



Community News and Views

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Survival, Sustainability and Economic Transformation in a Centralized Economy

by Rex L. LaMore, Ph.D.

Imagine a place where the economy has been isolated for over 50 years from the vicissitudes of the largest economic system on the planet. Imagine that following the end of the Soviet Union, an estimated 80% of your economies imports and exports simply disappeared. Imagine an island where fuel shortages combined with the loss of modern fertilizers led to an explosion in community organic gardens while as some observers remarked, the average citizen may have lost up to 20lbs. off their previous body weight. No replacement parts for equipment, no access to many consumer goods such as soap, detergents, on and on...a place isolated both politically and economically.

I am of course referring to Cuba, our island neighbor 90 miles south of the tip of Florida. This past December I had the unique opportunity as a U.S. citizen to travel to Cuba. I was invited to participate in an MSU Study Abroad program organized by Dr. Rene Hinojosa, a professor of Urban and Regional Planning at

Michigan State University. Dr. Hinojosa has organized several trips and exchanges with Cuba over the past few years and this particular study trip was for MSU freshmen from our Honors College and focused on historic preservation and sustainability. This study abroad experience was rather unique in that students were enrolled for two semesters in which they examined the history and culture of Cuba and each student developed and presented a research report on some aspect of sustainability or historic preservation. As freshmen they had a unique cultural experience combined with an intensive course of study on the basics of cross-cultural research design and implementation. Students research interests varied as you might expect from citizen perceptions of historic preservation, to attitudes on happiness and consumerism, to the quality of bottled water.

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Many students used a comparative approach to their research, seeking to compare and contrast the context of Detroit to that of Havana. While time and resources did not permit them to conduct what we would call a rigorous analysis, they did begin to discover for themselves some rather interesting similarities and differences in these two cities ranging from the nature and extent of urban gardening to the effects of not having cell phone service for social interaction. For some of the students it was the first time they had ever been unable to text friends and families on a regular basis...and they noted in some of our debriefing sessions that as a result of not being able to text whenever/wherever, they talked more to each other!

As a community economic developer of over 35 years there are a couple of takeaways from this experience that I would like to share with my colleagues. First, there is an emerging free market economy surfacing in Havana. The Cuban National Assembly has designated "Old Havana" as a unique district in which private enterprise is allowed. As you can imagine in a centralized state run economy like Cuba, this is a big step. A select number of hotels, restaurants and primarily tourist based enterprises are now being allowed to operate in the historic areas of Havana for the purposes of attracting tourists (Europeans, Canadians and others) to Cuba. These businesses are taxed and the revenues generated are reinvested in the restoration of Old Centre Havana. From what I was able to observe in my short visit, Cuba is attempting to support redevelopment in this targeted area very much like our Downtown Development Authorities. Old Centre Havana has some of the western hemispheres most unique historic buildings, many registered with UNESCO's World Heritage sites. The preservation of these treasures is a critical but difficult tasks given the limited resources available to Cuba.

We have invited Ayleen Robainas Barcia, Ph.D., Architect and a leader in Havana's restoration to join us at our September 4, [2014 REI Summit](#) at the MSU Kellogg Center to learn about the historic private enterprise zone being piloted in Old Havana and how it is helping to rebuild, revitalize and preserve the Old Centre of Havana. As an example of self-

sufficient urban development with limited resources, the lessons being learned in Havana today are highly relevant to Michigan's community revitalization efforts.



Redevelopment in Old Havana. Photo by Rex LaMore

I observed a very modest lifestyle exhibited by most of the Cubans I met...from physicians to teachers. As an isolated island economy they are very prudent in their consumptive behavior. Lots of folks ride the buses (a few have the 50's era cars you see in the travelogues ...but don't be fooled by those, they are not museum pieces. Often as not it is a Chevy body with a scavenged soviet truck engine (they are imaginative!). But while they lack material goods they have a very rich and vibrant cultural sector in music, dance, art and prose.

