

SERDI ANNUAL CONFERENCE

REGIONALISM: NO LONGER AN UNNATURAL ACT?

CARL STENBERG, UNC SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

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1. COOPERATION IS “AN UNNATURAL ACT AMONG NONCONSENTING ADULTS.” BEVERLY CIGLER, PENN STATE UNIVERSITY HARRISBURG, 2007.
 - WHY DID SHE MAKE THIS OBSERVATION SOME 50 YEARS AFTER THE ADVENT OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, PLANNING, AND REVIEW PROCESSES?
 - SOME POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS.
 - + THE STAYING POWER OF JURISDICTION, ESPECIALLY BOUNDARIES AND THE HISTORY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THOSE LIVING IN THAT SPACE.
 - + THREAT TO LOCAL AUTONOMY.
 - + BIG GOVERNMENT IN WASHINGTON OR THE STATE CAPITAL IMPOSES REGIONAL STRUCTURES INSTEAD OF “BOTTOM-UP” EVOLUTION.
 - + INEXPERIENCE OR DISCOMFORT WORKING TOGETHER (CITIES & COUNTIES, LARGE & SMALL JURISDICTIONS, RIVALRIES).
 - + FEW REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS WHO HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN COLLABORATION.
 - + BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION TAKE TIME AND ARE MOST VISIBLE OVER THE LONG-TERM, WHILE POLITICAL AGENDAS AND CALCULATIONS ARE BASED ON SHORT-TERM CONSIDERATIONS SUCH AS THE NEXT ELECTION.
 - + THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY SEPARATE COMMUNITY VALUES AND HISTORY FROM DISTANT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES WHILE THE SENSE OF PLACE ENCOURAGES COMMUNITIES TO DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES FROM THEIR NEIGHBORS.
 - + CHANGE IS HARD AND RISKY.
- SO THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THE TIME IS COMING TO LOOK AT REGIONALISM AS A MORE NATURAL ACT IN RESPONSE TO SOME CHALLENGING AND DAUNTING PROBLEMS THAT AREN'T

GOING TO GO AWAY. THIS MORNING I'D LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THESE DISRUPTING TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN 2030.

- ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING -- 5 TRENDS:
 - + URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE (“DYING” COMMUNITIES);
 - + CHANGING ECONOMY (TYPES OF JOBS, TRAINING NEEDS, WINNERS & LOSERS);
 - + CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS (IN-MIGRATION, “GRAYING,” MILLENIALS IN THE WORKFORCE);
 - + INFRASTRUCTURE DETERIORATION (REPORT CARD: US = D+, NC = C);
 - + TECHNOLOGY EXPLOSION (SOCIAL MEDIA, TRANSPARENCY & CITIZEN ACCESS, E-GOVERNMENT GROWTH, DIGITAL DIVIDE).
- THESE TRENDS ARE FOUND THROUGHOUT THE SOUTHEAST, AND NATIONALLY.

3. IMPLICATIONS: 5 BUILDING BLOCKS FOR REGIONAL REMEDIAL APPROACHES.

- PROBLEMS IGNORE LOCAL BOUNDARIES (NO “LOCAL” PROBLEMS).
- MOST PROBLEMS ARE “WICKED” (INTERGOVERNMENTAL, INTERSECTORAL, INTERDISCIPLINARY).
- PROBLEMS WILL NOT GO AWAY AND MIGHT GET WORSE (OPIOIDS & INFRASTRUCTURE).
- TO SERVE A CITY OR COUNTY WELL, POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERS MUST TRANSCEND THEIR INDIVIDUAL JURISDICTIONS (GEORGE FREDERICKSON).

4. SO IN ADDRESSING THESE TRENDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS, FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS ARE RAISED: WHO DOES WHAT? WHO PAYS THE BILL? WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE? AND WHAT

ROLES CAN REGIONAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
– OR RIGOS – PLAY IN PROBLEM-SOLVING?

- THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE GROWTH AND ENDURANCE OF RIGOS IS EVIDENCE OF RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR CREATIVITY AND COMMITMENT IN FINDING WAYS TO WORK ACROSS BOUNDARIES IN REGIONAL SPACES. BUT ARE THEY A “NATURAL” ACT?

