

NOTES OF A NEWCOMER

Looking in at Social Innovation
in Waterloo Region

Clara Bird

"We are a community of Firsts"



ABOUT SOCIAL INNOVATION GENERATION

Social Innovation Generation (SiG) is a collaborative partnership between Montreal-based J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, University of Waterloo, MaRS Discovery District in Toronto, and PLAN Institute in Vancouver. It seeks to address Canada's social and ecological challenges by creating a culture of continuous social innovation. The project is designed to enhance the conditions for social innovation in Canada, including providing practical new support for social innovators in cultivating organizations and initiatives.

The SiG project is focused very specifically on social innovations that have durability, impact and scale. Our interest is on profound change processes and our overall aim is to encourage effective methods of addressing persistent social problems on a national scale.

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Social Innovation Generation at the University of Waterloo (SiG@Waterloo)



INTRODUCTION

Wednesday, September 24th, 2008

It is warm for a fall day. Except for a slight change of colour in the leaves, it could be August, even July. From my balcony at 51 Mansion Street, I can see my neighbour Bill working on his house. In the time since we moved in, he has replaced most of the windows on the house and is now a good way through the construction of his porch. He promises to have Ola and me over for a beer once he has completed it. I think his offer is genuine. Bill is like that. While he is working away, a steady stream of people come by to visit. One day I noticed him unloading several coolers from his truck. When I inquired as to their contents, he told me he was distributing his family's sausages to friends and neighbours. I know little of Bill's history but recognize in his kind manner to me, and his interaction with others, that he is generous and open—exemplary of the community he calls his own. The simple fact of being his neighbour grants Ola and me some membership, too.

“SiG@Waterloo is the academic node of a larger national initiative, Social Innovation Generation, established to investigate and support social innovation across Canada”

I arrived in Kitchener in January of last year. I had visited several times during the fall to see my parents, who had recently relocated here from Montreal. Circumstances conspired and Ola and I found ourselves taking up residence here, albeit somewhat ambivalently. I am from Montreal and Ola is from London in the UK. We are used to the “big city.”

But we were both unemployed and this area seemed full of opportunities. So we moved. It was a snowy winter, and for the first few months Ola and I took refuge in our apartment on Schneider Ave, creeping out occasionally to the Shortstop on the corner, or to the Boathouse, when we needed life and company. Ola was working as a researcher for the University, and I was working on contract for Tamarack, editing a manuscript. I had made acquaintances through my search for work, but we had few peers and no friends. We were often on our own and spent much of our free time visiting friends in other places. Consequently, Kitchener-Waterloo seemed like a lonely place. We were aware of a strong community, but remained outside it.

In March, I was given the opportunity to work for SiG@Waterloo. They were looking for someone to do a short contract and I was available and eager. My task has been to write a piece about the community where SiG has taken up residence. SiG@Waterloo is the academic node of a larger national initiative, Social Innovation Generation, established to investigate and support social innovation across Canada. Located within the University of Waterloo, this node's chief goal is to explore, research and facilitate greater understanding of how and when social innovation occurs. Unlike some of the other nodes, SiG@Waterloo is not site specific, but aims instead to be an intellectual hub for generating ideas. That said, there is a recognition that novel approaches to solving social challenges cannot happen in a bubble. For academic ideas to have impact, they must have input from, and contribute to, the larger community. As such, SiG@Waterloo collaborates on local initiatives that leverage and enhance the talents and creativity latent in this community. SiG's local goals focus on deepening the understanding of social innovation in this region and strengthening capacity through sharing resources.

So, SiG wants to better understand the qualities that make this community thrive, as well as the challenges that hold it back. Further, understanding these processes provides important insights more generally into what characteristics make communities innovative. Given Waterloo Region's national and increasingly international reputation for invention and entrepreneurship in various sectors, understanding SiG@Waterloo's new home may be particularly revealing to those interested in social innovation.

The purpose of this story, then, is threefold. From SiG's perspective, it is an attempt to get to know its neighbours and to acquaint its neighbours with this institute concerned with social innovation; it is also an investigation of how social innovation operates at a community level. Additionally, and rather inadvertently, it is my own story; that of a young, educated, rather creative and quite socially aware newcomer to Waterloo.

In the end, this last perspective has come to shape the story. I set out to get to know this community for SiG through a series of interviews with people involved with and committed to social innovation. With each interview, I became better acquainted with the people and places that make up this community, and in turn, with my own place within it. I have chosen to convey my findings in a narrative that invites you to listen in on my conversations and to share in my own process of exploration and understanding. I recognize that I can only barely begin to fully

understand the history and culture of this region. I am new here, having little familiarity but also very few expectations. However, I came to believe that this "newness" grants me a fresh and valuable perspective. Moreover, it puts me in a similar position to so many others, people like me who have recently arrived in this region and are trying to make a home here.

So, in June of 2008, armed with the two refrains that this community associates with itself—"we are a community of firsts", and "we are a big small town"—I began a journey. Looking back on this experience, I feel excited and ready to share my story with you. I hope you enjoy it! And I hope that this new story about this community can offer to you some measure of the insights that it has given to me.



*SiG@Waterloo
- Located in the
heart of Kitchener*

At Home in a Big Small Town — Lynn Randall

Lynn Randall and I arranged to meet in her office in the Region's Health and Social Services Building, on Regina Street in Uptown Waterloo. The office building is new, shiny, full of light, and located in the heart of the action. Lynn, who is the Director of Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, greets me with a warm smile and invites me into her office. I sit down across the desk from her. She has laid out a series of documents for me to take home; they include progress reports, pamphlets and information on some of the initiatives that the Region is currently working on.

Regional government: uniting and servicing a broad and diverse community

Lynn begins by explaining the Regional government to me. She explains that in Canada there are three levels of government: federal, provincial and local or municipal. Over the past decade, the provincial government has been downloading responsibility for social programs to the municipalities, a move that often compromises their ability to provide services, as programs are funded from a finite tax base. Waterloo Region recognized that it needed to organize in order to cope with these greater demands, and the Social Planning Division was created by the Regional government in 1999. Lynn feels that this move filled a gap and has improved the Region's capacity for social planning and service delivery.

Planning: taking a strategic and long term view of the future

Knowing that I am here to learn more about social innovation, Lynn segues into describing the Region's strategic focus. According to Lynn, having a strategic plan that guides programming is quite useful. With input from the public, the Region has developed strategic priorities and areas of focus. For the term 2007–2010, these include: environmental sustainability, growth management, healthy and safe communities, human services, infrastructure, and service excellence. Lynn feels this forward looking and strategic approach makes the Regional government more capable of serving this community as well as fostering innovation. When I ask her to explain this to me, she singles out two areas of strategic focus: service excellence and growth management.

PART ONE

HOME

Community Health and Social Services - Waterloo



People: encouraging dedication, relationships and risk taking

Lynn tells me that as part of its mandate for service excellence, the Region has made a concerted effort to foster a supportive and creative work environment for staff. She explains that people are given the opportunity and the necessary support to take risks.

The Region recognizes the importance of ensuring that each staff member knows his or her importance in achieving objectives, as this encourages dedication, drive and creativity.

She also stresses that the Region is blessed with very good leadership. Several of the people on the Board and in executive positions have been in leadership roles for a long time. Lynn feels that people who have an extensive shared history trust each other more and are thus more willing to be flexible and even to go out on a limb together. This helps counter the effects of greater turnover among their provincial counterparts, where new staff may have no memory of local situations and issues. I ask myself whether having the same people in positions of power over a long period of time might actually stifle creativity and new ideas, but I can't disagree with Lynn's point that personal relationships can be very powerful in making things happen.

Change: using it to the community's advantage

The Region's strategic plan also prioritizes growth management. As Lynn sees it, this means planning for sustainability and making commitments: "You have a responsibility to see things through." A big part of a sustainable community is an openness to inevitable change. To this end, Lynn tells me that the regional staff are trained in change theory. There is an acknowledgement that change happens, and the staff have been taught to expect it and to manage it. Lynn stresses the importance of timing, knowing when to push and when to hold back: "Timing is everything; you don't want to introduce change, on top of change, on top of change. It's about managing change. If you don't understand it you can't direct it; you want to be able to absorb change and, when possible, have an impact on how it plays out."

Internal support for people and growth management for a changing community are two factors that Lynn feels foster the Region's capacity for innovation; and having them mandated in the strategic plan is an innovation in itself.

Outreach: local workers better represent and serve individual communities

Further, Lynn tells me that the innovation found in the strategic plan extends to the delivery of the Region's programs. She describes a program developed in consultation with the community called the "Community Outreach Program," wherein outreach workers are chosen from among local individuals rather than relying on the Region's employees. The belief is that local workers will be better able to reflect and meet their community's needs. Lynn describes the Region's role: "We work with the community to brainstorm ideas, to provide education and resources, and to come up with a model that works. We are out there but invisible. Our goal is to mobilize and equip local people and their organizations or neighbourhoods from behind the scenes—we see ourselves as enablers."

Input: changes that come from the bottom are more likely to make it to the top

On this point, Lynn is visibly animated. I can tell that she is particularly proud of the extent to which the community is participating in, and contributing to, the Region's programming. As she says: "There is a huge amount of community input here; we avoid working from the top down. We don't go out with the authority of the Region and tell people what to do. We go out and ask what we can do to help. Like with the Community Outreach Program or the strategic plan, the community is always consulted. Ideas and solutions come from them." There seems to be a fundamental belief that if a project is going to work, and if the Regional government is going to make any difference, it needs to be owned by the citizens.

Frankly, I would agree. Although I also know that such intense, long-term consultation and strong sense of ownership may bring its own challenges.

Balance: the down side of managing up

Anticipating my next thought, Lynn continues: “Sometimes this is very straightforward and sometimes it is more complex, even controversial.” She illustrates this for me with the issue of homelessness: “In our community, emergency shelters were often established within the faith and benevolent communities and they grew up organically; places like the House of Friendship or the YWCA. They, of course, bring with them a set of values-based approaches that can be in conflict with new ideas for solutions to the problems. For example, if it’s shown elsewhere that an effective approach to getting people off the streets is to have a “wet shelter” versus a “dry shelter,” there might be objections from faith-based organizations. So, innovative approaches may come up that are accepted and work in other places, but these are not necessarily compatible with our community’s sense of values and identity.”

Further, Lynn tells me, community input sometimes halts progress. I gather from what she is saying that the cost of significant community input is that sometimes a good idea, especially one that involves necessary change, is rejected. This can happen for a variety of reasons but very often is simply human nature’s fear of changing what’s familiar. Those who study innovation have discovered that different types and levels of collaboration are needed at different points in the development of any good initiative; but shifting these gears can be hard to do. Lynn’s comments remind me that it is no easy task to balance extensive community participation with a mandate for innovative growth and change.

Big small town: strong roots and knowing your neighbour

I wonder if this emphasis on community input is a reflection of the community itself. Confirming this intuition, Lynn notes: “People have strong roots here and a sense of having created a good quality of life. There is an expression used to describe this place: “a big small town.” It’s about a sense of the history and belonging, about safety and knowing your neighbours. We have half a million people living in this Region but you don’t get that sense.”

Her musings about the community in some ways echo her descriptions of the Regional government and I ponder the old adage about the chicken and the egg. Does the community flavour the character of the Regional government or do the governing bodies shape the community? I suspect it is the former, but also that the people in the Regional government are particularly good at recognizing their community’s identity, needs and challenges.

Challenges: a community shifting

On that note, I ask Lynn what she feels are the most pressing and difficult obstacles facing this community. Lynn acknowledges that this place is rapidly changing; she mentions more newcomers, more elderly people, increasing urbanization. In particular, Lynn recognizes the challenge produced by the ripple effects of a growing population intersecting with a downturn in the economy. Further, the increasing number of seniors presents difficulties in terms of keeping elderly people healthy and in their homes. As for the Region’s geography, she adds: “We have created a hard geographical boundary so we can have a good balance between urban and rural, but it’s a delicate balance. We have increasing pressures on both sides: the dying business of farming is hard for young people, and core urban areas need to be intensified and revitalized.” She sums up her thoughts: “Overall, we need to become friendlier in terms of the physical, architectural and attitudinal.”

As Lynn has stressed, the Region is aware of current and future challenges and it is trying to balance its response: to be prepared yet flexible; to reward risk, novelty and spontaneity while accommodating the concerns of its citizens; and to maintain long standing connections. I am struck by the difficulty of negotiating these juxtapositions, particularly in the context of a community in transition.

Onward: transitioning to the big while maintaining the small

From our interview, I have an impression of Lynn as an intelligent and thoughtful person. Later, I would realize that her story led to a framework of my own; she has provided me with a foundation for reflecting on my experiences with this place. From Lynn, I gather that this is a community that values its neighbours, the strengths of its ties and traditions, and significant community participation in government. It is also a community that is forward looking, entrepreneurial, risk taking and on the brink of significant change. Its population of 500,000 is about to balloon, making it a metropolis, at least in size. But what then of the “big small town”? Can the Waterloo Region grow and evolve while still maintaining its identity? Is there space for innovations that shake up the status quo? With these questions in mind, I set out to better understand these seemingly contrasting characteristics and dynamics, and what they mean for this Region’s capacity for social innovation and real, durable change.



No Place Like Home — Sunshine Chen

Insider: well known and knowing

I am set to meet Sunshine Chen at Hannah's Bella Bistro in Uptown Waterloo. I arrive early and wait for Sunshine outside the restaurant, listening to music and taking in the surroundings. Hannah's sits on the east side of King Street North, slightly up from the base of the hill that begins at Erb Street. On the opposite side of the street you can see Waterloo Town Square. Both sides of the street are lined with an eclectic range of establishments, from high fashion boutiques to low budget Asian eateries. Living in this Region, it doesn't take long to figure out that this is, for many, the "it" neighbourhood. With CIGI, RIM, the universities and the Municipal and Regional governments nearby, Uptown Waterloo has seen a renaissance of shops and restaurants to meet the tastes of students, university faculty and staff, famous visitors, up and coming tech folk and well established business and government people. I muse at the effect, wondering if it's another clue to understanding this place. Because, just like the majority of the clientele this neighbourhood serves, it feels both promising and transitory.

