstrated its proficiency in strategic intelligence with a view to helping decision-makers and planners navigate these turbulent times. In the spirit of adaptive leadership and anticipatory thinking, VSIR prepared [The Global Knowledge Mobility Nexus](#) (2020) which is the signature product in our strategic intelligence series. This brief provides an analytic framework to help decision makers and planners decipher the intersecting mega-trends that are shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to understand their significance. We hope this strategic intelligence brief inspires knowledge professionals, enterprising business owners, non-government organizations, think tanks, and local community leaders to effect intelligent decision-making with greater agility, foresight, and confidence.

As a complement to *The Global Knowledge Mobility Nexus*, VSIR started a new publication series called *Knowledge Futures*. This one-page brief is designed to promote a future-focused view of the world and to provoke public dialogue on the strategic issues of our time. The analytic value of *Knowledge Futures* is also demonstrated in the use of thought-provoking questions about future scenarios.

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## THE YEAR AHEAD

*VSIR does not envision a major restructuring of its business fundamentals in 2021. Building on the successes and lessons learned of 2020, VSIR will continue to expand its capacity for quality consulting services in knowledge mobilization and strategic intelligence, including foresight analysis.*

In this section, you will find a preview of the broad-based challenges and opportunities that VSIR anticipates in the year ahead.

**CHALLENGE:** The global pandemic reflects the global demand for interdisciplinary knowledge sharing and the crucial importance of discovery-led learning. At the same time, mounting pressure to manufacture and deliver a safe COVID-19 vaccine increases the likelihood of an asymmetric recovery, pitting region against region in a geopolitical struggle. That is why all government levels must learn how to scale their strategic research capacity in diverse social, economic, and institutional environments. The learning curve is likely to be very sharp for many public and private sector entities with deeply embedded legacy systems designed for an earlier and more predictable era.

**OPPORTUNITY:** It is impossible to predict our future, but frugal investments in knowledge mobilization techniques will help to enable new forms of organizational learning and build the cross-functional competencies of a forward-looking social enterprise. Throughout 2021, VSIR will continue to support small and medium enterprises (SME) interested in building expanded capacity in their knowledge mobilization infrastructure. This includes joint projects with like-minded businesses and consultants.

**CHALLENGE:** We are early in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and many lessons have yet to be discovered. The COVID-19 pandemic has inspired a robust public policy discussion about the challenge of adapting to a more complex and uncertain future. While often constructive and insightful, those (online) exchanges often lack a strategic focus and an analytic framework. Increasingly, superior economic performance will be evaluated on the ability to scale-up human-centred technologies and to scale-down information asymmetries. A first-order challenge is raising public and private sector situational awareness about the complex intersection of mega-trends which are shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**OPPORTUNITY:** Our common interest lies in shifting the public discussion from a transactional present to a strategic future. Averting strategic surprises and catastrophic failures remains contingent on an in-depth knowledge of global mega-trends and their complex interaction. Early in the year, VSIR will release *The Global Knowledge Mobility Nexus (2021)*. This updated strategic intelligence brief will also include a comprehensive index inventory for use in the identification of key change drivers and preparing baseline scenarios as part of strategic



foresight exercises. VSIR also plans to produce new issues of *Urban Dispatch*, reflecting the crucial role of cities in transitioning to a post-pandemic reality. Further research and analysis of the issues discussed in the *Urban Dispatch* series will be available upon request.

**CHALLENGE:** The COVID-19 pandemic is a preview of more complex emergencies distinguished by their scale and intensity. This emerging reality raises strategic questions about the way the future is imagined and anticipated. Exploring future scenarios and their long-range policy implications is a great way to instill agility into the strategic planning process. But emerging successfully from this crisis is going to depend on hard-edged discussions about the future we need, not only the future we want. The distinction is important and often overlooked by planners and academics.

**OPPORTUNITY:** VSIR will actively seek partnership opportunities to cultivate strategic foresight and futures thinking in 2021. First, VSIR will continue to promote futures “literacy” through the *Knowledge Futures* series. We invite you to visit the VSIR company page on LinkedIn to review current and new issues of this publication series. Second, VSIR will leverage the proliferation of online platforms to collaborate with local and international institutions with an interest in scaling up strategic foresight and futures “literacy.”

As always, VSIR is committed to organizational learning, intelligent decision-making, and a future focus. Below you will find more information about VSIR and our four cardinal research principles.

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**If you are a mission-driven organization that shares VSIR’s commitments and principles, then we would like to hear from you.**

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## About VSIR

Vancouver Strategic and Integrated Research (VSIR) is a management consultancy specializing in knowledge mobilization, strategic intelligence, and foresight analysis. Since 2017, VSIR has functioned as a catalyst for interdisciplinary collaboration, organizational learning, and distributed knowledge sharing. VSIR’s mission is to collaborate with public and private organizations in the co-production of new sources of social and economic value. Our vision is to become a premier knowledge broker and strategic intelligence enterprise for the Vancouver region within the next five years.

VSIR uses multi-disciplinary techniques to facilitate the effective exchange of research, evidence, and expertise in support of intelligent decision-making. Our integrated products and services are designed to foster confidence at multiple decision-points along the value creation chain.

Operationally, VSIR's work continues to be guided by four cardinal principles: *Be Engaged; Be Curious; Be Generous; and Be Agile*. As a knowledge broker committed to catalyzing decisive change, VSIR invests considerable resources ensuring these principles are embedded in daily practice:

<b>Be Engaged</b>	<b>Be Curious</b>
<i>Commit to mutually beneficial knowledge exchanges.</i>	<i>Cultivate a durable interest in discovery-led learning.</i>
<b>Be Generous</b>	<b>Be Agile</b>
<i>Actively share insights to foster community and trust building.</i>	<i>Learn to play the short and long game simultaneously.</i>

**Ideas**  
**Insights**  
**Knowledge**



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