- 5. INTERGOVERNMENTAL TRENDS PROVIDE A CONTEXT FOR ANSWERING THIS QUESTION.
 - 5 FEDERAL “FEARLESS FORECASTS:”
 - + THE FEDERAL CAVALRY WILL NO LONGER SAVE THE SETTLERS DUE TO THE 4 D’S (DEBT, DEFICIT, DEFENSE, DEMOGRAPHICS – AMERICAN RECOVERY & REINVESTMENT ACT WAS LAST EXAMPLE OF FEDERAL RESCUE);
 - + FEDERAL DEVOLUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY (“SHIFT AND SHAFT FEDERALISM”) DUE TO BUDGET “CLIFF;”
 - + POPULAR DISCRETIONARY PROGRAMS LIKE CDBG WILL BE TARGETED FOR CAPPING, CUTTING, OR CONSOLIDATING;
 - + BLOCK GRANTS WILL GIVE RECIPIENTS MORE FLEXIBILITY AND LESS MONEY;
 - + REFORMS PROPOSED WITHOUT CONSIDERING STATE & LOCAL IMPACTS (SALT COMPONENT OF FEDERAL TAX REFORM).

 - THE STATES’ RESURGENCE.
 - + SHIFTING POLITICAL LANDSCAPES/”TRICKLE-DOWN” PARTISAN POLARIZATION (URBAN-RURAL POLITICAL DIVIDE).
 - + PUSH-BACK POLITICS (AFFORDABLE CARE ACT, MEDICAID EXPANSION, ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION, SANCTUARY CITIES).
 - + SINCE THE 1960s, STATES AND THE FEDS HAVE CREATED AND SUPPORTED A SUBSTATE REGIONAL PATCHWORK OF SINGLE-AND MULTI-FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATIONS RESTING ON A HIGHLY FRAGMENTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT BASE.

- + MOST STATES HAVE NOT USED “CARROTS” OR “STICKS” TO PROMOTE INTERLOCAL COLLABORATION OR REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.
 - + GOVERNORS AND LEGISLATORS HAVE BECOME MORE ADVERSARIES OF RATHER THAN PARTNERS WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS.
- FEND-FOR-YOURSELF LOCALISM.
 - + STATE RESTRICTIONS ON LOCAL AUTHORITY ARE GROWING (NLC SURVEY: 42 STATES HAVE PREEMPTED LOCAL AUTHORITY IN RIDE SHARING, 24 IN MINIMUM WAGE, 17 IN PAID LEAVE, AND 17 IN MUNICIPAL BROADBAND; FOR EXAMPLE, IN NC DURING THE LAST LEGISLATIVE SESSION THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OVERTURNED THE GOVERNOR’S VETO OF A BILL ELIMINATING OBX LOCAL AUTHORITY TO PROHIBIT PLASTIC BAGS).
 - + CUTBACKS OF LOCAL AID ARE CONTINUING.
 - + UNFUNDED MANDATES ARE NOT GOING AWAY.
 - + MORE SHIFT OF SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES TO LOCALITIES WITHOUT FUNDING EXPECTED.
6. SOME IRONIES AND GOOD NEWS
- LOCAL INNOVATION & EXPERIMENTATION ENCOURAGED AND EXPECTED -- THE “NEW LOCALISM” (BRUCE KATZ).
 - PUBLIC OPINION POLLS SHOW CITIZENS BELIEVE LOCALITIES ARE MORE TRUSTWORTHY AND DELIVER MORE “BANG FOR THE BUCK” THAN STATES OR FEDS. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WORK – PERHAPS NOT AS WELL AS CITIZENS WOULD LIKE AT TIMES – AND THEY DELIVER VALUED SERVICES. DOES THIS GOOD WILL EXTEND TO REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS?
 - GREATER LOCAL RESPONSIBILITIES; FEWER FEDERAL AND STATE DOLLARS COULD LEAD TO MORE INTEREST IN SAVING MONEY THROUGH COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES.
 - RECOGNITION THAT THERE IS A SCALE REQUIRED TO PRODUCE SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM OUTCOMES. GROWING PRESSURE TO WORK ACROSS BOUNDARIES; AN IMPERATIVE NOT AN OPTION.