Sunshine arrives and we go inside. Hannah's Bella Bistro is spacious, with high ceilings and a roomy floor plan. It is colourful, artful and inviting, yet serious about its food. Once we are seated, Sunshine immediately inquires about me, my job and my reason for being in Waterloo—ten minutes later I find that I am still prattling on. In his job for his company, Storybuilders, a communications and media firm, Sunshine does a lot of interviewing, and he is clearly a skilled listener who is interested in people and their lives.

A young girl walks by and Sunshine says hello. Minutes later, a woman comes over to the table. Sunshine introduces her as Hannah, the chef and owner of the restaurant, and says: "Since we are talking about social innovation, you should meet Hannah; she started this restaurant when she was 25 years old, just this girl with dreads and a belief about how you create an environment that is both creative and 'out of the box', but also a comfortable nice place for people to stay." How interesting I think; there's that theme again of striving to be very open to the new but remain comfortable and familiar. Hannah laughs off Sunshine's characterization of her and these two chat about mutual friends for a while, leaving me to the side, to listen.

I get the impression that Sunshine is well known in this town. He seems to pride himself on knowing the people and the places that make up Waterloo. From their brief conversation, I gather that Tuesday is a 2-dollar taco night at Ethel's and there is live jazz every Friday and Saturday nights at King Street Trio. I am learning that there is much going on in this town that exists almost "underground"; but knowing the right people gets you access to an insider's vantage point. I guess this is true of any community, but I wonder, is it more true here in Waterloo? Before I can share my thoughts, Hannah heads back to the kitchen and the food arrives. I set aside my own wonderings, and turn back to hear more of Sunshine's story about his city.

Arrival: knowing your context and meeting demand

Sunshine is a compelling narrator. He describes his life like a series of detective stories. There is always a challenge or mystery, a clever detective who gathers the clues, and an ingenious answer that solves the case in the end.

I ask him to tell me about how he came to be in Waterloo and he explains that he has an uncle who came to school here and his grandparents decided to follow. His parents came to join the family when he was a small child. He goes on to tell me that his grandparents used to own a convenience store near the University of Waterloo. They noticed an increase in Asian clientele and soon figured out that their store was the only one around to stock instant noodles. Subsequently, they suggested that his parents start a Chinese restaurant to meet an obvious demand for Asian food. His parents opened Sunshine Express many years ago and it continues to be a success today.

Afterwards, I recognize that this seemingly unrelated story about his grandparents is meant to be a clue about the entrepreneurial spirit of the community. Further, I can see that Sunshine's story of his family's arrival and successful installation in Waterloo introduces his own story and, moreover, the one he wants to tell about this community. As he begins the story of how, as a young man, he ended up staying in Waterloo, despite his firm intentions to leave, I feel as though Sunshine is making a case for Waterloo and a personal appeal to me, not as an individual but as a young person. Clearly, attracting and keeping youth in this community is an important piece in his puzzle for building a bigger and better Waterloo. He gives some voice to my earlier sense of a "promising but transitory" feel to some of Waterloo's population.

Home: embracing the spirit of 'Why not?'

Framing his tale, Sunshine tells me that Waterloo has a place in Samuel Bronfman's story: "It's where he placed his biggest bet." Sunshine explains that during the 30's when prohibition was enforced in the United States, Samuel Bronfman bet that it wouldn't hold, and he bought the Joseph E. Seagram whisky distillery in Waterloo. During the entire time of prohibition, Seagram continued to make whiskey, and when prohibition broke, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons was the largest whisky maker in the world.

Sunshine reveals the relevance of this to him: "Even though I didn't know that history then, those buildings, the warehouses, were huge in my own personal imagination, because as a kid I would regularly ride down Erb street, right up next to them. They were part of my childhood imagining and understanding of this city."

Moving forward, Sunshine tells me:

I was in Architecture School when Seagram decided to close and tear down its buildings. At the time, I had started doing my thesis and was looking for a topic. I didn't want an exotic locale for my thesis because I was gearing up to leave when I finished. This was going to be my last eight months in Waterloo, so I thought: "Why not pick a local site? Then I am out of here! I am destined to be in a big city!" So, I decided to do my thesis on the development of the Seagram land.

During this period, across the country, everyone had the same question: "What is the future for downtown centres?" With this in my mind, I completed my thesis—and it made this strange proposal. You see, I was watching and I started to understand what anchors this community: the University. I wanted to figure out how to get the University into the core. I proposed building a convocation hall that would double as a convention centre for the high tech industry. I suggested building a hotel and residences in the "barrel warehouses." Also, I figured that if you are going to create a venue that is going to showcase your best and brightest, then you need the best and brightest to be here. So I proposed research institutes and think tanks.

I am impressed by Sunshine's foresight and ingenuity and I ask him whether his academic supervisors were similarly taken with his ideas. He tells me that they were sceptical; in fact, he was heavily grilled in his review. He explains that despite being interested in his idea they just couldn't believe that a university could anchor a downtown. "They were all from Toronto so they didn't really get Waterloo."

This last thought is interesting to me. The University of Toronto is nestled right in the centre of Toronto, so clearly Sunshine's professors were familiar with universities anchoring urban cores. I imagine that Sunshine is suggesting his professors found it hard to imagine Waterloo as a similarly designed city, perhaps because of the "small town" feel of this region, while in fact Sunshine's vision for Waterloo is as a growing and busy metropolis, not unlike Toronto. Later in our interview he speaks to this directly, but for now, he comes back to his story:

So the day I defended my thesis, The Record announces that the City is buying the land but they have no plans for it. Despite my reservations (at that point I was set to leave and go to work for a world famous architect in Kyoto), my mother convinced me to call the City and propose the idea. The response was that they couldn't afford it, so I let the idea drop. After all, I had Japan.

Seagram Distillery buildings now converted to condominiums



Around this time, Sunshine continues, his friends recommended he talk with visiting economics professor, Larry Smith. The two hit it off and Smith called the City on his behalf. The City called the next day and agreed to come and see his model at the University. He gave them his proposal, careful to relate it to them using their language and to appeal to their needs and concerns. At the end of the presentation, the officials called for the city truck, packed everything up, and invited Sunshine to present to the City's senior management team the following day.

Sunshine tells me that the first question that senior management asked him was where he went to school, and when he responded that he had graduated from the School of Architecture, they asked him if there were other people like him there. He replied with a definite "yes!" Shortly thereafter, explains Sunshine, the City offered him a job to help them figure out what to do with the Seagram land.

So he stayed. I ask, half joking, whether the prospect of a steady income convinced him to stall his departure. He confirms this, laughing, but tells me that what actually persuaded him to take the job was home, it was a sense of home, of doing something for his home.

It's an intriguing and remarkable story. I wonder what gave Sunshine the courage to keep pushing, at times defiantly. He reiterates again: "I had Japan and [nothing to lose], and remember, I went through the Co-op Program at the University. So, why not?"

Why not indeed? Like the current motto of the University of Waterloo, Sunshine's story of how he ended up staying in Waterloo is filled with the spirit of "Why not?": a maverick, risky, defiant, inventive and playful attitude towards life. It also alludes to the importance of connections, of recognizing windows of opportunity and anticipating what's to come. Further, it is a story of hope and optimism and a love of home. Trying to separate out what of this belongs to Sunshine himself and what is characteristic of this community, I question Sunshine about the relevance of the School of Architecture and its Co-op Education Program in his story and that of Waterloo.

The street fighters: self reliance, defiance, perseverance and alliance

By way of an answer, he relays a conversation he had with the president of the University over breakfast. I am struck by the double message in his statement; it is clearly about Co-op's influence on its students, but also again, about having significant alliances.

The President: What do you think about Co-op?
Sunshine: Can I speak frankly?
The President: Sure.
Sunshine: Look; the U of W creates the best street fighters of the academic world.
The President: What do you mean by that?
Sunshine: The feedback we get from employers is that given a choice between a Waterloo student and one of their own, they will take one of us any day. They say: "You just know how to work, you have enough experience, you know how to get things done and you don't know what you are worth."
The President: That is really interesting.
 What do you think of the Co-op fees?
Sunshine: Honestly, I will pay the price of admission and, if you give me the credits [I need] and leave me alone, I will find my own jobs when I am finished.

I am amused by his bravado and ask Sunshine to elaborate on this conversation. He tells me that the experience of Co-op at the School of Architecture is totally decimating because there is a hugely unrealistic amount of work to do and because the students are largely left to their own devices, isolated from others students and the rest of campus.

Though difficult, I think Sunshine is saying that this kind of experience builds amazing resolve and self-reliance. In the real world, this translates into a feeling of being very capable and creative, able to go above and beyond what is expected.

The other side of the story: isolationism

But there are negative connotations as well: "The School moved to Cambridge to pioneer. They like to be pioneers, but what they sacrificed was that they left Waterloo at the moment when the culture and the infrastructure were reaching maturity. They lost the opportunity to connect with people who are creating new buildings and advancing new ways of thinking. It is odd for a School of Architecture that is supposed to design buildings for the larger society to be kind of anti-social."

This is the first time I have heard Sunshine be overtly critical of his alma mater or the town and I think it's because, like the professors he spoke of earlier, the School of Architecture contradicted his vision to urbanize Waterloo. Arguably, however, the School's move may have this effect in the long term for the Region, as Cambridge grows and attracts a more diverse set of citizens. In the short term, however, it could be seen as isolationism, something that Sunshine is clearly fighting against. This is perhaps the flip side of the self reliant, independent and maverick spirit Sunshine champions.

Place: what makes this community so innovative?

Sunshine has a way of tying his stories back to his main argument, in this case, the merit of the Waterloo Region. He tells me that the Co-op model of hard work, struggle and self reliance typifies what goes on in the larger Waterloo community. "What is really fascinating is that every time people decided that they were going to take care of themselves, they found answers to things that are much more universal." He cites two examples of what he feels were new and innovative initiatives: the very first offering of a Peace and Conflict Studies program at the University of Waterloo, and the grassroots beginnings and corporate success of the locally launched Home Hardware franchise. In Sunshine's words:

"This is a place where we get to experiment."

I ask Sunshine what he thinks allows for this capacity for experimentation and self reliance. He gives me an answer which he says is only part of the equation and it highlights an important ingredient he had only spoken about indirectly up to this point: the power of connections.

If you stick around in a community long enough, things kind of emerge. At some point, Paul Born of Tamarack Institute and John Colangeli of Lutherwood, two locally based, very successful social innovators whose programs have had immense impact way outside of this region, called me into a meeting for an idea being developed called Leadership Waterloo. That experience opened my eyes to the fact that no one is more than a phone call away in a community like this. In some ways, it's a small community, a tight-knit group where things get done on a handshake and relationships come pretty easy and hold a lot of weight.

I suggest that perhaps this might not be everyone's experience, but Sunshine seems to dismiss this: "Well, it depends on where you hang out. I will let you in on a secret and it says more about Waterloo than about me; the most cosmopolitan place in Waterloo is Chapters (book store)." He goes on to tell me about an experience he had recently. He was in Chapters over the Christmas period and noticed that both Malcolm Gladwell (author of *Tipping Point* and *Blink*) and Mike Lazaridis (Founder and CEO of Research in Motion, inventor of the Blackberry) were in the store. Seizing the opportunity, he introduced himself to both of them, and then, introduced them to each other. He finishes his thought by saying: "This could never have happened in Toronto."

I am inclined to agree. Sunshine describes himself as a connector, and I can see why. But, as he has done throughout our interview, he takes no credit, instead attributing this unlikely happening to the specific community environment that is Waterloo. He appears to be fascinated with what he sees as its innovative, entrepreneurial nature, but he admits to not having figured out why it's like that. He reflects: "This is the question, this is what is fascinating; maybe it's the Mennonite roots, the working together..." Yet for all his history and experience here, he's not completely sure; after all, it's hard to really see yourself or your own reality clearly. It's typically a blind spot.



Waterloo Town Square

Next: the making of a metropolis

Despite repeatedly telling me that he has been trying to leave for years, I can tell that Sunshine is dedicated to Waterloo and will probably stay. Sunshine's stories of Waterloo in the past and present seem to be infused with his belief in its future; he is committed to helping transform Waterloo into a metropolis. He muses about what it means to be a big city:

When you are in a big city you have no choice but to interact with other people, they are in your space and you are in theirs. Suburbs are different, they are all "this is my castle." This is funny because people always say cities are more impersonal and smaller towns are friendlier. It isn't really that way, is it? So this is the challenge, how do we make people feel that it's okay to get messy, interact and get out of their nice bubbles?

Sunshine is busily trying to do this. He talks about an event he has begun holding at a house. It's a cultural potluck that is about bringing people together who otherwise would not be in the same place. He invites me to come sometime. His company, Storybuilders, and his work with the cultural initiative, Neruda Productions, echo this kind of perspective. As he puts it: "I still believe that design and architecture have a role to play in enhancing culture, but that before we can get there, we need to bolster the culture itself."

My interview with Sunshine went on for more than two and a half hours and felt more like a conversation. Since then, I have encountered him several times, and in many ways I think of him as exemplifying what this community is all about. His own story, as well as his thoughtful insights and infectious optimism, paint a picture of a place uniquely capable of supporting its citizens through strong connections and a maverick spirit of entrepreneurship and self-reliance. Yet, perhaps because of its seeming preoccupation with independence and "the Waterloo way," it still feels like the "big small town" that Lynn described. But from his stories and his manner, I get the impression that Sunshine is a keen barometer of social and cultural shifts and that his vision for the metropolis of tomorrow is not far off. The increased immigration and diversification that Lynn spoke of will result in a new landscape for Waterloo. The question is what will that future landscape look like and how will the community weather the journey forward? Perhaps the metaphor of an adolescent fits: full of growing pains, still hankering after childhood, yet being propelled forward despite itself. Will it resist? Will it embrace change? What kind of adult will this region become?

