
Civic Engagement & Civic Governance: Lessons for Mississauga

David A. Wolfe, Ph.D.

Program on Globalization and Regional Innovation Systems
Centre for International Studies
University of Toronto

Presented to the Mississauga City Summit
University of Toronto Mississauga
October 25, 2011



PROGRIS

Cities as Centres of Innovation

- Paradoxical consequence of globalization
 - Location matters more, not less
 - Innovation and research are sourced globally
 - Concentrated in a places with key knowledge assets
- Knowledge economy demands proximity
 - Proximity fosters the flow of knowledge
 - “it is in cities that information is not just created, but sorted – where the ‘important’ information moves to the top of the enormous heap of banality”

Resilience of City-Regions

- Economic success depends on resilience
 - Likelihood of success requires the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and adjust to external shocks over time
- Local governments & governance arrangements are critical
 - Resilient city-regions have markets and local institutional structures that adapt to economic change
 - Successful regions build *institutional capacity* to respond to changing economic circumstances

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

Dimensions of Governance in City-Regions

- Associative governance recognizes the importance of community actors as important sources of local knowledge
- Multilevel governance draws on programs and resources from all three levels of government
 - Cities need to align initiatives with programs from senior levels
- Joined-up governance overcomes policy silos and improves coordination among policies at different levels of government
 - Allows for economic development to be addressed holistically

From Social Capital to Civic Capital

- Social capital - shared norms and trust
 - Features of social organization that facilitate coordination and cooperation among economic actors
- Civic capital
 - Consists of interpersonal networks and solidarity within a community based on a shared identity, expectations or goals and *tied to a specific region or locality*
 - Local leaders play key role in strengthening networks within and between communities
- Civic capital can be harnessed for effective regional governance by *civic entrepreneurs* or *regional stewards*
 - Boundary spanning 'bridge builders'

Collaborative Institutions

- Formal and information organizations that:
 - Facilitate exchange of information and technology
 - Foster cooperation and coordination
- Enhance civic capital and improve competitiveness by:
 - Creating relationships and establishing trust
 - Identifying common strengths and developing common agenda
- Civic associations draw upon civic capital created by these institutions
 - Generate trust by engaging key social partners in 'talk' – to build a set of shared understandings and expectations

Role of Civic Associations in Economic Development

- Key Networking Institutions
 - Engage in dialogue about city's competitive position
 - Promote awareness of city-region
 - Develop mentoring programs for new firms/business people
 - Participate with multiple levels of government in strategic planning for the city region
- Emergence of local civic associations is critical step in the formation of civic capital
 - OCRI – Ottawa
 - Communitech – Waterloo
 - Mississauga City Summit, CivicAction Alliance – GTA

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?

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?
- 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?

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
 - Engage local partners in 'talk' to create set of shared understandings & expectations
 - Formulate key initiatives and action agenda
 - Target 'low hanging fruit'
 - Importance of early victories

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
 - Mississauga is part of larger regional economy
- 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, Mississauga Economic Development
 - Efforts at regional transit face major collaborative challenges
 - Solution to transit issues critical for Mississauga's economic development

Scope: Policy Silos or Boundary-Spanning Civic Governance?

- Policy networks across the region are fragmented and tend to be siloed
- Solid evidence of joined-up networks within Mississauga
 - Important to look across the four task forces
- Evidence of 'bottom-up', socially inclusive collaborative *civic* governance
 - Strong leadership from Mississauga Summit on key issues

Power: Who Speaks for Mississauga?

- Strong integration between City Council and Mississauga Summit
- Challenges in moving from agenda to action
 - Need to focus on early victories
 - Move on to more ambitious goals
- Competing summits in other parts of the region
 - CivicAction Alliance, Hamilton
- Potential for common regional front

Regional Challenges

- **Scale** – still limited evidence of regional collaboration
- **Scope** – need to foster linkages across task force agendas
- **Power** – maintain cooperation between Mississauga Summit and city council
- **MLG?** – need to work within context of Greater Toronto region
 - Greatest challenge is creation of a regional economic development agency

Conclusion

- Civic Engagement is a process not an end point
 - Resilient cities constantly reassess their situation and adjust goals
- Cities & regions develop the organizational & institutional infrastructure for collective action
- Initiatives need to be tailored to the circumstances of individual city-regions
 - Build on past success
 - Target early wins – demonstrate success
- Link Mississauga initiatives to regional goals
 - Especially transportation and regional economic development