Finally, the Cuban people I met were welcoming and uniquely curious about U.S. citizens. They don't see many of us (I was often asked if I was Canadian) and most of them expressed a sincere curiosity about why we don't seem to get along. I am

Survival (Continued)

old enough to remember the Cuban Missile crisis (more accurately the Soviet Missile Crisis because they were Soviet missiles not Cuban!). I remember vividly the fear of potential global nuclear confrontation, but most of the Cubans alive today don't have a living recollection of that event. They found it difficult to understand why we have apparently forgiven Russia for the missile crisis, communist China for Korea, Germany and Japan for World War II, but not Cuba.

Cuba is an island nation in transition. It is a neighbor to whom we are physically close, but economically and socially segregated from. They have a strong culture of self-determination, something we share in common. In reflecting on my visit to Cuba and the many lessons learned, perhaps this is a situation where stepping back will move us forward.

For more information contact Rex LaMore.

GET INVOLVED: University Center for Regional Economic Innovation (REI)

Are you interested in joining a [digital community](#) seeking to generate innovative ideas, tools, policies, and practices that can strengthen Michigan's Economy? [Join the REI Networks!](#)

Do you have what it takes to be a Co-Learning Plan Author? We are calling for authors to write on a variety of topics including youth entrepreneurship, community benefit corporations, and much more! This is a great opportunity for experts working in entrepreneurship and business development, K-20 education, exporting, IT, policymaking, venture capitalism, scholarly research, civic leadership, urban and regional planning and economic development. Please consider sharing your expertise to help strengthen Michigan's economy. The findings and recommendations in these co-learning plans, funded through this request, will serve as a source for current and practical information for regions and communities across Michigan. [Click here to review requirements.](#)

MSUOE/CCED Staff Help Build Neighborhood Capacity

by Bob Brown

Flint, Michigan is one of four U.S. cities to be awarded a Building Neighborhood Capacity Program (BNCP) grant. The (BNCP) is:

"a federally-funded program that focuses on neighborhoods where there have historically been barriers to creating viable revitalization plans and that struggle with issues such as concentrated poverty, high rates of crime and issues of community safety and justice, low-performing schools, inadequate access to housing and healthcare, and the absence of economic vitality. The BNCP realize these issues are interrelated and must be addressed holistically rather than in a piecemeal fashion. In addition, successful efforts to address these challenges in ways that lead to better results for children and families require community-driven efforts that build on neighborhood assets and that are supported and sustained by local leaders over an extended period of time."

-Center for the Study of Social Policy

Jessica Barnes-Najor (MSUOE) and Bob Brown (CCED) are partnering with the Flint BNCP to build the capacity of neighbors to effectively engage with each other and university researchers. Although the key principals of the Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach have been identified, our capacity to prepare communities and researchers to engage together in participatory research processes is just emerging. To bridge that gap, we have developed, in collaboration with community partners, a series of engaged scholarship modules. These modules are based upon the understanding that the effectiveness of an engaged scholarship initiative is determined, in part, by the intention, knowledge, and skill of partners. To identify the topics of need for supporting the knowledge and skills of partners, we looked to the literature in CBPR, while delving deeper into a wide array of research for each individual topic. The module topics, research base, and current status are presented in the table below¹. Please note that the literature base identified in the table is not exhaustive; rather, we have identified the primary bases of literature used in the development of the content (or the expected literature base for content not yet developed). – Continued

MSUOE/CCED (Continued)

The first four modules have been delivered to our BNCP partners in 4 two-hour interactive sessions. These co-learning sessions not only build capacity of our BNCP partners, but also help to refine and improve the presentation of module content.