Home is Where Your Voice is Heard — Isabel Cisterna

Outsider: finding your voice, fighting for your place

Isabel and I meet at Café 1842, on the corner of Princess Street and King Street North. We arranged for the interview to be quite early, and I am a little bleary eyed and thankful for the coffee when I arrive. Even at this early hour the café is busy. People sit alone or with others, reading the newspaper or chatting. I have been here several times before and find that I am beginning to recognize the kind of crowd this place appeals to: professionals, creative types and art students seem to be its mainstays. Perhaps this is not surprising given its location: the corner of King and Princess is home to a record store, a vegetarian eatery, a comic book store and two independent cinemas. It shares a space with a hotel and a popular pub and seems to be a centre of local culture in Uptown Waterloo.

I sit down at a corner table and find myself eavesdropping on the conversation at the adjoining table while waiting for Isabel to arrive. Two women and three men are having breakfast before work. They seem to know each other quite well and, from what I can discern, they are professionals in some capacity. There is talk of their jobs, their country homes and yoga. I notice that they are all quite young and wonder to myself, my conversation with Sunshine coming to mind, whether they are from here or somewhere else, and what keeps them in this town.

The sight of Isabel, smiling broadly, looking a little flustered, interrupts my musings. She apologizes for being late, and rushes off to get some food and a drink. I also get something to nibble on and we return to our seats. She begins by excusing herself for being late, recounting her troubles this morning; a back ache, the problem of having children at home during the summer months and trying to get some work done. Somehow, I can't recall why, we get onto the topic of fashion in Waterloo. We agree that there is something lacking, but Isabel tells me this is a relief to her. She is glad there is no special emphasis on appearances; it's a nice change after growing up in Chile. Isabel tells me a story about a particular

summer in Chile, when the newest fad was to wear thigh-high, high-heeled leather boots with a mini skirt. Apparently, Chile is a fairly homogenous culture and the "in" outfit is worn by everyone. She describes to me how uncomfortable those thigh-high leather boots were in the heat of summer and I can see why she finds Waterloo's more relaxed attitude towards fashion a relief.

Searching: lonely to laudable

I ask Isabel why she left Chile and how she ended up in Waterloo. She tells me her story, beginning with her departure from Chile and covering her life right up to the present day. Isabel speaks with honesty and intensity about herself and her experiences. As with so many artists, I feel her story is full of implications about the world around her.

Isabel explains that her parents didn't have a lot of money; they could only afford to send one child, her brother, to university and it would not have been possible for her to work and go to school. Further, she was involved in street performance, and because of the repressive government, she knew she would not be able to practice her art safely at home.

She went to Toronto with the intention of staying for a year or so, long enough to make the necessary money to put herself through school back in Chile. She quickly became involved in two Spanish theatre productions, but was frustrated by their limited exposure to the general public. At some point, Isabel visited a friend who was attending the University of Waterloo. She felt Waterloo presented the possibility of a better life: less expensive, good wages, more visibility, resources close at hand and everything within walking distance. She decided to give the region a try.

Isabel tells me that at first she had a hard time; she had been expecting a very different kind of reception. In Chile, people fall all over foreigners and marvel at them. Her instinct on arriving was to say, "Hi my name is Isabel and I am from Chile" and then await applause. She soon discovered there was nothing special about being foreign; in fact, it was a disadvantage. With limited English language skills and no work experience, finding employment was challenging. She accepted anything she could get, and spent years working at jobs that required little capacity for communication. It was lonely and isolating.

To illustrate this for me, Isabel describes the inhospitable environment of a factory where she was employed as a stock keeper. Most of her co-workers were women from developing countries and the lunch tables were clearly divided along ethnicity and language lines. Her expectation, based on previous jobs in Chile, was of a more social, interactive work place. This was her first experience of much-praised Canadian multiculturalism and she summarizes it succinctly: "to each their own playground."

Isabel's depiction of her early years in Waterloo is evocative and speaks of the difficulty of being a newcomer. Despite its small size, Isabel was unable to easily connect with others and feel part of this community. She lacked the necessary tools and relationships to grant her membership. In close-knit communities and

long established cultures, this is often the case. A subtle and deeply embedded social order makes integration a drawn out process. I have experienced this myself when living in other countries. Hearing about the same phenomenon here was surprising, as I consider Canada, on the whole, to be relatively open. I suspect that this may be the flip side of a community “where everything gets done on a handshake.”

As Isabel goes on with her story, I can see that she is determined to fight against this kind of exclusion; in fact, it has become her central focus. I think she is motivated by her own experience but also by a desire to see this community transformed. Perhaps this is because she has experienced relative success here, or perhaps because, more generally, she sees this Region as a place with great potential.

Voice: artistic expression as a venue for communication

Isabel tells me that starting in 1997, she began performing monologue pieces around the city:

“I needed to know that I still had a voice. I felt invisible and needed to be heard.”

For years she put on shows sporadically, with limited exposure but some underground success. Eventually, Henry from Theatre & Company saw her perform and invited her to participate in Writer’s Block, a group for new and up-and-coming writers. The group organized to present a play, and again she did a monologue, only this time she received critical acclaim. She says this event, and connecting finally with those who believed in her, gave her enough confidence to consider taking on more and bigger community projects.

Receiving recognition led to an important realization: “I recognized a need to connect artists coming to Waterloo from all over the world with a Canadian audience, and to offer them a chance to perform with dignity in established and professional contexts. I could see that this was a path to integration and understanding between cultures.”

Within months of her performance with Theatre & Company, Isabel had launched the first Café Cabaret. The notion of Café Cabaret is based on a Chilean tradition, wherein all types of performers come together for an evening of entertainment, usually over the course of a meal. These events were immediately successful. Newcomers and artists, perhaps similar in their feelings of isolation, were given a venue to communicate, share, and become visible.

Social transformation: Neruda Productions

The Café Cabarets reinforced Isabel’s belief that art has the capacity to bring people together and break down boundaries. It also inspired her to do more. She created Neruda Productions, a not-for-profit, community arts organization, as an arena for ongoing and expanded newcomer involvement and artistic expression.

Isabel tells me that Neruda Productions continues to host Café Cabarets, and now offers other events and workshops, including *Arpillera: Tapestry of Life*, collages that tell life stories, created over many weeks by groups of women. Another important project has been *Art Through Children’s Eyes*, a mentorship and exploration of Canadian identity through children’s art. She explains that newly arrived women and children are the focus of her work because they are the most isolated and vulnerable. Men can engage with others in the workplace, whereas women and children are often at home. This means they are less likely to learn English language skills and are thus more disconnected, less rooted, and less part of society. Isabel has been convinced that when women come together they discover that they are not alone in their experience, and this is both comforting and empowering.

So, using her own experience as a guide, Isabel through Neruda Productions helps newcomers share their stories and histories and navigate the process of settling and living in the Waterloo Region. As Isabel elaborates, her organization may have started off focusing on art, but now art is the vehicle for social transformation:

You know, Neruda Productions started out as an arts organization, but has morphed into a social entrepreneurship venture. Art is the vehicle, not the end result. I determine success by gauging the experience; did people learn, experience catharsis, interact and connect? How many communities were involved? How many volunteers? Where do these people come from? What I care about is the connection, interaction and bonding, not whether the art is beautiful; that’s just the icing on the cake.

Here she reminds me of Sunshine, perhaps not surprising as they work together. Isabel talks about enabling different kinds of community, where art and culture play a more central role and where newcomers are equally engaged, and engaging, citizens. She is convinced that art has transformative powers, and is deliberately provocative in this assertion:

There is a gap that everyone recognizes needs to be bridged in order to integrate cultures in our communities. There is a missing “arts and culture piece” that I think we need to create and support. We can begin to do this by simply bringing people together

through music. So, give us the thousands and thousands spent in planning and writing reports, and we will show you how to bridge this gap. Shared experience is worth so much; it changes outlook, interactions and mindset. Creating together is very powerful.

Paradoxes: Waterloo and the arts

In her tone, I hear an impatience and frustration with culture here and also with the ways things are done. I ask her to tell me more and she explains:

There is a global notion that arts and culture are struggles. But here, people think we do it better, because we think we do everything better. In other countries there are more resources for the arts built into the culture. Here, we have endless discussions about where to “put” arts and culture, as though it is a tangible thing to be created, bought and sold. Culture is not like a recipe where you can just add flour and bake. Why do we need a cultural plan? It is like having a contingency plan for emergencies. Culture [here] is “scheduled for 8 o’clock tonight” —it is an injection, a booster shot every once in a while.

This makes me laugh. Since arriving here, I have on several occasions overheard people talking about a “cultural plan” to make Waterloo a vibrant cultural centre. I ask Isabel why she thinks this community views culture in these terms. Isabel’s answer suggests that power structures and conflicts for control contribute to the idea of culture here, as does the view of culture as a commodity:

[Somehow] it is also a question of who makes the culture here. Is it the artists, the University, NGOs, the government? It is a question of responsibility, with everyone pointing to someone else as holding responsibility. It is also a matter of who is setting the agenda and defining the terms; [some people may feel like] we already have festivals and that is good enough. Ultimately, who is the motor or engine? Who are the relevant people, what are the relevant institutions?

I suggest that maybe the cultural workers themselves need to be in decision-making positions, but Isabel rightly points out that wider support and recognition needs to come from other players in the community. Otherwise, as she puts it: “it would be a very lonely performance.”

This brings to mind Lynn’s remarks about the emphasis on grassroots participation in this community. If, as Lynn suggests, decisions largely come from the community, then what Isabel is inferring about the lack of direct contact and accountability seems out of place. On the other hand, Lynn also mentioned long-standing leadership as a contributing factor to innovative action and thinking. And then, Isabel’s story of receiving acclaim and recognition evokes the role of connections and “powerful friends.” I wonder, can a community be simultaneously closed and open, capable of support and assistance yet exclusive and limited? And what impact does this have on its capacity for change and innovation?

Reinforcing this paradox for me, Isabel tells me that,

“...on the other hand, Waterloo is unique at giving people chances and, as a community, it is very open to new experiences, even thirsty for new experiences.”

Isabel says that this is exemplified by the kind of shows that can get funded here and the audiences who are willing to attend them. A predominantly English audience will attend a show that is primarily in Spanish. In other cities, that same show would probably only bring in Spanish viewers. As she sees it, this curiosity and openness can create new synergies and connections.

Similarly, Isabel tells me that Waterloo is definitely open and welcoming of newcomers in principle, even if they do not seem entirely sure what to do with people once they get here. She suggests this openness may come from their unique history: the tradition of the Mennonites who managed to co-exist, but remain slightly apart. They have preserved their culture but are equal partners. She notes: “We should learn from this.”

I find myself questioning this. Doesn’t an us-and-them mentality contribute to the isolation Isabel experienced herself and is fighting so hard to change for others? Isn’t it also part of what continues to frustrate her, as she attempts to transform this community: that the small circle of leadership insiders in this community is so inaccessible to most people? Does she think this community can, or should, change as the context alters, making room for new and different relationships? Not easy questions; and no easy answers.

New voices: making change happen, making it last

According to Isabel, the context is rapidly shifting. As she sees it, the challenge right now is that Waterloo Region is changing very fast, faster than municipalities can keep up with and accommodate. Many immigrants are arriving and need to be invited to belong, not simply to assimilate. Municipalities say that they support multiculturalism, but again, it is very hard to get anywhere when the people they are trying to reach are in the shadows and are unfamiliar to them.

The kind of support that the municipalities provide people may also change to reflect this evolving context. The tolerance and openness that this community prides itself on may not be enough. Isabel's own story and the longevity of Neruda Productions exemplify this. Isabel attributes much of her success to being in the Waterloo Region. Once she was granted recognition, she was able to pursue her dreams in a way she does not feel would have been possible elsewhere. Yet, as we speak, she questions her ability to maintain and grow Neruda Productions: "We do not have [enough] capacity; we would need a lot more resources."

Like a Waterlooian, Isabel is looking for inventive solutions to keep Neruda Productions going. She is hoping to get corporate sponsorship and eventually become self sufficient, but recognizes that she will need continued community assistance: "We are hoping that the community will see the value of what we do." The fear of course, is that Isabel will burn out, and with no one else to pick up the slack, her unique organization will cease to exist. She tells me that she and Sunshine work constantly, too much in fact:

We know there is so much more to do but neither of us can make a living following our passions, so this is a side project. We are burnt out and can't continue forever this way. Can we change the model to make it sustainable? We know that many people are dependant on us now. Closing Neruda Productions would be devastating to newcomers. It takes courage to be on the inside of this community and to fight for what you believe in. It gets very tiring sometimes; it's a challenge to stay on the inside.

