Civic Engagement and Civic Governance in Toronto’s Future

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Presented to the Royal Bank Chairs’ Conference on Civic Engagement and Economic Development in City Regions
Trinity College, U. of Toronto, April 27, 2011
Case Study of Toronto

- Part of a larger examination of the social dynamics of economic performance in Canadian city-regions
- Is Toronto developing governance mechanisms to shape its economic future?
  - Does Toronto exhibit features of a resilient region?
Institutional Underpinnings of Resilience

• Resilience is the result of more than just market forces – involves interaction of three sectors
  – Private (firms)
  – Public (governments)
  – Civic (networks and associations – governance)

• Local governments and governance are central
  – Resilient city-regions have markets & local institutional structures that adapt to changing environmental conditions continuously
  – Including changes in the policy environment introduced by senior levels of government (WTO)
Civic Engagement and New Forms of Governance

- Beyond government to governance
  - Recognize that outcomes depend on interaction among a broad range of social actors
  - Power is dispersed among a wider range of actors
  - Includes market forces, state institutions and civic associations

- Signifies a broadening and extension of the meaning of ‘government’
  - Boundaries are blurring between public and private actors and across different levels of government
Strategic Planning in City-Regions

- Drivers of economic change demand response from city-regions
  - Strategic planning for cities and regions
    - Enhance factors of production that cannot be transferred from one city to another at low cost
- Draws upon ‘civic capital’ created by collaborative institutions
  - Interpersonal networks & solidarity within a community based on a shared identity, expectations or goals and tied to a specific region or locality
  - Engage local partners in ‘talk’ to create set of shared understandings & expectations
Dimensions of Civic Governance

• Scale
  – What are the real geographic boundaries of the city-region?
  – How closely do they coincide with administrative boundaries?
  – How well are fiscal resources and administrative responsibilities aligned?

• Scope
  – Refers to the number, type and range of issues that find their way on to urban governance agendas
Dimensions of Civic Governance II

• Who exercises power in the city-region?
  – How fragmented or diffused is the exercise of power?
  – To what extent is it dominated by narrow groups?
  • Traditional ‘growth machine’

• City-region ‘development coalitions’ shaped by three factors:
  – Culture – strong civic engagement or laissez-faire?
  – Institutions – jurisdictional turf wars or boundary spanning bridge builders?
  – Leadership – conventional political leaders or dynamic civic entrepreneurs?
Civic Governance: Competitive or Collaborative?

• Role and nature of local civic associations
  – How integrated?
  – How inclusive?

• Relations with formal government bodies or agencies
  – Complementary or competitive?
  – Do associational activities support or compete with government initiatives?

• Effectiveness of strategic planning efforts
  – Do they successfully mobilize key local players?
  – Do planning activities lead to concrete initiatives?
Key Toronto Region Economic Challenges

• Regional competitiveness:
  – Loss of traditional manufacturing base
  – Slow recovery from recession – rising unemployment
  – Mismatch between jobs and labour demand
  – Sprawl/transportation congestion (OECD report)
  – Strong research base – weak commercialization record

• Fiscal imbalance between needs and resources

• Infrastructure demands and utilization
Different Perspectives on Toronto

• The Neo-liberal City
  – Amalgamation as neo-liberal project to draw investment

• Focus on ‘boosterism’ and prestigious events
  – To promote Toronto as investment platform
    • Olympic Bids and Pan Am Games
    • G20 Meetings
    • Large-scale cultural projects – ROM, AGO, Ballet/Opera

• Bottom-up civic governance via civic engagement
  – Decade of collaborative economic, social, environmental, cultural initiatives, but
  – Fragmented government gaps at regional scale and lack of multi-level governance across three scales
Scale: Weak Regional Ties in GTA

- Amalgamation in 1998 covered only a small portion of the regional economy
  - No regional brand – TO, GTA, GTA+H, GGH
  - Difficult to craft a compelling story like Waterloo
- Fragmented political structure lacks institutional supports needed to coordinate economic development strategies:
  - Failure of Greater Toronto Services Board
  - Joint efforts to market the region (GTMA) are weak - OITC, TRRA, Invest Toronto
  - Efforts at regional transit (Metrolinx) face major collaborative challenges
  - GTA Regional Summit – limited follow-up
Scope: Policy Silos or Boundary-Spanning Civic Governance?