Module Topics

Topic	Literature Base	Current Status
Introduction to CBPR and TPR	CBPR and TPR	Content completed
Honoring local and indigenous knowledge	CBPR, TPR, Anthropology	Content completed
Understanding partnerships	Community Psychology, CBPR, Social Network Analysis	Content completed
The dynamics of effective teams	CBPR, TPR, Business Management, Industrial-Organizational Psychology	Content completed
Introduction to needs assessments	CBPR, Epidemiology	Under revision
Power and privilege	CBPR, Cultural and Ethnic Studies, Education, Developmental Psychology	In production

Barnes-Najor and Brown will also be partnering in Detroit with the Warren/Conner Development Coalition and FoodPlus Detroit to build the engagement capacity of the Detroit residents.

For more information on these projects, contact Bob Brown at brownr23@msu.edu.

MSU CCED Students Impress at 2014 Crossing Borders Conference by JD Snyder,

Kelly Christopherson, Aaron Galer, and Leslie Grimm

CCED research assistants Leslie Grimm, Kelly Christopherson, and Aaron Galer were invited to present at the March 13-14 to present at the Crossing Borders 2014 Conference hosted by the Canadian Studies program in the Department of Transnational Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo.



MSU CCED Research Assistants pose for a picture with SUNY at Buffalo Canadian Studies Program Director Munroe Eagles. Pictured Left to Right: Kelly Christopherson, Aaron Galer, Munroe Eagles, Leslie Grimm

This interdisciplinary conference emphasized political, economic, and socio-cultural issues facing international border communities in North America, with an emphasis on U.S.-Canadian communities. Presentations explored cross-border relationships through literature, social media, advertising campaigns, sports environments, and reflections on natural phenomena such as Niagara Falls. Dr. Andrew Holman, Professor of History at Bridgewater State University, delivered the keynote address titled “*Outside the Glass: Some thoughts about Hockey and Canada.*” He observed the shifting cultural norms surrounding hockey and Canada, including shifts away from violence and equalized opportunities for participation between genders.

The CCED research team presented on their *White Paper on Global Models of Binational Regional Collaboration: The Potential for Great Lakes Regional Innovation.* – Continued

Binational Collaboration: Part II (Continued)

This paper explores regional economic partnerships across borders in Europe and North America; analyzes collaboration on the state-provincial level, regional sub-state/sub-provincial, and the traditional federal level; and identifies key economic strategies and building blocks for successful binational regional collaboration.

Binational regional sub-state/sub-provincial collaboration involves participation from local units of government such as municipal and county officials; private sector actors; and economic development agencies and organizations. The white paper highlights the recent CCED work to develop binational regional sub-state/sub-provincial level in Michigan and Ontario.

MSU CCED is collaborating with the Southwest (Ontario) Economic Alliance (SWEA) in holding a binational regional collaboration conference June 11, 2014 in Sarnia.

CCED has already co-hosted three successful binational conferences in 2012 and 2013, two in Sault Ste. Marie, MI and SSM ON, and one in Port Huron, MI. The Port Huron conference October 2, 2013 identified potential collaboration areas between Michigan and Ontario groups and networks in green chemistry, agri-food production, and joint regional marketing. The MSU CCED is currently developing strategic elements for these areas in a project funded by the MSU Institute of Public Policy and Social Research.

For more information about this project, please visit www.knowledgeplanning.org.

CCED Team Research: Eliminating Private Property Abandonment

by Emily Banks and Mengqui Wu

Many communities in the United States have suffered population loss and decline for several decades resulting in widespread residential, industrial, and commercial property abandonment. Currently, the pattern of abandonment in our society is mainly due to land ownership policies that allow land owners to literally “walk away” from their private

CCED Team Research (Continued)

property. As a result, local governments take the responsibility of eliminating abandon structures, and because tax payers ultimately bear the cost of deconstruction, there is a need to identify strategies that end private property abandonment.