As a social innovator, Isabel is inventive, charismatic and a leader. She is a force to be reckoned with. But, like all of us, she is defined to some extent by her context, and can benefit or be held back by it. Through her stories and insights, I can see she has experienced life in both unlikely and unsought ways. Her years spent in the shadows clearly limited her capacity to change and create, but also seem to have strengthened her resolve. Once included in this community,

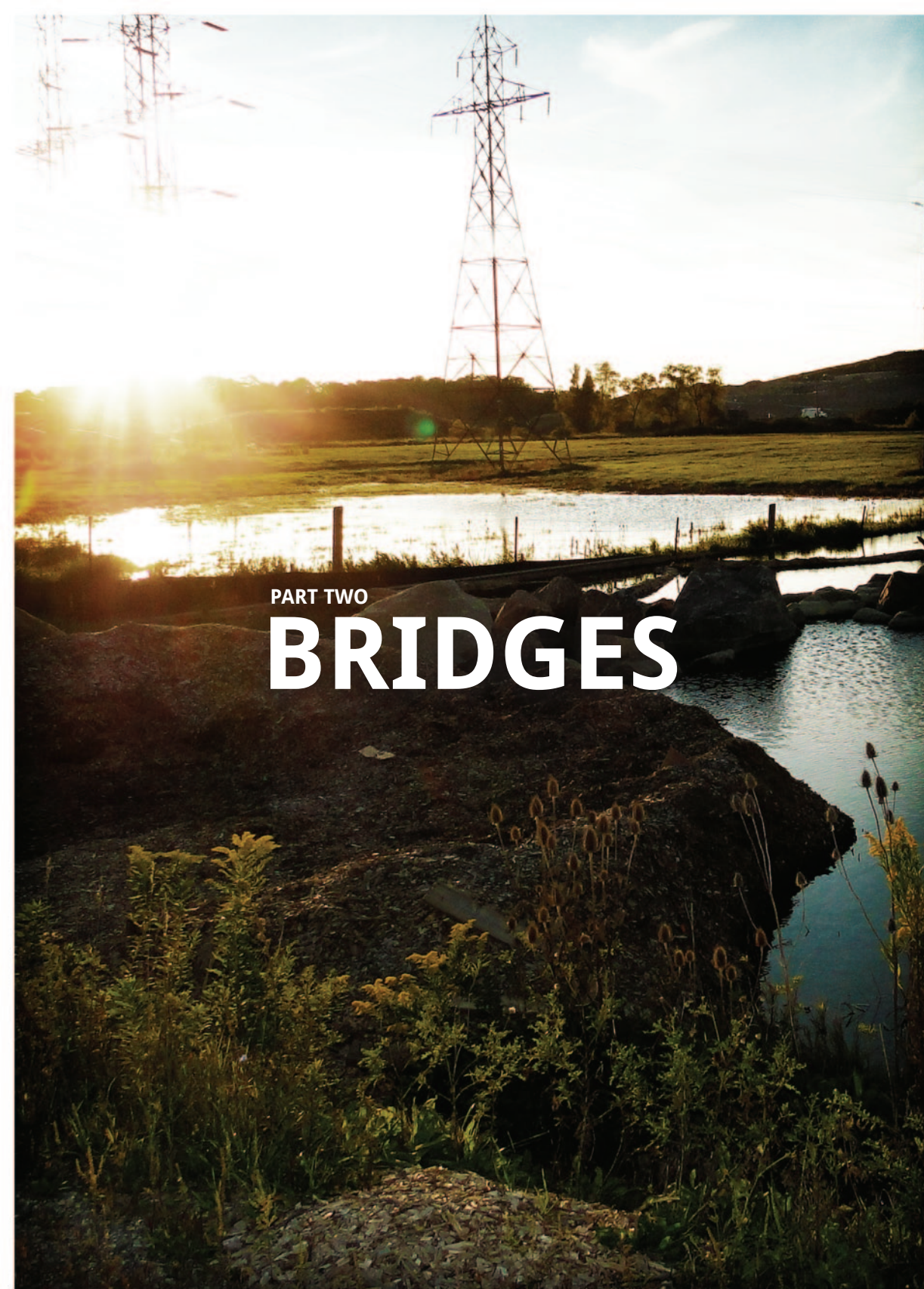
she has benefited from the bonds and connections that make things happen in this town. She is resolved to grant this experience to other people and believes that artistic practice is a catalyst for this. She clearly envisions a Waterloo that is more diverse, creative and innovative, and is doing her part to make this a reality. Still, she will need continued and augmented support. In order to move Neruda Productions, and perhaps this community, along a trajectory of greater innovation, she will need additional resources and greater inclusion.

Social innovation theory might say she needs to move her project from the generation stage (creative, explosive idea generation) to the exploitation phase (focused resourcing and implementation of that which is most relevant to goals), where great ideas become imbedded in culture and policy.

This reflects my conversation with both Sunshine and Lynn. I am beginning to recognize a limited capacity to move between these two important phases in the adaptive cycle. As Isabel noted, this community is great at welcoming, and I would say, creating, inventing and stimulating. But it seems to be challenged by precisely what to do with, and how to support the potential of, new people, ideas, creations, and actions after they arrive on the scene.



*Neruda Production located in
The Button Factory, 25 Regina St. S, Waterloo*



PART TWO

BRIDGES

Thursday, October 2, 2008

It is now undeniably fall and utterly unlike the sunny morning when I started writing this account. I am out at my parents' house in Haysville. Again, I am out on the porch, only this time I am covered in blankets, sipping hot tea and watching the rain and the trees swaying in the wind.

I have reached a natural pause in the story. My first interview with Lynn set the context and gave me some clues to understanding this region: its unique capacities and its challenges. To paint a complete picture of this region would be a lifelong project. For the purpose of understanding the capacity for social innovation here, I will now focus in on the community characteristics that seem to either enable or inhibit social innovations as they emerge and struggle for viability in the Waterloo Region. First, though, I take a stab at linking what I have heard so far with what I am absorbing of social innovation models, from Frances Westley and others.

Beginning with Lynn and through Sunshine's story, **I am beginning to see that this region may be a place where renewal and reorganization thrive.** In terms of social innovation models, this directly relates to what is called "the back loop of an adaptive cycle": the natural periods of time when elements of the old are left behind and new possibilities get lots of attention. The entrepreneurial, creative, bottom up, self reliant and maverick spirit of Waterloo Region means that new ideas abound, are usually welcome and appear to be supported.

These qualities are affirmed in Isabel's story. However, as I conjectured initially after talking to Lynn, some of the capacities essential for the periods of renewal and reorganization may perversely be limiting a capacity for the growth and conservation, or what is called "the front loop" of the adaptive cycle. It is in this phase of innovation that ideas become institutionalized. They are scaled up, spread out and become part of the fabric of every day life.

I wonder if initiatives and organizations in this Region may at times unintentionally block social innovations by not making place for outsiders in central roles. In an environment that lacks relevant diversity, or that fails to include all voices connected to the place or the objectives, ideas will be born, but then may struggle to be brought to fruition. Ironically perhaps, having a strong grassroots stakeholder model in which most ideas must be collaboratively imagined, may mean that some potentially important innovations are not widely enough supported, do not get approved up, and therefore, never see the light of day.

I shall now turn my attention to the remaining interviews with the hope of deepening my understanding of these capacities and their roots, as well as these challenges and their origins.

Building Bridges to a Bigger World — Rick Haldenby

Sunshine speaks of the power of his education to shape him, his outlook and his skills. In speaking with Rick Haldenby, this is again confirmed to me. But I have come to think that it is not only the School of Architecture or even the University that molds; it's the community at large. Rick Haldenby is the director of the School of Architecture. He has been in the position for many years. Originally arriving here for his undergraduate degree, he returned to the University of Waterloo after taking a long break to cycle across Europe, and has never left.

Rick was notably enthusiastic about doing an interview with me. In our correspondence, he was friendly and accommodating. We met for the first time at William's Café, beside the Kitchener City Hall, and right across the street from the SiG office. I waited, a little anxiously, near the front door. As we had never met in person, I was worried that I might fail to recognize him. When he entered the café, he greeted me with a confident smile, and I knew I had the right person. In the line for coffee, we exchanged pleasantries and a mutual happiness about having found each other. In person, he expresses himself so similarly to his correspondent's voice that I felt I was speaking with someone I had known for some time.

"Innovation is about better design and the here-and-now"

Before we had even sat down, and without beating around the bush, he began talking about the University, and the need for a strategic vision. He had been at a meeting earlier that day about a new initiative around social innovation. As he sees it, innovation is about better design and the here-and-now, perhaps a not surprising opinion from an architect. Still, as he emphasizes throughout our conversation, he has unique views on architecture and design and, consequently, on the School of Architecture, which he in no small part helped to create.

We sit down. Throughout our conversation, Rick stops to greet people in the café. As it turns out, he has a meeting at City Hall right after our interview, and several of his colleagues are in the café. I get the sense that he is well connected. Coffee in hand, I start off by asking Rick to tell me his story. With minimal prompting, I get a picture of a person, a member of this community, and a culture.

Beginnings: autonomous, self reliant, maverick.

The School of Architecture was founded in 1967 and I started as a student in 69. The school began as part of Engineering, but it was the 60s and architects were long-haired, socially active, slightly subversive people, so it just didn't work. The School of Engineering was a juggernaut with a very clear sense of mission, and the School of Architecture really didn't fit in.

When I arrived, the School had been in existence for two years. It was completely chaotic, and with all due respect for the people involved, appallingly run. We were on our own, off campus in a completely inadequate building on Phillip Street. It was a recently built, one-story space in a completely featureless industrial building. Virtually no money was invested to create educational facilities. It was the most unlikely location, in fact, quite ridiculous: an Architecture School in the "degree zero" of architecture.

In one sense, the University should have been ashamed, but looking at it from the point of view of institution building, it was genius planning; completely unintended, but genius. Because of the fact that we had to invent everything, the strength and the resilience of the culture created on Phillip Street was extraordinary. You get a bunch of really creative people in a semi-isolated situation with very little support and they start inventing things. They invent a culture of really interesting ideas and actions. It was a wild time.

So, from the beginning, the Architecture School had a clear sense of its own autonomy. Many of us who have been with the school since it was on Philip Street consider our 21-year stint on campus to be the era of displacement. It was always our ideal to be more closely linked to the community.

Rick tells me that this maverick spirit of independence and inventiveness is central to the School of Architecture and its successes. It's how they ended up incorporating a semester in Rome, how they changed the structure of the program to include a research-based Master's degree, and how they ended up relocating. Each of these decisions came from a recognition that change needed to happen, and a belief that this could be accomplished. As Rick puts it: "It is not that I don't consider the risk, or consider failure, but when something seems like the right idea and it answers the need, we try not to be overwhelmed by the details or constrained by normal expectations. I admit we have make mistakes, but somehow, we are able to make remarkable things happen."

I find myself thinking: there it is again, the spirit of “Why not?”

Although all of Rick’s stories are telling, I think the best example of this is the School’s recent re-location. The School of Architecture has come full circle and is once again off campus... way off. The School is now located in downtown Cambridge. I ask Rick to explain how and why this happened.

Opportunity: moving the School of Architecture

He reiterates that the School’s community wasn’t happy on campus and was always considering the possibility of going elsewhere. They were not actively looking, but they were open to ideas. He tells me:

It happened out of the blue. I was running a research project on mid-size cities, and I was trying to get the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo to support the project. One day, I was at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in Cambridge when one of the members of the executive said, “This project is fine, but we would really like to know what it would take to move the School of Architecture to Cambridge.” And, as we were sufficiently frustrated, my reaction was quite simple; I said it would take a great site and lots of money. He said, “Fine, then it’s as good as done.” That was November 3rd, 2000.

I wonder what prompted this suggestion. Rick explains that the Cambridge core had been decaying for a long time. Over the years, ideas were proposed for cultural centres or museums, but these things are terribly expensive and don’t attract enough people.

Rick continues:

So they just limped along and waited. Then on that day in November, the group experienced one of those moments. They said, “Wait a minute, you have four hundred of the brightest young people in the country, they are a co-op school, and they are unhappy up on the Waterloo campus. We can find them a beautiful site.” So we said, “Great, let’s do it!”

Back at the campus we met with the President. He said, “This is going to be a short meeting. I have two questions. Number one: Does anyone think that Architecture doesn’t need new facilities?” Everyone knew we needed new facilities. “Number two: “Does anyone have any other ideas about how they would get them?” The answer was no. So the President said: “Okay, much as I would like to keep the School on campus, it looks as if we are going to Cambridge.”

I look back at this thing and see that a thousand eyes of needles had to align. Leadership was crucial. The election in Cambridge was happening during the fall of 2000. A new candidate, Doug Craig, won by a very slim margin, so they asked for a recount. We had set up a meeting for the morning of the recount, with whoever won. At 10, Doug Craig walked into the room and I make the presentation, along with Tom Watson, the chair of the group of business people that were supporting this whole thing. No more than eight minutes later, Doug Craig said, “This is it. Architecture is the future of the city.”

Once the decision had been made, and a location chosen, they went to the provincial government and then the federal government to get money. Rick gives some details:

We received support from the Province through the municipal infrastructure program. The federal legislation at the time prevented spending any of this money on educational facilities, so our alliance presented the building as urban renewal and, once again, we got the money because the City was making the request.

The organization of the project was also very innovative and fully cooperative; the City actually handled the construction of the school. The Province wouldn’t flow the money to the University because it was a municipal “super build” program, so the City built the building and on October 22, 2004, at the official opening, the City turned the building over to the University, so the University owns it now.

It was a brilliant solution and, again, there were elements of luck; but when you see the way opening in front of you, you have to go for it.

Two additional fortuitous things occurred in making the School of Architecture the place that it is. First, they acquired a gallery. As Rick explains:

We couldn’t afford to create a gallery. The director of Cambridge Library and Galleries, which is located across the square from us, came over and said, “I can find half a million dollars; if the University can lease the space to us, we will design and build the gallery, provide the staff, and we can collaborate on the overall exhibition program.” I was sitting there thinking, “I have died and gone to heaven.” All architecture schools want to have exhibit galleries, but it is difficult to get the necessary funding from universities. Community art galleries do far better, as they are eligible for a wider array of grants and funding. So we created Design

at Riverside, one of only two publicly funded galleries in Canada dedicated to architecture and design. It is a unique collaboration and a wonderful bridge to the community.

Second, they got a restaurant on site.

Shortly after we decided to relocate to Cambridge, I went to University Food Services and said: “So what can we do about a food outlet at the School of Architecture in Cambridge?” They came back and said: “You don’t have enough students; three hundred and eighty students isn’t enough to justify us putting anything in, even a coffee and donuts operation.” I filed it away, and then, with the business association, we did a request for proposals from restaurant operators. The winning proposal was from the people who run Solé and Black Shop. They pay rent and we get an excellent café.

The new location, with all its various finishings, has had the intended effect. According to Rick, the students are proud of the facility and the City of Cambridge seems all the better for it. The School attracts about two hundred thousand people a year to the building.

Rick elaborates on this: “If you want to measure the tangible effect of this move, look at a tourist map of this area. The School of Architecture is on it. Since we announced the School was coming, the number of housing units in the Cambridge core has increased by two and a half times. The architecture students built Grand House. There is a new City Hall and a theatre on the way. Main Street is about to be renewed. All is change.”

I ask Rick whether, on the whole, the University has been supportive. He responds, “Absolutely, the University supported the initiative; everyone knew the School of Architecture needed new facilities and there was no hope of obtaining them in the foreseeable future.” That said, the thought of moving away from the campus was not universally welcomed. Upon reflection, it seemed to Rick that the University that grew out of the community had become somewhat isolated over time. Significantly, perhaps, the Waterloo campus is encircled by a ring road; in contrast, the School of Architecture was from the beginning conceived of as a partnership with Cambridge, with the intention that the School add a creative heart to the community, a facility in which the public would feel welcome.

