

***Getting the Job Done: From
Deliberate Relationships to a
National Community
Innovation System***

Neil Bradford

Huron University College, UWO

CRPN Research Associate

Presentation, Gathering of Counterparts,
Calgary Alberta, February 6-7, 2008.

Presentation Outline

Three Themes

1. Context: Place Matters and Double Devolution
 - 5 Big Public Policy Challenges: The Difference Community Makes
 - A National Community Innovation System: Challenges and Opportunities

Context: Legacies and Lessons of the 1990s

A decade without a “communities agenda”:

- Top-down mega policies: eg. NAFTA, Charlottetown Accord
- Top-down deficit reduction: ‘Landmark’ 1995 Budget

For cities and communities:

- Responsibilities without resources: Downloading and offloading
- “A culture of non-recognition and neglect” (Federation of Canadian Municipalities)

New Priorities for the New Millennium

The economic house may be in order but negative social consequences evident in cities and communities ...

- Look beyond top-down, cost cutting government
- Reinvest in public infrastructures for quality of life
- Think about triple bottom line investments

And New Practices ...

“[We need] locally appropriate solutions to issues of national consequence playing out at the local level.” (Harcourt Committee, *From Restless Places to Resilient Communities*, 2006)

“Locally appropriate solutions” based on:

- **Shared Governance**
- **Place-based Public Policy**

Locally Appropriate Solutions: Double Devolution

Double Devolution's two tracks for rebuilding public infrastructure

- New Localism: The Municipal Agenda
(municipal autonomy and physical infrastructure)
- Community-Building: Voluntary and Non-Profit Sector Agenda
(sector recognition and social infrastructure)

Canada so far ...

- Some progress along both tracks since 2000
- But most attention to the municipal New Localism (federal and provincial New Deals for Cities)
- Yet voluntary and non-profit sector Community-Building holds great promise in meeting today's most complex and urgent collective challenges

Community-Building's Promise

The Voluntary and Non-profit Sector uniquely bridges longstanding divides in public policy

- *Place and People*
(individual capacities and community assets)
- *Process and Outcome*
(relationships and results)

The synergies produce *smarter* public policy
(customized, innovative, preventative,
durable) for better outcomes

(Suzanne Morse, *Smart Communities*, 2004)

Acting on the Promise: Community-Building and 5 Big Policy Challenges

1. Social Inclusion
2. Environmental Sustainability
3. Cultural Diversity
4. Public Health
5. Economic Development

All require the local knowledge, networks, commitment, and credibility supplied by the voluntary and non-profit sector

And the sector *is* delivering with knowledge, networks, commitment, and credibility on these challenges

Inclusion: Asset based Neighbourhood Change, Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Sustainability: Ecological Footprints, Ecosystem Stewards, Watershed Restoration

Diversity: Inter-cultural collaboration and settlement services

Development: Social Economy, Labour Market Intermediaries, affordable housing

Health: Social Epidemiology, Healthy Communities, Community Health Clinics

The Main Message

For quality outcomes public policy increasingly requires a “community lens”

The community lens will:

- Recognize, support, and engage voluntary and third sectors as policy partners
- Ensure that all government departments align their programs and policies to respond to local needs and strengthen communities

A "Deliberate Relationship" is the Necessary Foundation

As Susan Carter explains, a Deliberate Relationship between the Voluntary/Non-profit sector and government will include:

- **an agreed set of principles to govern the relationship (Framework Agreement)**
- **active measures to strengthen the Sector (Capacity-building)**
- **processes to maintain and sustain an on-going relationship (Architecture)**
- **methods to enhance the Sector's policy role (Policy Involvement)**

Putting Relationships to Work? A National Community Innovation System

Three System Components:

- Knowledge: 'Street Science'
- Institutions: Four Levels
- Alliances: Strategic Brokers

Why an *Innovation System*?

- *“You create a system that’s not the usual ad hoc deliberations and serendipitous comings together of resources and people and interests ... You actually define a problem and an agenda that is compelling and you put the pieces together so you can deal in a systematic way and create a long-term impact”*

Community development practitioner, quoted in Ronald F. Ferguson and Sara E. Stoutland, “Reconceiving the Community Development Field” 1999.

Why a *National* System?

While the challenges and opportunities are increasingly localized in their expression, the experience is a Pan-Canadian one ...

- Many struggling rural and remote towns
- Widening neighbourhood gaps in big cities
- Ecological pressures in *both* sprawling cities and resource industry communities

In our terms ...

A National Community Innovation System can now be mobilized for progress on each of the 5 big policy challenges in different places.

The System Components (1)

- Knowledge: Street Science

The goal is a blending of evidence-based technical expertise and grass-roots experiential knowledge.

This means ...

- *For communities an Asset-driven Model*
- *For governments a Community Policy Lens*
- *For both, engagement in “policy co-production”*

(Jason Coburn, Street Science: Community Knowledge and Environmental Health Justice, 2005)

The System Components (2)

- Institutions: Four Levels
 1. *Volunteers (residents, neighbourhood associations etc.)*
 2. *Non-Profit Sector (frontline service and research organizations)*
 3. *Intermediaries (funders, technical assistance, representational networks)*
 4. *Governments (municipal, provincial, federal)*

Need a common language and collective action frame across levels (a public philosophy?)

System Components (3)

■ Alliances: Strategic Brokers

“the special potential of bridging individuals or organizations that occupy several positions, or move across positional boundaries, as crucial agents of change” (Bennett Harrison)

Some prominent examples (this room today in full of strategic brokers):

- Frances Lankin Greater Toronto United Way
- Nancy Neamtan Quebec Social Economy
- Sherri Torjman Vibrant Communities

These people ‘work the system’ crossing levels and building alliances for change

Canada's Community Innovation System? Moving Forward

Susan Carter's paper describes some of the components working together

Promising developments in the provincial, municipal, and federal arenas

But much more to be done in transforming deliberate relationships into a dynamic system

Moving Forward?

- Canada now enjoys a certain “latecomer’s advantage”

European settings: Strong on government and intermediary roles

American settings: Strong on voluntary and non-profit roles

EU: Strong on learning and linking levels

- We can learn from elsewhere and adapt good practices for our own innovation system