CCED team began this private property abandonment research in October, 2012 and has been continuously moving forward. Dr. LaMore and Michelle LeBlanc, a former CCED research assistant, developed preliminary research paper titled: [*Planning Policies and Regulations that can reduce the Practices of Private Property Abandonment in United States, the Case for Michigan*](#). The report examines the feasibility of adopting public policy and planning regulations that would require private enterprises to secure financial instruments (i.e. insurance and guarantee bonds) on newly constructed commercial and industrial structures. The application of such insurance policies would change the ability of private industrial and commercial entities to abandon their property without carrying the responsibility of deconstruction.

The report examines two possible strategies for ending the practice of private property abandonment: insurance policies and bonds. The recommended policy for requiring insurance for deconstruction, which follows a similar legal principle to health insurance or fire insurance, would be a mandatory policy for newly constructed commercial and industrial properties. Similarly, performance guarantee bonds require private sector developers to obtain and carry bonds that will cover the cost of demolishing. These bonds are secured by the local government. This practice is currently feasible under the Performance Guarantee Act of the Michigan Zoning Enabling

Act of 2006 which empowers the local government requires surety bond acceptable to the local government covering the estimated cost of improvements. The performance bond could be implemented at the local level through zoning ordinances.

CCED is continuing its abandonment research and develop the construction and deconstruction cost estimates of the average industrial and commercial property – Continued

CCED Team Research (Continued)

in order to evaluate the insurance policy cost. The cost assumption would help the insurance companies determine the premium for different kinds of properties and encourage the property owners to use recycled materials which can reduce the cost and duration period of deconstruction.

The two systems of financial assurance, insurance policies and bonds, could reduce the practice of private property abandonment in Michigan. The future practice of requiring financial assurance may be molded by the level of government at which this requirement would be mandated. The two strategies, while different in practice, could achieve the same purpose of holding private property owners responsible for dismantling, removal, and restoration of their industrial and commercial property. In the future, we plan to develop a focus group to begin initial discussions on the feasibility to these insurance policies and bonds, hopefully resulting in a new sector of insurance policies for industrial and commercial companies. The overarching goal of this research is to abandon the idea of abandon property in Michigan and around the United States.

For more information, please contact Rex LaMore.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTOR

Enjoy this next article submitted by a Lansing community member.

Five-Step Master Plan for Talent

Retention by Community Contributor: Keri Litweller

When it comes to creating an economic master plan, the focus needs to be placed on talent retention and attraction and recognizing how these variables influence economic development. The capital city offers a diverse community college campus and is neighbor to a Big 10 university. Between the two campuses there is a population of approximately 100,000 students. Considering this number, a comprehensive strategy needs to be implemented to tap into the available human capital as a way to retain talent, rebuild our economy, and strengthen the assets we possess.

Community Contributor (Continued)

Employees can no longer be viewed as tools for workforce labor, but need to be recognized as the catalyst for workforce development. As we begin to shift this perspective of workforce development, we can transform our city into one of economic vitality and are better able to compete with other comparable cities to attract a stronger human capital.

There are several key elements in retaining and attracting human capital. First, through the growth of knowledge-based jobs. We need to market the capital city region as an area that has a developed workforce and a clear vision for economic wellbeing. Second, the emphasis on diversity in the workforce. Our young adults are more diverse than previous generations and value inclusivity. Having a diverse foundation will continue to attract young talent. Third, the ability for college career counselors to network with local organizations in effort to embed talent into the economy. Employees want their strengths to be utilized and to find purpose and meaning in their work. By putting “aces in their places,” the opportunity to retain talent increases. Fourth, investing in our adolescents and providing them the opportunity to job shadow and explore career opportunities. By developing a continuum of strong high school graduates, we create a built-in workforce that continues to advance our economy. Finally, the expansion of amenities and recreation in the area. The ability to retain and attract talent also includes the resources to engage individuals with their environment. This fuels a place not just to live, but also to play.