He goes on:

There is a spirit of innovation at the University of Waterloo that is balanced by a spirit of conservatism; in that sense it is actually

quite consistent with the community. The same people who are visionaries in one sense can be quite conservative in other ways. It’s something about the culture here; they look at issues squarely, they are best when addressing practical problems and technical problems. There is a spirit of innovation, but the campus itself has no overall order and the quality of design is mixed to say the least.

In all this, I can tell that Rick feels that the School of Architecture is different. But I wonder. It seems to me that the spirit of “why not” prevails across the board. Perhaps it is more an issue of scale; the School is relatively small, while the University is huge. At that level it is more difficult to act independently and spontaneously; different tools are needed. However, the University does seem to encourage this spirit in its faculty and students. In fact, Rick himself notes this: “If I might be a little irreverent about it, one of the great provocations to be innovative at Waterloo is its belief that it is still a bit the underdog: “You think we can’t do this—just watch us.”



Thinking about this spirit, I ask Rick for his opinion on what motivates the School, his faculty and himself towards innovative change.

He responds that the whole quality of innovation that the School developed was to simply look at problems as directly as they could: “We took advantage of opportunities, we made opportunities, we were willing to step outside and try something no one else has tried, and immediately things started to happen.”

Indeed. With its unique program, its semester abroad, and the new location, the School has become a great success. “Now we are getting sixteen hundred kids applying for seventy-two spots, and these are the best students in the country.”

In his experience and his thinking, Rick is strikingly similar to Sunshine. They both believe that self-reliance, recognizing and capitalizing on opportunity, and the spirit of the underdog are all key to making change happen. Sunshine speaks of the power of connections directly; Rick makes reference to it in all his stories, and would no doubt attribute some of his success to this. They both give credit to the University for molding and infusing them with the “Why not?” spirit, but almost like teenagers to their parents, they criticize it in turn. They are both deeply invested in Waterloo, in one way or another, and want to see it build into a vibrant cosmopolitan community. However, in their strategies to achieve this,

they differ somewhat. Sunshine seems to affirm his local commitment by staying very central, but it seems that Rick has done so by moving to the edges.

Rick strikes me as ambitious. I think he wants to see the School of Architecture on a world stage. This seems to come at the cost of separating it somewhat from the University, and maybe even the community, in the short term. The move out of the municipality of Waterloo is symbolic: breaking away from the local while bridging with the national and the international. The success of the School of Architecture brings this community closer to its cosmopolitan ideal.

My conversations with Sunshine and Rick have made me recognize a conflict in this community between its independent, highly entrepreneurial, self-reliant spirit, and its desire for growth, cosmopolitanism, and change on a large scale. Social innovation operates at multiple levels, and necessitates changes at each, and across them all. I think this may be a real challenge for this community. Scaling innovations up to the next plane often requires breaking with practices and norms, allowing for dissent and diversity. It also requires adding resources, often from new sources. This last point was reinforced for me in my next conversation. Chantal Cornu was open and frank about financing, and made me aware that few people discussed this central issue.



Bridging the Funding Gap — Chantal Cornu

Chantal's story has elements of Sunshine's and Rick's, but also reminds me of Isabel's, as she seems to stand outside. Chantal is enthusiastic, entrepreneurial, independent and accomplished. From being a regular student at the School of Architecture, she has become the director of a unique not-for-profit organization.

At the time of our interview, Chantal was working hard to complete the construction of the Grand House Student Co-operative, the project she has been working on for the better part of five years. I agreed to meet her down in Cambridge, in her office in the School of Architecture. Driving to our meeting, I was immediately taken by how pretty Cambridge is. It reminds me of a small country town in England. From the winding county road beside the Grand River, I came into the centre of the city: a few main roads flanked by grey stone buildings, a small bridge, a church and a pleasant square. The new School of Architecture is located off this square in an old industrial building. I can see why Rick speaks of it with pride. It's a beautiful building, retaining its aged feel, while being modern and functional at the same time. Just being in the School makes me feel full of potential and hope; it's that kind of a place.

When I arrived that day in June, a pleasant man, whose name I later learned was Adam, greeted me. He told me that Chantal was out running errands, but would be back shortly. Soon after, Chantal arrived, looking a little overwhelmed. Being so busy with her work, she had momentarily forgotten about our interview. I told her, and I really meant it, that I was quite happy in the waiting area. Unconvinced, she showed me into her office, and with what seemed like a sigh of relief, sat down.

Her office was small and crowded, with two desks, one for her and one for Adam, and papers, displays and building equipment scattered around. Throughout our interview, people came in and out. On top of building and managing the Grand House Co-op, Chantal is also teaching a course. Her students and various volunteers came in, looking for advice, direction or assistance. Chantal was patient and kind but firm with all of them. She strikes me as awfully poised for a young woman close to my own age. Right off the bat, she tells me that she isn't sure what I want her to talk about. I ask her to tell me about the Grand House Co-op, what it is and how it came into being.

Sticky matters: the very real need for money

Chantal tells me that the idea for the Grand House was initially born out of a need for more affordable student housing in Cambridge. A vision soon developed to incorporate several other dimensions, like integrating students into the community, building more sustainable housing, and educating about green architecture. She explains that she and a few friends conceived the idea, and then, reminding me of Rick, tells me that they just went out and did it.

“We believed we could build better, healthier, safer, happier, and cheaper buildings with awesome materials. So, we set out to prove it.”

One of the first things they did was to become incorporated as a not-for-profit. This process opened her eyes to the co-operative movement here and in the United States.

The co-operative community is a really good network of resources and experiences to draw upon. In fact, one of the things that really made this a success is the strength of the co-op community and the support we get from them. They accept and encourage the idea of students actually taking responsibility and owning property.

She tells me that co-operatives are widespread here, but, at the same time, are fairly unknown and under-supported:

The student co-operative model is not common everywhere, though it is more common in the States. Ontario has lots of co-ops, approximately 15,000 and, actually, 3 million people belong to them, but people aren't very aware of them. Quebec is really strong in co-ops; it is more part of public discourse there. We are not really made aware of them here in Ontario, so there are a lot of barriers facing co-operatives.

Given the nature of co-operatives and what I know of this community, I am not surprised. The emphasis on independence and self reliance here could be a deterrent to widespread knowledge and sharing of resources. I imagine, however, that once involved with the movement, considerable support is available. I ask Chantal about her experience being part of the co-op community. She tells me they are very supportive and helpful and then adds, “The nice thing about joining the co-op community here is that it helps us make connections beyond the University. We want to avoid being like Waterloo, where there are all these very different groups that do not interact.”

Probing this further, I ask Chantal how her experience in Cambridge differs.

The City has been really supportive and it has been really great working here. City Hall is just a couple of blocks away and we see all the officials walking around and we talk to them and stop by and call them up and have this really great relationship with them. They actually get involved. You don't have to go through secretaries and hope that somebody will call you back. You can call up the mayor and he actually talks to you. He says: “Hello, I saw you put your roof on yesterday.”

Again, the importance of connections comes to mind. Chantal and her team clearly recognize and make use of this. In fact, one of the mandates of the Grand House Co-op is to bring the students and community together. She elaborates on this telling me that: “We wanted to create an integrated community. We are in a new place and we are just trying to get some understanding and a sense of what is happening in our new home. I feel it's just about giving back to the community. We have taken a lot and we have been offered a lot. A lot of people have gone out of their way to make the students feel at home.”

I ask her about the other mandates and how they are realized. She tells me that in terms of affordability, they are working to get affordable housing certification and are almost down to five hundred dollars for a room in the house. As for environmental sustainability, they work hard to use green materials, even when this costs them more. They also try to find funders with an environmental mandate. The education piece is something they have been developing recently. They have had volunteers from Conestoga College's Architecture-Construction Engineering Technology Program coming out. Further, during the past eight months of construction, they have also run with two apprentice programs. She explains that, “We had a lot of people apply and we chose six people to come on site and build. In exchange for a four-month commitment, they get room and board.”

Chantal goes on:

Unfortunately, we have had a lot of funding issues, which meant that I was not around as much as I should have been to support the apprentices, workers and volunteers. It has slowed us down and affected the quality of the apprenticeship programs. There haven't been as many people on site who knew what to do and I couldn't talk to them. There should be three professionals on site with six apprenticeships, but there have only been two professionals because our main site supervisor was busy doing project management with me. It is just this domino effect, which is directly related to our lack of secure funding and other financing issues.

I can sense her frustration when she talks about this. I inquire about the funding process and how it is going. She responds:

We started with no money, and we still have no money, but we do a lot of fund raising. Right away, that first winter we got a grant from the Co-operators Group and we also got a grant from the Ontario Co-op Association. So that is what really helped set it up.

Clearly they had some money at first, so how did their financial situation then evolve?

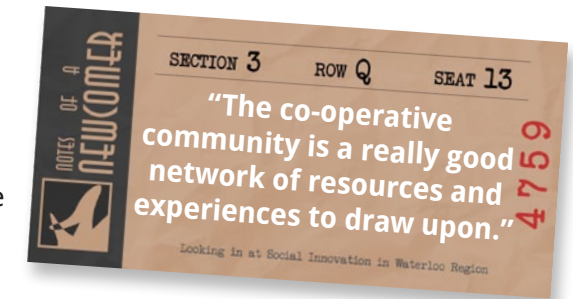
We have the craziest financing in the world. In a nutshell, right now we have five mortgages and two guarantees, and at the end of construction we will have three of the same mortgages that will go into long term financing, and two will turn into one longer term. We could take out financing mortgages, but they need 10 guarantees of their own, which we are trying to arrange right now. That's aside from the fundraising we are doing to take down the overall cost and try to get out of one of these mortgages.

The thing is, banks won't look at us because we are a co-operative; well not just because we are a co-operative but because we are a small student housing co-operative. Our main membership is students and they don't want to have anything to do with student housing at all. Credit unions have been quite a bit more receptive. Recently, a student co-operative from Toronto offered to do our mortgage at a better rate, but then pulled out without any warning or explanation. This made the other lenders nervous, but they didn't pull out, which was really great. Still, it has been a lot of work. We have been doing due diligence reports and survey reports. We have been going over our budget and redoing rental surveys and just re-doing everything. This has taken a lot of time away from actually setting up the co-op, and it's been stressful.

Still, within a month and a half of the co-op pulling out we had replaced that entire amount of financing, mostly through an organization called North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO). They came forward and said, "Oh my God, you guys are awesome. Here are some guarantees and here is some money. Keep going and don't worry about the details; you can figure that out afterwards, just build your building."

Chantal laughs, and goes on:

So now we have three loans from the States and two from Canada. The three loans from the States have been very much: "Here is money, you guys are awesome, keep going. You have got some things to work out, but you will work it out. We will help you." The two from Canada were much less supportive. One of our US lenders is USCA Berkeley. They are the largest student co-op in North America with thirteen hundred members. The second largest is actually WCRI in Waterloo.



I ask whether the Grand House receives funding from them. Chantal hesitates and seems to choose her words carefully:

"They gave us a grant of five thousand dollars. They have been supportive and are available for us to talk to if we need them." This is not the first time that I have been told that funding is far more progressive in the United States. Still, one might expect that a Waterloo institution would be likely to fund this much praised local initiative.

Chantal is the only interviewee who discussed funding so openly. The taboo of talking about money still seems to apply; yet financial resources are a crucial part of social innovation, of bringing ideas to fruition. Organizations regularly fail because they are not supported financially. The constant search for money takes a huge toll on everyone in an organization, not least the leader, who generally feels a deep sense of responsibility.

As Chantal notes:

The whole funding situation is incredible and it's unfortunate and it's so frustrating. I didn't know how much it cost to do all the soft stuff of construction, how much it costs me in my time to do financing stuff. This is not what I should be doing. It is stupid because it is a lot of work for a bit of funding. It's just that fundraising has to be all the time and it is such an energy sink.

Despite this, and somewhat inconsistently, Chantal says: "We have a really great group of supporters here and a really strong community and there are so many people who think that the Grand House is great, and it is, and it is good to be reminded of that."

I admire Chantal's perseverance and her good will. I am inclined to agree with the Grand House supporters: it is an excellent project, and quite unique. I hope it succeeds and, moreover, becomes the norm. For this to happen, it will need broader recognition, and as Chantal alludes to, more support from this community and this country. At the end of the day, financing matters. To invoke a colloquialism, you have to, "put your money where your mouth is."

That said, without good will and social support, good financing is of little consequence. In my next conversation, with Megan Conway, I come to see the importance of this. Further, I am offered a new framework for thinking about the challenges in this community.

The Bonded and the Bridged — Megan Conway

Megan Conway suggested that we meet over lunch at City Bakery. Located on Victoria Street, the City Bakery is well loved by locals. From the outside, the building looks like a children's playhouse, colourful and funky. A huge green neon sign adorns the entrance of this converted garage. Inside, the café is very open; you can see the whole kitchen and the huge wood-fired bagel stove. Much of the food is self-serve, as is the payment system. The owners run a basic operation that offers simple and much sought after grub. There seems to be emphasis on minimal fuss. In fact, the store keeps minimal hours. But instead of alienating clientele, their model seems to foster loyalty. I myself curse and gnash my teeth about having to get to City Bakery before 6:00 to get my delicious pizza, but inevitably, I go anyway.

I sit outside in the sun while I wait for Megan to arrive. It is a nice day, warm, even hot for June. Once she shows up, we order our lunch. I happily choose a slice of my favourite pizza and Megan orders a sandwich. The staff clearly know her; she adds both our lunches to her tab.

We sit down in a quiet corner and quickly find ourselves chatting. Megan and I are close in age and we bond about experiences with this community. I ask her if she likes living here. She responds: "Well, yes and no. There are a lot of nice people here, and it is a good place to see how we can make a difference, but I think for the demographic of 25 to 35, it has challenges. There is not really a thriving social scene like there might be in downtown Toronto. The other thing is that, even though there are a lot of great people here, it can sometimes function as a closed community."