- Policy networks across the region are fragmented and be siloed

- Variable networks within the City of Toronto
  - More integrated in cultural and social spheres

- Evidence of ‘bottom-up’, socially inclusive collaborative *civic* governance
  - Civic Action Alliance - community connector or ‘hub’ that provides forum for community leaders to develop actionable projects
  - Strong civic leadership – especially on income security and cultural issues
Toronto CivicAction Alliance

- Meta-governance through CivicAction Alliance:
  - Not-for-profit non partisan group founded in 2002 to address Toronto region’s economic and social future
- Private and community sector driven collaboration (more than 50 civic leaders)
  - Emerged from Mayor’s summit on the future of the city
- Role of CivicAction Alliance
  - “convenes leaders of all different sectors to identify key areas that need attention and then identifies actions that can undertaken very quickly”
- Over 8000 people involved with CivicAction initiatives
  - Lobbies senior levels of government to get them involved
  - Greater Toronto Summit, 2011 – over 700 participants
Power: Who Speaks for Toronto?

- Concerns about lack of ‘strategic vision’ and leadership at the municipal/mayoral level
  - Policy capacity of city level, but lack of resources
  - Lack of unified voice for GTA(+H)
- CivicAction Alliance filled a void of civic engagement
  - Successful projects on social and cultural side
- Weak linkages between the municipal government & CivicAction Alliance
- Competing summits in other parts of the region
  - Mississauga, Hamilton, etc.
Regional Development Strategies for Toronto

- Province of Ontario
- Toronto Board of Trade
  - Regional Economic Summit, 2009 stresses need for regional wide strategy and policy coordination
- City of Toronto – Economic Strategy
  - Toronto Competes and Agenda for Prosperity
    - Cluster strategies, TFSA, Invest & Build Toronto
    - Transit City Plan
  - “The production of strategy plans has become a growth industry – the challenge is implementation”
Agenda for Prosperity

• Mayor’s Advisory Committee
  – composed of 25 representatives from business, labour and education
  – Limited consultation - no links with CivicAction
  – Not a regional strategy

• Facilitate investment
  – Concierge service for jobs-related applications

• Promote innovation
  – Innovation infrastructure eg. MaRs, incubators

• Support sectors and cluster
  – Film and television
  – design,
  – ICT,
  – Toronto Financial Services Alliance
Governance Culture and Development Coalition

• Toronto’s civic culture
  – Laissez-faire tradition in promoting regional economy
    • Created a ‘culture of passivity’ on part of government
  – Reliance on senior levels of government
    • Legacy of the Auto Pact
  – Strong ‘neighbourhoods’ inhibit development of a region wide perspective
  – Long tradition of civic engagement from ‘Stop Spadina’ to CivicAction Alliance
    • Problem may be too many competing groups, especially at sector and cluster level
Governance Institutions and Development Coalition

• Institutions
  – Lack of regional government encompassing GTA
  – No economic coordinating body
    • Inhibits policy initiatives and strategic planning for economic development on regional scale
    • Intermunicipal competition for investment
    • Uneven fiscal burden across regional municipalities
    • Board of Trade call for regional coordinating body and Investment Promotion Agency
    • Cluster strategies beyond the city
Civic Leadership and Economic Planning

• Perception of CivicAction Alliance as civic ‘champions’ who could ‘get things done’
  – Strong track record on series of successful projects
• But limited involvement with strategic planning efforts for economic development
  – No overlap with Mayor’s advisory committee
  – Board of Trade expanding its role and scale
• Sectoral strategies have varied leadership
  – Strong in financial services and aerospace
  – Fragmented in ICT, biotech and fashion
• Regional stewards lack integration & cohesion
Multi-Level Governance in Toronto

- Toronto has special policy issues and needs but lacks the power to address them and fiscal resources
- Works more closely with the province – but still ‘policy-takers’ rather than policy-makers
- Some evidence of informal multi-level collaboration but
  - Tends to be issue-focused
  - Varies across sectors
    - Financial services and culture versus aerospace
  - Lack institutional structures – one off
Regional Challenges for Toronto

- **Scale** – little evidence of regional collaboration
- **Scope** – municipal government tends to be siloed BUT boundary-spanning activity in *civic* governance networks on social and cultural issues
- **Power** – competition between elected politicians and civic leaders over who speaks for Toronto
- **MLG?** Not formal and not really...
Conclusion

• Ongoing issues:
  – Lack of coordinating body at regional level
  – Limited fiscal resources at local/regional level and variable cooperation with provincial government
  – Need better links between civic initiatives and government ones
  – But where is the federal government?

• What’s working:
  – Strong basis of civic engagement
    • Needs better integration across social, cultural and economic sectors!
  – Some involvement of senior governments across jurisdictions
  – Growing recognition of the region as the appropriate scale for economic development strategy