In effort to entice skilled individuals to stay in the area, these elements need to work in conjunction with one another. The absence of these elements impacts the sustainability of our city, which lies in our ability to retain a greater proportion of our graduates and to attract new talent. While our city has a great history of industry and manufacturing, the best way to accelerate a knowledge-based economy is by concentrating on more advanced manufacturing, expanding our business climate, and looking at our talent as our “most valuable asset.” It is through the convergence of this plan that we can embrace “quality of place”. Our ability to retain and attract the creative and the innovative, the dreamers and the doers is critical to the overall wellbeing of our city.

CCED Thinkers and Doers: Lansing for Hire

by Kate Calabria

Every semester, CCED hosts a Thinkers + Doers forum. These forums focus on current events or issues within the Capital Region and act as a way to exemplify the relationship between research and action. Each semester, CCED invites a “thinker” –someone doing the research, analyzing data, and determining trends – as well as a “doer” – someone actively engaged in the community through outreach efforts such as public policy or programming. Together, thinkers and doers are creating and implementing solutions to our region’s problems. Thinkers + Doers forums provide a platform to advocated these efforts. The forums also act as an opportunity for likeminded individuals to expand their networks and resources, ultimately building capacity within the Capital Region.

On April 24th, 2014, CCED hosted a Thinkers + Doers Forum titled “Lansing for Hire”. This semester’s forum was crafted by community member, Keri Litweller as a call to bring more attention to talent attraction and talent retention to Lansing.

Lou Glazer of Michigan Future shared his thoughts on how Michigan can become more prosperous and voiced the need for a stronger knowledge based economy. Colby Spencer-Cesaro of Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN) presented the many ways that WIN is utilizing data to find trends in the workforce and how to relay those trends into creating better workforce development strategies. Finally, Amanda Dumond of Prima Civitas explained the Michigan Internship Initiative – an effort to better connect employees and employers through structured internships designed for entry level works as well as older workers transitioning between jobs.

After the presentations, audience members conversed with the speakers and each other – asking questions or sharing their own experiences regarding Michigan’s employment conditions. The event proved to be another successful forum in regards of exchanging knowledge, demonstrating current action in Michigan, and identifying ways the Lansing can build

Thinkers and Doers (Continued)

upon its current efforts or resources to continually improve the Capital Region. For more information on past or upcoming Thinkers + Doers forums, [click here](#). CCED is always looking for new forum topics.

Summer Outreach

Opportunities at REI

by Lauren Ross

The MSU EDA University Center for Regional Economic Innovation (REI) has been working diligently with professionals across the state to develop a third series of Co-Learning Plans for the 2013-14 project year. In February, eight Co-Learning Plans were selected from a pool of nearly twenty applicants, and include various topics such as: *Pop-Up Business Program Development*, *Improving TIF Transparency and Accountability: A Consolidated TIF Database for Michigan*, and *Platform, Places and People: Engaging Alumni as Champions of Michigan's Unsung Heroes*. The authors of these Co-Learning Plans will be featured at our annual Innovate Michigan! Summit on Thursday, September 4, 2014. The authors will present the findings of their research; the summit is a great opportunity for economic innovation professionals to network with others from around the state.

REI will also be conducting several student-led, faculty-guided project webinars in the coming months. These webinars include [Site Selector Data Collection and Website Development in the Upper Peninsula](#) with Dr. Jennifer James-Mesloh of Northern Michigan University on Tuesday April 29, 2014 from 10-11am.; [Montcalm Business Incubator](#) with Dr. Davia Downey of Grand Valley State University , on Wednesday April 30, 2014 from 2-3pm; [Action Plan for a Detroit Employment District: Mt. Elliott Industrial District](#) with Dr. June Manning Thomas and Dr. Eric Dueweke of Taubman College, on Tuesday May 6, 2014 from 10-11am; and [Afterhouse](#) with Dr. Steve Mankouche of the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, on Thursday May 8, 2014 from 2-3pm.

For the full list of 2014 Co-Learning Plan series projects, information on current and past webinars, and Innovate Michigan! Summit updates; please visit our website at www.reicenter.org.