Megan's impressions are largely based on her experience in setting up the Pathways to Education project, where she is now the director. She tells me how she came here, how she got the job with Pathways, and her experience getting Pathways to where it is today. I find Megan to have a particularly interesting perspective. She has a quick intelligence and seriousness about her. Yet she laughs easily. She is clearly deeply committed to her work and the ideas it is based upon, but she tells me her story with self-deprecating humour. If anything, she seems to lack the confidence that she has clearly earned from her remarkable career.

As background, she tells me that preceding her arrival here she worked for the MPP of Kitchener for two years. This meant that she was acquainted with the community. Since she had volunteered with the initial Pathways to Education in Toronto, she was also very familiar with the program.



Megan explains that at a social event she ran into Cathy Brothers, whom she knew from her time working for the MPP. Cathy heads the Catholic Family Counselling Centre (CFCC), now Mosaic Counselling and Family Services in Kitchener, and told her that CFCC had just received the funding to study whether or not they should have a Pathways program in this region. Cathy asked Megan if she wanted to join the local Pathways initiative. She had just started her PhD at the University of Waterloo but wasn't enjoying herself fully. At the same time, she was offered a job of policy advisor in the Ministry of Education. She says she felt conflicted: "What do I do? They are both really great jobs, one was very community oriented and the other was a position of greater influence, so it was a hard decision. Ultimately I chose to stay here because I thought that I could make more of a difference in this type of program."

One of the things that was particularly appealing to her about Pathways was that it would allow her to work, as she puts it, "inside but also outside of schools." She elaborates on this, explaining that, "The Pathways program advocates for students in a school context, but you are also community based. You effectively support positive outcomes for students because you can pull resources together. You are building resources within the school setting, but you are also building relationships outside the school."

Megan thinks this is part of the reason the Pathways model has been successful. As she tells me: "None of the supports are in isolation. It addresses as many barriers for the student as possible and recognizes that these are connected." Megan tells me more about the original Toronto Pathways program and I tell her that I think it's a great story, impressive and inspiring. She agrees and says, "Based on the greatness of the story, they said, 'Let's replicate.' So that is where I came in. My job for the next ten months was to engage the community and get the project approved."

Rocky reception: the process of gathering information

Megan describes the initial part of her work as challenging and very lonely:

The first year of getting the program off the ground was community engagement and development work. I was a total outsider trying to talk to youth and parents about the barriers around the education system. Even with important experience and knowledge to share, being new here made it hard to build trust. It was a long, long process and sometimes it was psychologically hard. I definitely didn't feel welcome. I didn't feel people wanted me to ask these questions that sometimes were crucial. I felt I needed to validate, validate, validate who I was. I think people were like: "Who are you? What do you want? Are you really going to help me? Are you going to waste my time?"

I think about the process of change and the different perspectives brought to it. At one end there are people saying: "Over my dead body is that thing going to happen." And at the other end you have people who are saying, "What can I do to make it happen right now?"

There were people who said I couldn't be everywhere in the city and others who were angry because the program wasn't in their area. The truth was, the onus for getting this program started had to rest partially on the readiness of neighbourhoods and communities. It couldn't be me doing everything. I needed to have communities engaged in that conversation and working together. And of course it could be argued that the neighbourhoods that weren't engaging might be the ones that needed the program most."

I wonder how Megan recognizes when it is going to work, and when it isn't, and how she gauged where the project would be best suited and able to have impact. Her reply focused on understanding the connection between poverty and challenges in education.

Mapping strategy: understanding the nature of poverty in Kitchener

Well, it was a matter of finding out if there was a need for the program within the communities. Kitchener doesn't look like Toronto, but that certainly doesn't mean that poverty doesn't exist here. In Toronto, there is more of a concentration of poverty, whereas in Kitchener it is more dispersed. I think it diminishes the voice and power that communities can have around poverty issues if they don't have a collective, place-based experience.

The poverty here is on the periphery rather than in the centre, where the population is transient from what I can observe. Originally, it was thought that the program might work well in the downtown core, but there isn't a concentration of youth there to serve on a regular basis; and the first priority for street youth in downtown Kitchener is housing and food.

I find this interesting. The Pathways model concentrates on the interconnection between various barriers to education and wellbeing. I think this "whole picture" approach is useful when looking at this community.

Despite the obstacles Megan encountered, she persevered. At the end of the first year, she gave her report to Pathways Canada. She tells me that she had come to identify very personally with the project, but at the end of the day, she had little say in the outcome:

You can know in your gut that the program is going to work in some places and not in others, and it's hard not to do everything you can for that neighbourhood that wants and needs this support. But when the power is not in your hands, it is hard. And I felt like my whole personal reputation was on the line, that it reflected who I am as a person. I was totally affiliated with this initiative, spending most of my nights going to community meetings or driving around in my car, with pizza or food, talking to kids.

I had no life, and I am not sure I have completely recovered. In many ways, I feel this was the most difficult time in my life, both personally and professionally; this work was my whole identity. I became known as the Pathways Lady, and how people felt about the program was how they felt about me. At times I know I annoyed people. Sometimes when the community's expectations don't meet with the capacity of the program to deliver, people get angry. At times, their criticism was quite personal; the attacks were aimed at me and my character.

I sympathize with Megan and tell her that it must have been hard to deal with. She responds: "Yeah, at one point I was like: 'Well, the community just effectively fired me. I guess I am leaving.'" But she didn't. She did the necessary work, and the local Pathways project was approved. She has stayed on to be the director. It was a pretty radical shift from her previous position. In very short order, she was required to get the program going. I ask her how she managed this.

Letting go: relinquishing control

I didn't. I wasn't managing my life. We trained staff in August and the program was ramping up, but I had serious doubts as to whether it would really deliver. In my head, I am thinking: "Shit! There is not one kid who is going to show up for tutoring and mentoring; I am a sham. This is not going to work." It was the moment where I had to let go and think, "Okay this is not just mine; now this program belongs to all of us."

I am impressed by Megan's capacity for self-reflection. She practices what she preaches. Getting to Maybe, authored by Frances Westley, Michael Patton and Brenda Zimmerman, describes the importance of "letting go" to stimulate social innovation. For a project, practice or idea to become truly innovative, it has to move out of the personal sphere into the communal. It must be left to grow. This means other people must pick it up and add to it.

I wonder if perhaps the entrepreneurial, do-it-yourself, self-reliant emphasis of this community discourages this. As I was mulling these ideas over with my partner, Ola, he pointed out that being entrepreneurial is not the same things as being innovative. The entrepreneur keeps his ideas close to his chest, develops a product and then gets the credit for it. Social innovation, on the other hand, seems to occur by relinquishing the "product" and making space for its growth, often through unusual, cross scale partnerships.



Megan has clearly spent time thinking about these dynamics. Coming back to where our conversation started she tells me:

I often think about the notions of bridging and bonding capital. You know, Putnam's theory of social capital. It's about small, closed communities as bonded communities, versus communities that come together and bridge to the new, the outside. I feel like there are more bonded communities here. Everyone refers with pride to Kitchener-Waterloo as a "big small town," but for me, as an outsider in the community and doing the work that I did when I started the program up, this was definitely challenging.

Her experience is somewhat similar to that of Isabel and Chantal, who benefited from their first connections, were met with interest for their ideas, along with initial, start-up support. After this, however, they were largely left on their own; the onus was on them to make their projects succeed. Each of them speaks of huge personal responsibility and subsequent burn out.

Megan pointedly frames this experience within the larger context of her community, and uses Putman's theory of social capital to better understand the dynamics at play here. I find the theory very helpful. According to Robert Putman, author of Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, bonded communities have the following characteristics: constituents are empowered, organized, internally cohesive and connected. By contrast, bridging communities are connected to other communities and accessible to outsiders. I think this framework adds something to our understanding of the capacity for social innovation in this community. It would seem that bonded communities, and this community in particular, encourage internal cohesion and perhaps start up projects and initiatives. What may be lacking is a capacity to bridge; to extend outside the familiar and known to new people, ideas and places, and thus bring a greater number of initiatives and projects up to scale and to their full potential.

What follows are three conversations with individuals who seem determined to change patterns of interaction from bonded to bridging. Their stories and insights grant me deeper understanding of this community, and the process of making lasting, meaningful change.

Risking Unusual Partnerships — Tim Jackson

Tim Jackson's reputation precedes him. I first heard of him through SiG, when they were compiling lists of people to invite to some of their very initial events for social innovators. My first impression of him was from a SiG hosted brainstorming event in June. He struck me as being straightforward, energetic, forceful and personable. We agreed that I would come to his office later that week for our meeting.

Tech Capital Inc., which Tim co-founded and where he still works, is located on Erb Street across from the Bank of Montreal, once again near the corner of King in Uptown Waterloo. The office is located above a popular nightclub and gives the impression that you are entering the guests-only backroom. Going upstairs, this impression was replaced with that of a dynamic work place. The inside is plain but pleasant and the staff was cordial and friendly. I was told to go into Tim's office and wait for him. A few minutes later, he came bounding in, welcoming me and offering me a refreshment.

Tim exudes energy. He speaks quickly, his face reflecting his thinking. I introduce myself properly and explain what I am doing. Picking up on this, he launches into his own experience with innovation and his thoughts on the subject.

Firsts: a community theme of innovation

Tim tells me that he has given several talks on the subject of innovation in this region. There is a long history of innovation here. He tells me that it is, as I have heard many times now, a community of firsts: Mutual Life Insurance Company, the world's most eminent button factory, Electrohome, Seagram, etc.

He suggests that the University of Waterloo plays a huge role in this, related to its institutional capacity to take risks. He gives me the example of co-op education at UW:

I think about the discussions that must have gone on. Imagine being there around the board table when someone says: "Lets do co-op education." People must have said: "That is crazy, universities are open from September to April; if we do co-op we are going to have to pay faculty to teach in the summer and provide support services for twelve months a year instead of eight." Perhaps someone replied: "That may not be the way it's done anywhere else in the province or the country, but that is the way we are going to do it here." And out of those kinds of conversations, you have a co-op program that is now world renowned.

PART THREE

PARTNERSHIPS

Tim describes the intellectual property policy as another case of the University's innovative, risk-taking and forward-looking nature. Researchers working within the University of Waterloo suggested that they should own their inventions; usually, intellectual property belongs to the institution. According to Tim, this is a huge differentiator. Because the University agreed to these terms, commercially oriented researchers are attracted to the region and the University; this, in turn, feeds into the wealth and culture of the community. Tim notes: "You have some institutional policy here that I think supports the whole innovation piece of this area."

Involvement: introduced to the community sector

Tim stops himself, says he has been rambling, and gives me the floor. I explain that I do not have a set of pre-established questions, but would like to get a sense of his background, how he came to be involved in the social sector, his current projects and above all his thoughts on social innovation.

Tim was born and raised in Oakville, but did his degree in accounting at the University of Waterloo and then moved to Toronto to work in a firm. After a while, he ended up returning: "A friend of mine had a tech company in Waterloo. I had been helping out a bit and they said, 'Come join us as Chief Financial Officer.' While in Toronto, I got involved in some not-for-profit organizations. When I came back to town, I wanted to stay involved in the community. I met with the Executive Director of a food bank. We had stuff in common: both liberals in terms of politics. I was invited to join their Board of Directors and I accepted." From there, his involvement in the social sector grew. As he puts it: "Once you are on one board you get asked to join lots of others; soon you are on many boards."

Tim doesn't seem particularly interested in talking about himself. His energy and enthusiasm is for his not-for-profit efforts, especially their intersection with his for-profit work. Tim is very involved and knowledgeable about the local not-for-profit sector and he spends a lot of time thinking about how it can be enhanced. As he sees it, greater partnership with, and learning from, the for-profit sector could substantially boost the not-for-profit sector.

New partnerships and perspectives: blending for-profit and not-for-profit models

Tim begins by illustrating this with a story about an initiative that he has been working on for some time:

Six years ago, the food bank realized that this area had an abundance of food manufacturers and that the excess food, as is traditionally the case, was going to landfills or being used as pig feed. So, five years ago, those involved went to the Trillium Foundation and said: "We think there is an opportunity to get some of this excess food and put it to use where it's needed in

the community." We asked them to please fund a pilot project. Our goal, at end of three years, is to have food banks across the area pay half the cost of re-directing this excess food, and have corporate sponsorships paying the other half. And we need to prove our model by measuring and tracking the progress.

Taking risks: becoming comfortable with failure

Tim goes on:

I look at that and think, "You have a not-for-profit ready to try this new idea, and needing the support of the Foundation and the board because of the risk involved. If this were a corporate board, they would be saying, "You have to take risks, try things, even if they are not all going to work." Unfortunately, there is not enough of this in the not-for-profit arena. I think that's why people don't often think of the not-for-profit sector when they think of innovation.

Tim tells me about another food bank initiative which won an innovation award from the Volunteer Action Centre. Staff teams from local companies were enlisted to spend one night building structures out of food cans, all of which were then donated to the food bank.

This is an example where a board said, "You can take the risk." I think the more you get innovative business folks on your boards, people who in their own work are not afraid to take risks, the stronger the energy and the message will be. There is a culture of "It's okay to fail" in business. You can't innovate without failure. If you are not failing sometimes, it means you are not trying stuff out. You can't punish failure, but that doesn't mean that you have to tolerate incompetence. I don't know what Mike Lazaridis' original business plan looked like, but I can guarantee that it didn't say that in 2008 we would all be using a device that looks like the Blackberry. Strong companies are always taking chances and open to changing whatever doesn't work.

Tim clearly values risk-taking, but also, from what I can tell, creative thinking. I wonder about how to encourage this and he explains that you have to reward it, even though you're not sure that you are going to act on any of the creative ideas. According to him, some companies reward ideas, regardless of whether or not they get used, as this stimulates creativity.

Pondering this, and the capacity for risk taking, I wonder if this philosophy really applies to everyone. As I say to Tim, “I would imagine that sometimes people just don’t get back up after failure.” I question how he negotiates this. He says, “You don’t punish failure, you have to learn from it so you don’t make the same mistakes. Failure gives you insight into what is going to work, and what isn’t. I always say that I learn most from my mistakes and failures.”

