Civic Governance and Social Inclusion in Ottawa

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Notes for a Conversation

- Thank you for the opportunity of being part of the RBC conference
- My presentation today is an attempt to acknowledge an intellectual debt to David Wolfe and Meric Gertler
- Their research project pushed us not only to think about the relationships between economic development, civic leadership and social inclusion but also to empirically investigate these relationships. For those, like me, whose previous research had been centered on civic governance and social inclusion this has been challenging and intellectually stimulating.
- These are crucial questions for Canadian city-regions and for Canadian development in general. Neil Bradford (2005) described the three key aspects of the urban landscape in Canada as –

    - cities are the engines of national economic prosperity

    - poverty and polarization have become more pronounced in cities

    - widening gap between growing and declining cities

Civic Governance and Social Inclusion

- I wanted to look at the processes whereby social inclusion has been build – and the role of civic governance in this process
- To pay my intellectual debt I decided to take a concept from economic geography to reflect on the processes of social inclusion
- My question – what can we learn from the idea of tacit knowledge that will help us understand the processes of social inclusion?

Tacit Knowledge

- Borrowing heavily from a 2003 article by Meric Gertler – 'Tacit knowledge and the economic geography of context, or

  The undefinable tacitness of being (there)'

-as compared to codified knowledge

-'the tacit component of the knowledge required for successful performance of a skill is that which defies codification or articulation'

-acquired through experience, learning-by-doing

-defined by social context, collective rather than individual

Structure of the argument presented in the article

- Three questions about tacit knowledge
  - how is it produced?
  - how is it appropriated?
  - how is it disseminated?
- Three prospects for overcoming problems
  - learning regions
  - communities of practice
  - knowledge enablers

Social Inclusion in Ottawa

- Does it make sense to use the idea of tacit knowledge to try to understand the processes of building social inclusion?

- 'the successful performance of a skill' – could describe building social inclusion- relates to the literature on social capital , building trust.

- Best testing of the question is to see if it leads to greater understanding of the challenges and successes of the examples.

Ottawa Examples

- Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP)

- City for All Women (CAWI) –Equity and Inclusion Lens

Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership

- Federally funded (CIC) – about 40 across Ontario

- Strategic planning for better integration of immigrants –economic, social, cultural , political

- Social inclusion of newcomers

- Working with Neil Bradford on a study of the initial phase of the LIPs

City for All Women Initiative

- Partnership between community-based women's groups and the City of Ottawa
- Overall objective – to increase the voice of the full diversity of women in decision-making in the City of Ottawa
- Specific project –an Equity and Inclusion Lens-done for the City – create a tool for city employees to be more inclusive in all stages of policy making
- Social inclusion of 11 marginalized groups

Producing Tacit Knowledge

- OLIP

-face to face meetings - of the Council

-face to face meetings – of the steering committee

-face to face meetings of the sector tables

- CAWI

-face to face meetings of Project committee – individual members, city staff, advisory committee members, CAWI staff

CHALLENGES - of continuity in attendance, institution buiding

Appropriating Tacit Knowledge

- OLIP

-putting forward sector specific knowledge and practices-through examples and stories

-through specific examples of gaps or problems, seeing how adding different pieces could build a solution

- CAWI

-articulating different stories, practices and words across marginalized groups and across different categories of members

-developing codified knowledge (the document) through a sharing and coming together around tacit knowledge

CHALLENGES of time

Disseminating Tacit Knowledge

- OLIP

-development of good stories

-sharing of innovative practices

- CAWI

-training and coaching

-role playing

CHALLENGES – the limits of codified knowledge

Learning Region

- Ottawa has some interesting history in terms of civil society traditions of social learning as a region – OCRI, LASI

- Less true of the municipal culture –history of municipal –federal relations which tended to develop a muncipal self-image as a deliverer of basic services- maybe in process of change

- OLIP and CAWI trying to build on civil society traditions – social learning processes, social innovation

Communities of Practice

- OLIP

-sector tables to be communities of practice

-annual forum to create a community of practice

- CAWI

-project teams (or groups of employees) to be communities of practice

-community based associations to become communities of practice

CHALLENGES of funding,of human resources

Knowledge Enablers

- Boundary spanning or Boundary spanners

- Are these civic leaders?

- OLIP

-certainly some boundary spanners

-individuals with experience in more than one sector

- CAWI

-the coordinator is a boundary spanner

-an element of collective boundary spanning

Another aspect of social inclusion

- A central question in the relationship between economic development, social inclusion, civic engagement and leadership – but only touched on in this presentation.

- Have there been links between the economic development governance efforts and questions of social inclusion – TOP, OCRI as examples ?

- What has been the impact on social inclusion of the collapse of Nortel in Ottawa?

Links between the economic and the social

- The interviews we did in Ottawa for the Wolfe-Gertler project indicated that the links were not strong.
- But there were a few boundary spanners.
- Some initial attempts to create a learning region but little real follow up (at the time) on collaboration in the postsecondary sector. And these also fell apart with the downturn in the high tech sector

And a more specific question

- The impact of the demise of Nortel on social inclusion

    - certainly the concerns around pensions has a social inclusion impact.

    - it also seems to have had an impact on the city's ability to rethink its economic development strategy – disappointed to go back to the federal government but took a while to begin to rethink an economic development strategy for the City

Conclusion

- What have we learned about processes of social inclusion?

- Does the idea of tacit knowledge help in understanding the processes of social inclusion?

Conclusions

- Building social inclusion takes time, trust, resources, institutions and boundary spanners

- The examples of collectively building cooperative solutions around concrete projects relating to agreed upon gaps does relate to the power of tacit knowledge

- However the challenges remain in terms of getting the necessary resources (human and financial) to maintain the cooperation and in terms of how to convey the shared tacit knowledge to those who were not part of the group – and recognizing the importance but the limits of codified knowledge.