- THERE IS A RECENT AND GROWING INTEREST IN SERVICE-SHARING IN THE STATES, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH RELATIVELY LARGE NUMBERS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND HIGH PROPERTY TAXES (NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY). SURVEYS OF ELECTED OFFICIALS AND MANAGERS BY ICMA AND OTHERS INDICATE SUPPORT FOR GREATER INTERLOCAL COLLABORATION AND SERVICE SHARING.
7. REGIONALISM IS NO LONGER AN “UNNATURAL ACT” BUT IT IS A DIFFICULT ONE. THERE ARE AT LEAST 5 HURDLES THAT MUST BE OVERCOME IN THE NEXT STAGE OF RIGO EVOLUTION. WITH THEM COMES SOME CHALLENGES TO RIGO DIRECTORS. FIRST, THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS VARIES WIDELY AND MAY NOT BE APPRECIATED, UNDERSTOOD, OR RESPECTED BY CITIZENS AND LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS. HOW CAN THE PROFILE OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS BE RAISED WITHOUT THREATENING MEMBER JURISDICTIONS AND WHAT IS THE REGIONAL BRAND? SECOND, THERE IS FRAGMENTATION AMONG SINGLE- AND MULTI-PURPOSE REGIONAL BODIES CAUSING CONFUSION IN REGIONAL DECISION-MAKING AND COORDINATION PROBLEMS IN PROGRAM AND SERVICE DELIVERY. ARE THE KEY POLITICAL PLAYERS ALIGNED TO RECONGIZE THE NEED FOR MORE AUTHORITATIVE, UMBRELLA RIGOS AND TO TAKE ACTION? THIRD, MANY RIGOS HAVE AVOIDED CONTROVERSIAL AND CONTENTIOUS ISSUES THAT COULD CREATE DISAGREEMENT AND DISSATISFACTION AMONG LOCAL MEMBERS. AS A RESULT, REGIONAL AGENDAS OFTEN ADDRESS SECOND OR THIRD TIER “SAFE” PROBLEMS OR NEEDS. HOW CAN RIGOS ADDRESS ISSUES THAT REALLY MATTER TO CITIZENS WITHOUT OFFENDING OR THREATENING YOUR MEMBERS? FOURTH, THERE IS NOT MUCH SENSE OF REGIONAL CITIZENSHIP AND LOCAL OFFICIALS RECEIVE NO POLITICAL CREDIT FOR CHAMPIONING REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. WHAT INCENTIVES CAN YOU PROVIDE TO GET BUY-IN AND SUPPORT FROM YOUR MEMBERS? AND

FIFTH, REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE THE BEST KEPT INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECRETS. WHILE THEY ARE EVERYWHERE THEY ARE NOT VERY VISIBLE OR HAVE A SENSE OF IDENTITY OR PLACE. WHAT POWERFUL, POSITIVE STORIES ARE YOU TELLING ABOUT RIGOS TO GET REGIONALISM ON THE RADAR SCREEN?

8. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR RIGOs IN THE “NEW LOCALISM.”SOME NEXT STEPS TO CONSIDER IN ALIGNING THE REGIONAL MOON AND STARS.

- MANY RIGOS HAVE COME A LONG WAY IN BUILDING TRUST AND CREDIBILITY THROUGH THEIR PLANNING, GRANTSMANSHIP, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORKS SINCE THE 1960S EVEN AS FEDERAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT (HOUSING ACTS) AND PLAN/PROGRAM SUPPORT (A-95) HAVE WANED. IT’S TIME TO TEST THE WATERS ABOUT MOVING TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE TO CITIES AND COUNTIES.
- CAPITALIZE ON OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED BY SERVICE-SHARING MOVEMENT (OBAMA & TRUMP MANAGEMENT AGENDAS; STATE INITIATIVES – NY, NJ, OH).
- WORK WITH LEGISLATORS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES IN STATE CAPITALS TO KEEP STATUTORY AUTHORIZATIONS AND EXPAND AUTHORITY SUCH AS TO PROVIDE SERVICES (NC, A “DILLON’S RULE” STATE, GRANTS BROAD AUTHORITY FOR COLLABORATION AND SERVICE CONTRACTING).
- WORK WITH LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS TO IDENTIFY LOW-HANGING FRUIT SUCH AS HEAVY EQUIPMENT SHARING, IT ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT, WATER AND SEWER LINE CONSTRUCTION, JOINT PURCHASING, 911 CALL CENTERS).
- WORK SMALL TO ACTIEVE A LARGER VISION – BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOALS (JIM COLLINS “INCREMENTAL REVOLUTIONARY”).
- BUILD TRUST, DEMONSTRATE SUCCESS AND SAVINGS & MOVE ON TO TOUGHER CHALLENGES AND WICKED PROBLEMS.

9. RIGO'S "BRIDGE BUILDER" VALUE-ADDED.

- BRINGING TOGETHER DISPARATE, DIVERSE JURISDICTIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO DEAL WITH "WICKED" PROBLEMS.
- THE 5 C'S:
 - + CATALYST;
 - + CONVENER;
 - + COORDINATOR;
 - + COLLABORATOR;
 - + CONDUCTOR.
- IF THESE FIVE ROLES ARE SUCCESSFULLY EXECUTED REGIONALISM WILL BE CONSIDERED A NATURAL, NOT UNNATURAL, ACT.