But is failure equally acceptable in the not-for-profit sector? I feel the potential costs are much higher when people’s well-being is at stake. Tim agrees with this, but feels strongly that, in fact, it’s limited resources that make not-for-profits more cautious and risk averse.

Not-for-profits tend to be so constrained in their money that they feel they can’t afford to make mistakes. I recently had a conversation with Jan Varner at United Way. She told me that she is seeing general donations decrease, while more directed donations are increasing. I suggested, as something to think about, that perhaps United Way should not continue funding organizations once they are getting significant private donations. Instead, maybe they should be funding start up initiatives. Once a new initiative reaches a critical mass, you start to wean them. I told Jan that I wouldn’t object if United Way said: “Let’s drop your funding by 20 percent,” and then did the same thing with other established organizations. They could put this money in a reserve pool and then fund new not-for-profits with seed money, or give it to an established one that wants to try something new.”

Efficiency: the value of collaboration

Tim also feels that the not-for-profit sector could benefit from the for-profit emphasis on efficiency. He explains this to me by illustrating a current situation in the arts sector:

We have a variety of theatres in town. The Centre In The Square has an excellent ticketing system. Why on earth is Theatre & Company running their own box office a block and a half away? Why not just have one stop for all the ticketing? And why aren’t we sharing facilities, managed collectively or through partnerships? Each operation is trying to do it from scratch instead of finding out what is out there.

The Centre In The Square has all these subscriptions, with a model of creating memorable experiences for all. This means we sometimes do programming that we lose money on because we

think there is an important aspect to it; for example, we have a great Canadian play series that gets 300 people in a venue that holds 2000. So I say, “Why don’t we take that production and put it in a smaller theatre? Why does a subscription to the Centre In The Square have to take place at a 2000 person theatre?” Forget the pride of ownership, and share resources; diversify the events each night. You are taking a downtown theatre that is struggling and a big theatre that is losing money on small programs and making them partners so that they can help each other out.

It’s a good point. A partnership like this would surely be beneficial. So why doesn’t it happen? In the corporate sector, it no doubt would. But the arts and the not-for-profit worlds are different; is there any good reason for this? I suspect this kind of problem arises in other places, not just here. Then again, I am not sure...

No more silos: the need to share resources

Tim continues:

There is too much duplication; there are far too many small organizations and they are not sustainable the way it is. They need to consolidate for greater efficiency. For example, I sit on the board at the Children’s Museum, and we don’t do any of our own accounting. It’s all contracted out to the Centre In The Square since it has a very strong finance department and a very strong CFO type, Sharon McMorran. The beauty is that we pay them a fee, they do our bookkeeping, payroll, etc., and we also get access to Sharon McMorran when we need to tackle bigger picture financial issues. It’s the best of both worlds. This is the kind of thing I think we need more of. If we can get people talking to each other, they start to figure this out for themselves, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, and combining for more efficiency and effectiveness.

I can certainly understand and appreciate this recommendation, but listening to Tim, I can’t help but think that perhaps this isn’t always the case. As far as I can see, the not-for-profit sector continues to be fairly siloed and at times inefficient, despite organizations regularly converging. Again, I wonder if there isn’t some good reason for this? Maybe there is merit in duplication, or maybe the obstacles to consolidating are too great. Maybe there isn’t enough support, expertise or resources for doing so?

As though picking up on this, Tim complains that another problem within the not-for-profit sector is that people aren’t being paid enough. Highly qualified people usually don’t want to take a pay cut to work in the sector, so people

with limited expertise often fill jobs. He tells me that the board at the Children's Museum decided to spend the money to hire the ideal candidate, David Marskell. It has been a rewarding choice. According to Tim, the Children's Museum is now a thriving cultural centre, and he attributes this directly to Marskell's high level expertise and experience.



Compensation: paying better salaries

Tim tells me about a conversation he had recently:

I sat down with some people who run a not-for-profit in the community and they told me proudly that the income released each year by the Ontario government as its poverty line is what they pay their staff. That way, staff members understand how the people they are serving are living. I thought that was bizarre. In that particular case, the Executive Director happens to have income from elsewhere. But basically, I think you are limited in whom you can get to fill those important positions if you won't pay a competitive salary.

I can definitely see what Tim means, but I think I know the organization he is talking about and know them to be very successful. Perhaps some things work in one case and not in another. Regardless, Tim's opinions and insight are worth listening to. He has been quite successful himself, particularly in making good partnerships and bridging the divide between traditionally disparate sectors. His perspectives seem to highlight what this town does best with regard to innovations in business. But maybe he's right and these philosophies and principles could be brought over to the not-for-profit sector and help to increase the capacity for social innovation.

I think about asking Tim how his notions for a better not-for-profit sector are applied in his own work, but he beats me to it. Revealing of Tim's character, he is already in the process of putting his thoughts into action through several projects. With much enthusiasm, he tells me about his current project, one that incorporates much of what we have talked about.

Capacity Waterloo Region: a new initiative

Tim tells me that the initiative was born out of a meeting of leaders from the big not-for-profits. They did brainstorming workshops around how to improve the environment for not-for-profit organizations in Kitchener-Waterloo. Around this time, the Olive group was formed—a collaboration of the United Way, the Trillium Foundation and the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation. They got together and decided that they needed to be working in concert in order to increase capacity in this area. Tim stops to say that he thinks this particular approach to connected capacity building, new partnerships, and collaborative design ties into what he understands the SiG project is partly about, especially the SiG@MaRS node which is concerned with social entrepreneurship.

Going back to his story, he continues:

One of the things that came out of the meeting with not-for-profit leaders was around Communitech, which is an organization of businesses. We thought we could learn from them and do similar things for the not-for-profit sector. What emerged was the blueprint for two particular programs: a peer-to-peer network and a mentoring program.

The way it happened was that Steve Farlow (head of Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship at Wilfred Laurier University) and I decided that there are three things we can do to help not-for-profit organizations. The first thing is to run peer-to-peer groups using the Communitech model. They run 20 to 30 peer-to-peer meetings a month involving people working in different capacities in the technology sector. Three things happen at these meetings: sometimes there are guest speakers around a theme; then there is a roundtable discussion about problems and solutions; then there is time for networking. One of the big benefits is that people really start to get to know others in their community. We hope that there will eventually be cross-pollination and that connections will be created between the not-for-profit and the for-profit sectors.

The second thing is a mentoring program for the not-for-profit sector, again similar to that of Communitech. The idea is to have a sort of CEO in residence. We would recruit people prepared to offer a year or two of mentoring others as an Executive Director in Residence (EDIR). Communitech say this is the number one service that their organization currently provides. Recently, I met an Executive Director of a not-for-profit who said that she got her job right out of university, and that her number one issue was the lack of a mentor. She had never hired or fired anyone and didn't know how to manage her board. If the EDIR had been in place, she would have

had this experienced person to offer support and share ideas with. Communitech will house this EDIR, so he or she will not be isolated. But also, this speaks to that hoped for overlap that creates the potential for cross-pollination between the two sectors. Hopefully, everyone will get involved and connected. The reality is that no one is dealing with something that someone else hasn't dealt with.

The third piece is all about board training. Steve Farlow brought it in and it is really his piece. It's about strengthening boards through some specifically designed training that isn't currently available locally.

Tim gives me a draft of the proposal for Capacity Waterloo Region. I can tell that he believes in this project and, as he said earlier, feels that it relates to some of what SiG does. With this in mind, I ask him if he thinks that Capacity Waterloo Region is likely to encourage innovation. He responds with confidence:

Yes, I am sure it will. I think you are going to get overlap between businesses and not-for-profit organizations. I think that not-for-profit boards and executives have been hesitant to innovate because they have been afraid to fail and are under resourced. I don't think that businesses are any smarter but there are real cultural differences. So, there is a lot of benefit in bridging these sectors.

And so...

Tim seems focused on practical solutions. In his thoughts and his actions, he is geared towards making concrete change happen in the present. He is both dedicated and driving. I find myself getting excited by what he proposes. But will it work? I think it may. I might suggest that Tim set his sights on what is achievable, and not get bogged down by larger issues. But as I have stated several times, social problems are very complex. Maybe through the kind of focused direct actions Tim proposes, larger change can be encouraged.



Challenges: corporate culture

As I have done with several other interviewees, I ask Tim about his views on the challenges for the Waterloo Region. He presents them mostly in terms of the tech sector, and in terms of what he sees as the obstacles in the way of greater partnerships and a thriving not-for-profit sector:

We are at a real tipping point; the community is growing and will continue to grow. We need to do things right now. Otherwise we are going to end up with three quarters of a million population and say, "What just happened?" You have to think ahead, look at the infrastructure. We need to instil a culture and attitude that says, "Business has a role to play in building the local community."

The tech sector is so immature when it comes to that philanthropic perspective, both in terms of time and in terms of money. It's made up of a lot of first generation wealth, 28-year-olds making huge salaries. They may be second generation immigrants, the son or daughter who is first to go to school. They see what their parents gave and feel pleased when they give more, even if it's really a negligible amount. They are not brought up with a culture of real community engagement. Also, tech goes up and down, and there's lots of paper wealth. And the tech world is fast, which means there are lots of youthful first time managers with little experience. They don't have mentors, they haven't watched people to learn about work and its connection to community life. It's different if you're at a place like Manulife where everyone commits time to not-for-profit involvement. So, I think there is a whole cultural issue that we need to deal with, particularly in the tech sector.

All these aspects tie together: the not-for-profit world, the cash, the time, also the arts and culture thing. Here's an illustration: if I ask Communitech members: "What is your number one issue?" they will say: "Recruitment and retention." They need to attract good people to the area, and convince them to stay. If I ask what the barrier is they say: "People don't think Waterloo is a happening place, there is no stuff to do, everyone knows RIM, but there is no night life, etc." But then if I go back the next week and suggest they support the symphony, or the Centre In The Square, they will say: "I am not interested in that." There is a complete disconnect between what they have just told me about recruitment and retention and supporting the development of the arts; it's very bizarre.

Tim's thought trajectory is interesting. From a better not-for-profit sector, informed by and partnered with the for-profit sector, to entrenched cultural perspectives about philanthropy and the arts, he has touched on the spectrum of strengths and challenges to social innovation that I have been thinking about. In so doing, he has deepened my understanding of both.

In his practical perspective on how to bolster the not-for-profit sector, his attitude reminds me of many business people. Socially conscious people from the business world are working hard to apply their knowledge and skills to improving human welfare, often in the not-for-profit sector. And they have had some great success. Certainly there is something to be said about working across sectors and disciplines, and taking the best from each.

Still, complexity theorists would argue against one-size-fits-all solutions. Maybe there are deeply imbedded cultural norms that bind the not-for-profit and the arts, and maybe for good reason.

“Socially conscious people from the business world are working hard to apply their knowledge and skills to improving human welfare, often in the not-for-profit sector. And they have had some great success. Certainly there is something to be said about working across sectors and disciplines, and taking the best from each.”

different cultural domains. The rules that apply to not-for-profit and the arts don't always make sense to business or high tech and no doubt vice versa. In fact, these cultural differences may get in the way of the success of the bridging partnerships Tim is advocating. This is a real challenge. But how to get around it? Once again, I sense that the strengths of this region may also be its weaknesses, no less because its success has perhaps blinded it to the shortcomings of its most familiar tools.

But Tim seems to recognize the challenges inherent in these kinds of partnerships and in applying for-profit solutions to the not-for-profit. In Tim's perceptive critique, I recognize some of the subtleties of Waterloo's capacities. I think the emphasis on risk-taking with the support of mentors and efficiency is particularly revealing. So too is the planning orientation and the emphasis on concrete solutions. Like everyone so far, Tim hints at the power of connections in making things happen. He is the first, however, to point out a real challenge in dealing with

Partnerships as Catalysts for Change — Andrew Hunter

Andrew Hunter was the second to last person that I spoke to. He was not on the initial interview list, but had recently made important connections with SiG and been recognized as someone inclined to new and creative thinking.

We arrange to meet in the SiG office in Kitchener; I am struck by the fact that it's the first time I've arranged any meetings in this “official” office space. Andrew is the Director of RENDER at the University of Waterloo. This art gallery space is housed on the north campus, rather isolated and distant, and so Andrew thought it might be better to come to me.

Andrew is an artist, but has spent much of his career working as a curator and director of galleries. He is animated, funny, and totally without pretension. On first sight, he doesn't fit with the stereotype of an arts person. Through our conversation I realize that, like his interests, he isn't easily categorized.

Also a newcomer to the Waterloo Region, his experience setting up here has been much like that of Isabel, Chantal or Megan. Almost since the beginning, he has been fighting for more support, more recognition and greater understanding.

I decided to include his interview in this chapter for several reasons. Like Tim Jackson, much of his current activity and thinking is devoted to partnerships. Added to this, he picks up on what Isabel mentioned about the power of the arts, harnessing this by using creative practices and thinking to change the status quo: our basic way of thinking and doing. He brings new tools to partnering, and, I think, presents the possibility of different results. Further, my conversation with him feels like a counterpoint to my conversation with Tim. In juxtaposing the two, I gained fresh insight.

An example of...

Andrew started working two years ago as Director at the gallery at the University of Waterloo. He was intrigued by the position because they seemed to offer him the room to do whatever he wanted with the place and space.

Andrew didn't want to work within the “public gallery setting.” He feels that galleries are outdated and very restricting. They can be exclusive kinds of places, and only really accommodate certain art forms (2- and 3-dimensional visual art). Andrew wanted to refocus and do something different. The University gave his new vision for an artistic initiative, which he called, RENDER, a space and enough funding to bring his vision into being.

As mentioned by Tim, the University has a policy whereby anything that you create belongs to you. Andrew tells me that this is good in some ways, as it means that RENDER is his and he could leave and take it with him. But of late, he

feels this may be a mixed blessing, because the University is very hands off and doesn't invest in his projects, financially or with resources.

