Rural Collaborative Potential: Evaluating Regional Economic Development Initiatives

The EREDI Project

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EREDI Funders

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WATERLOO ENVIRONMENT

School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
EREDI research purpose

- To examine **emerging best practices** in the organization, governance and structure of regional economic development initiatives
- To identify RED **success factors**
- To identify RED **barriers, issues, and challenges** to participation by rural communities.
- Themes
  - **Innovation**
  - Green economic development
  - Sustainability
  - **Value-added agriculture and food**
Theory: The New Regionalism

- Regional networks facilitate the **generation and diffusion of knowledge and information** and increase the prospect of innovation and business creation.
- **Formal and informal networks** are important.
- Networks are a form of **social capital ...and...**
- Networking helps create other forms of social capital:
  - attitudes of trust,
  - reciprocity,
  - associations and organizations
  - economic enterprises
- Networking leads to collaboration
- But collaboration implies more...
Theory: Collaboration

There is a continuum of complexity and commitment.

Himmelman 1996

- Exchanging information,
- Altering activities,
- Sharing resources,
- Enhancing the capacity of others
- Increasing levels of joint action
- Increasing shared values

AMO - 2015
Collaboration

- Collaboration is the act or process of “shared creation” or discovery. [It] involves the creation of new value by doing something new or different.

- [It] is transforming in the sense that you don’t leave the same way you came in. There’s some sort of change. **You give up part of yourself.** Something new has to be created. Something happens differently because of the process. *(Thomson and Perry 2006)*

- Collaboration is a process.... involving **shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions**.
  
  *(Thomson, Perry, & Miller 2009).*
The regions we examined...

- Seeking examples of regional collaboration
  - Okanagan Valley, BC (Ryan Deska)
  - Upstate California, USA (Ryan Deska)
  - North Carolina Research Triangle Park (Tamara Bangura)
  - Ohio-Pennsylvania-West Virginia TechBelt Regions (Tamara Bangura)
  - Vancouver Island, BC (Ryan Lipscei)
  - Cape Breton Island, NS (Ryan Lipscei)
  - North Country, New York State (Brittany Bruce)
  - Four Counties, Ontario (Brittany Bruce)
  - Thunder Bay Region, Ontario (Karen Sander)
  - Greater Peterborough Region, Ontario (Karen Sander)
  - Niagara Region, Ontario (Danielle Collins)
  - Windsor-Essex Region, Ontario (Danielle Collins)
Some Initial Results

- Evidence of networking is easy to find.
- Evidence of successful locally generated rural regional collaboration is much harder to find.

- Highly collaborative innovative regions are heavily subsidized by external funders...
- Why is networking easy, collaboration difficult, and funding essential?
Hypotheses

- The new regionalism asks rural regions to collaborate.... but....this is not easy
- Regional actors are self-interested actors
- Social capital approaches are “aspirational”
- Rural regional collaboration and innovation requires
  - Support for the transaction costs of collaboration
  - Underwriting the risks collaboration
  - To give time for
    - regional social capital to build
    - regional identities to solidify
- Purely economic programs are not successful...
- Because they do not move the participants beyond self-interest towards regional identities and shared norms.
Regional Development Policy

- Needs to support not only regional networking and economic investment
- But also collaboration which builds
  - Regional identity
  - Trust
  - A willingness to share risk
  - Principled engagement
  - Shared motivations
  - Capacity for joint action
References


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Thank You!