Andrew explains that there was initial seed money, but now there is no more funding. The Dean of Arts suggested making Andrew a faculty member to release more money for RENDER and give him more stability. But quickly and quietly, the idea was dropped.

Andrew's story mirrors those of several others I have spoken to. This makes me wonder if perhaps this Region, and what it has to offer, appeals to certain types: independent, creative, driven. Unfortunately, without the necessary support, it is easy to become discouraged and tired. Andrew articulates this well: "There is a lot of pressure on me. It's all my show; there is no one to pick up slack. It's all my ideas, all my vision—all the time. I am largely left on my own."

This is the case, quite literally. His current location is a perfect metaphor for his relationship with the University. As Andrew explains, it is a problem of location; there is no good public transit and it is not connected into the community. On the whole it is not accessible. Further, the University is planning to erect a giant building between RENDER and the central campus, pushing it even further off campus, and making it more inaccessible. Out of sight and out of mind.

Still, like others, despite these obstacles, he seems determined to stay the course. As Sunshine so aptly notes, sometimes this kind of neglect strengthens resolve. He remains committed to the University and partnerships that involve students, and still works and collaborates with people associated with the University. He is working very independently but is trying to create a hybrid relationship between being totally disassociated and completely involved. Increasingly, he seeks to connect with the larger community here and around the world.

I ask him to give me an example of his work and of "connecting with the world." In so doing, he also relates how he transitioned towards the partnership model in which he now works.

[One initiative was to be based] on a partner project with Proboscis (an art group from London, England) called Anarcheology, which was a research lab of sorts. RENDER began a similar project that would have taken place in downtown Kitchener or downtown Galt. It was to be a living lab where people come together to work on elements of a project, for example the re-examining or re-visioning of the centre. It was to be a place where people could come to create alternative visions, share and collaborate together.

Sadly, Andrew relates to me, despite lots of local upfront interest, support and enthusiasm, the project was dropped because of lack of funding or tangible support. Andrew says this was deeply frustrating to him and made him seriously reconsider his role and his work. No one really seemed to understand his work. They liked it in theory, but perhaps because it is not concrete enough, they were not really willing to give it a serious chance. As a consequence, he switched gears and came to recognize RENDER's role as a partnering organization. This speaks to the inventiveness I have come to associate with people here. Andrew set out on a fresh trajectory similar to that of Tim and in so doing, is increasing this community's bridging capacities. And, though this may have come out of necessity, it also speaks to Andrew's larger vision for arts and for culture.

Partnerships: in the present and on principle

I ask Andrew to explain this vision to me. He tells me that at the heart of RENDER's work lies interdisciplinary collaborations and connections. This is a different idea about what art is, and where and when art happens. He sees art as being active; not simply a static representation. Creative cultural thinking, when applied to the issues that are relevant today, is an art form in itself. As he puts it:

By having a variety of people at the table, we are able to have different types of conversations and ask different questions: "What is the cultural investment?" "Who will it benefit?" "Who will add to it?" "What is its role in our lives?" We need new ways of thinking, new angles and perspectives. There are many ways of doing this, we [should] try them out, play, discuss and learn. Therein lies the creativity and the art.

Andrew explains that he models RENDER on Proboscis. Like him, they have a vision for art that extends beyond the classical fine arts tradition. They do work with the Department of Justice in England, as well as several housing estates and other projects. They hold workshops and discussions where they introduce creative tools to stimulate new perspectives and ways of conceptualizing, novel ways of connecting and working together. This sounds very interesting, but also quite abstract. I ask Andrew to give me some examples of the kind of work RENDER does, and of his current partnerships.

He tells me that he works with the School of Architecture in several capacities. He recently started working with Waterloo Unlimited, which is out of the University of Waterloo, and is their high school enrichment program that brings youth to Waterloo each spring and summer. He was asked to do a presentation for them last summer, and is building links for more work in the future, including workshops and longer projects.

He is also working with the environmental organization, RARE, on a few initiatives. He was introduced to the organization through Joy Roberts who does consulting work for them, and immediately found it exciting. As a natural green space between Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, Andrew saw great potential for it to be a community-meeting place.

Just a month ago, Andrew did an event at RARE in collaboration with David Buckland, of Cape Farewell. On the RARE grounds, he worked with the high school students who were about to leave for the Arctic with David. With Andrew, the youth prepared to do a piece about their experience in the Arctic. The idea is that this work will have reverberations when they return to their home countries, and will trigger discussion and thought about the world and our place in it. Andrew hopes they will look at their own communities differently afterwards.

He is also in the process of planning another project at RARE, in collaboration with Jeff Thomas. Jeff is a Six Nations photographer who has done research on the cultural history of land use along the Grand River. Together, they are trying to start a community garden, created and sustained by high school students from Waterloo Region and the Six Nations Community. The idea is to bring together native and non-native youth on a project to combine their visions, their understanding of the land, and their skills. It's about creating a new relationship with a specific space over an extended time frame.



Planning for serendipity: the accidental encounter

I wonder where Andrew's vision and ideas come from. He tells me that his vision is constantly changing: "I have a plan but I don't have a plan." He has a clear sense of the kinds of work and artists he is interested in, but he also emphasizes the organic nature of making connections and collaborations. The work is always evolving and changing. He speaks of the accidental encounter as being a principle of his work. But then goes on to say that is isn't really an accident and points to all the background connections he made while working on RARE projects. The time and the place and all these individuals feed into making an encounter between people happen.

I find this perspective insightful. Recognizing all the elements that can enable something happen is helpful in being able to recreate it; in this way, the accidental isn't accidental at all. But holding on to the principle of accidental encounters, always being open to the possibility of the unexpected, is a good attitude.

It was also personally interesting to me. For my Master's thesis, I wrote about the transformative power of art in the context of managing natural resources. I looked at the inclusion of art in management practice in three ways: the use of art to encourage engagement and greater understanding, the participation of artists in decision making and planning, and finally, the use of art to literally transform environmental systems.

Like Isabel and Andrew, I believe that art and art practice brings people together, and can be a powerful tool for communication and generating ideas. My research revealed this to be true: art seems to encourage thinking and acting differently.

Tim proposes that greater numbers of partnerships will enable us to become more of a bridging community. He concedes, however, that for for-profit tools and partnering to be truly effective at a larger scale, a larger cultural shift needs to take place.

In a recent issue of the SiG e-newsletter, Al Etmanski, from the PLAN Institute for Caring Citizenship, is quoted as saying:

At the heart of most projects of dissemination is this belief that if you share the model, that by itself is sufficient to create critical mass... [But] we believe that the insights, the inventions associated with our work, are so profound that we have a responsibility to embed those in the structures of our society.

In other words, in order to scale our innovative models up, we need to find ways to fundamentally shift the way things are done, rather than just extending the reach of our innovation. Andrew's experience and his insights speak to this. The tool he uses is creative cultural thinking. He hopes that by injecting artistic and creative thinking and processes into our discussions and our partnerships, he is doing his part to shift our habitual mindsets and thereby open the way for new outcomes.

Wondering about how this might affect the state of culture in the Waterloo Region, I ask Andrew what he thinks about this region in terms of culture. He responds that Waterloo is more practical than aesthetic. It lacks visionaries who see beyond the first stages of development of cultural enterprises. As he sees it, this is exemplified by the number of "from nothing to something" initiatives:

"[It's like] a planned cultural injection. [For example,] the theatre in town and the Children's Museum. In keeping with the entrepreneurial model of Waterloo, they were huge successes overnight. But [now they are much less popular]. [This may be because] they have no relevance in day to day life. They are inorganic and often inaccessible."

Andrew is on much the same wavelength as Isabel and Tim on this. I mention my discussions with them on the subject of creating culture. Andrew agrees: "You can't plan to do it organically. It's not good enough to have sidewalk cafés and pretty squares. We need to look at the processes used to encourage change and creativity; they are often highly bureaucratic and soulless proceedings." Andrew feels that we need to be thinking differently about what creative capital is. Instead of aiming for more galleries or more hip cafés, we should be working towards creative community thinking.

Easier said than done, I imagine. I ask Andrew what we can do practically to enhance our capacity for creative community thinking. In his opinion, we need to be more invested in risk; we need to embrace the potential for something new.

I point out that this region is famously known for its innovations, and that several people I have spoken with attribute this to this community's capacity to take risks.

Andrew responds that success seems to make people more conservative and risk averse. He tells me the story of being at a meeting about arts and culture with Jim Balsillie from RIM, and how he ran it in a very top down manner and insisted on many constraints—not at all in keeping with his entrepreneurial roots. "You have all these large organizations trying to be involved in creative industries, but they have very rigid managerial structures." According to Andrew, this makes them unlikely to take real risks, even if their own success came from taking chances. At the time, I thought this was an interesting point, but was unsure about its validity. In retrospect, I think Andrew was tapping into a problem of scale. What works at one scale, in one context, does not automatically translate to the next scale, or to another context.

From what I can tell, Andrew feels that the principles behind the accidental encounter need to be enacted in this community, and that enabling informal soft connections to happen is even more important than formal connections.

While, like Tim, Andrew has advocated for partnerships, he believes fundamentally in changing the discourse, and so goes further and suggests that we also need new tools to change the way we interact.

Perhaps, however, in his emphasis on the organic and informal, he misses an important element of which Tim, if inadvertently, makes use: the powerful friend. Andrew chastises larger bureaucratic organizations and their leaders, but, of course, needs them in order to make change happen. In fact, his current practice is based on forming partnerships with organizations and people with more resources. This paradox is highlighted in what Andrew says about funding: "It is really important to invest financially and give support in order to make spaces available for creative practices."

Tim and Andrew both think that change occurs as a result of partnerships. Interestingly, my conversations with them could almost be a read as a debate. Tim insists that this Region is successful because of its capacity to take risks. Andrew thinks we are too risk averse. Tim cited the Children's Museum as an example of a successful cultural institution because of its use of for-profit techniques. Andrew decried it as being too mainstream and inaccessible. Tim maintains we need more public spaces, more cafés, and Andrew says that these exact things are limited and too forced. Still, they are both clearly dedicated to making a difference and their perspectives offer insight. I am left wondering whether a conversation about how to negotiate cultural change across scales or across sectors would be helpful, and might even lead to a breakthrough in their thinking.

Partnering From the Ground Up — Bill Davidson

Bill Davidson was actually the third person that I interviewed. Apart from him I have relayed my conversations in the order in which they took place. However, when I interviewed Bill Davidson in the early part of last summer, I didn't know what to make of him or of his story. Despite recognizing it as very insightful, our conversation didn't fit easily into my narrative.

After completing my other interviews, I am now able to better understand Bill and his story. In a way, Bill and Langs Farm Village Association are emblematic of this region and its strengths and weaknesses. I decided to include it here, at the end, because I think it helps summarize what I have learned, and further, brings me back to myself and makes me reflect on my own role and that of SiG as members of this community.

On my way to Langs Farm from my house in Kitchener I traveled along two highways and passed as many strip malls. On the other side of the 401 and in the outskirts of Cambridge, Langs Farm is surrounded by industrial and commercial zones, yet, as I came to discover, is also in the middle of a suburban community. At first glance, the Langs Farm Village Association looks like a shopping complex; upon closer inspection, colorful and fun scenes of community life on store front signs indicate otherwise. The space is large. Before finding the right entrance, I walked by at least two doors: a health clinic and an early years centre. I decided on the Resource Centre and was rewarded by my choice; a cheerful and busy reception indicated I was in the right place to meet with Bill Davidson, Executive Director of Langs Farm Village Association. I managed to take in a series of computer terminals, lots of flyers and a few offices before I heard Bill calling my name.

First impressions: competence behind modesty

Bill was immediately surprising; my background research informed me that Bill had been with Lang Farms for over 20 years, but he was far from old. After a firm handshake, Bill showed me into his office, offered me a seat, and went to get us both something to drink.

The simple website, plain exterior and basic furnishings seem to indicate that Langs Farm is a modest operation, but this a little deceiving: on the wall, masked at times by the door, is a framed Governor General's Award. As Bill begins to tell me about his vision and Langs Farm, I come to understand why he is the recipient of this award.

Bill is very direct and to the point. In his introduction of Langs Farm, he clearly states what makes this association unique. His assurance and belief in its mandate are infectious and convincing. His recounting of the history and evolution of Langs Farm makes its success seem almost inevitable; as though the right ingredients guarantee the desired outcome.

From the start: a collaboration informed by the grassroots

According to Bill, Langs Farm Village Association started 30 years ago because citizens were concerned about vandalism and local youth problems. The police, school and church representatives got together to try and deal with the problem. This quickly dissolved because the various agencies were not used to working together. Still, one school principal held on and decided to put the question to the neighborhood residents: What do you think needs to be done, what do you most need from us? The residents of the area responded that they needed recreation for their youth. Bill explains that this neighborhood was historically working class and poor with large families (four children on average to this day) and many single parent households. It was densely populated with young people but there were no gathering places. The Langs Farm Village Association acquired a townhouse in the neighborhood and soon began offering services to the community. Right from the start there was a noted decline in youth related problems.

He explains that the initial vision for Langs Farm was as a meeting place for a variety of organizations and groups to come together and provide services to community. At the time this was quite visionary, as agencies were more inclined to be siloed and competitive.

Bill needs no encouragement; he continues uninterrupted.

He tells me that by putting the question to the residents, the school principal diverged from the norm, and in so doing, began something innovative. This simple philosophy of including residents in all decision making has remained at the root of Langs Farm ever since.

30 years later: the principles still hold

Still unclear about what Langs Farm does, I ask Bill to elaborate on their current programming.

He tells me that the youth centre is still operating. There are also programs for seniors, women's groups and parenting groups. They have a community health centre. They run workshops on the Internet. They go on expeditions and outings and they have early years programs. What differentiates them from other organizations, Bill reiterates, is that all these programs were either generated by the community or have been approved by them.

I find myself thinking back to the Regional government's mandate for community input, and wonder if Langs Farm functions in a similar way, with general stakeholder meetings and questionnaires, or whether there is more integral community involvement. I ask for an example of how this might work in practice.

Bill tells me that the community health centre is exemplary of their philosophy. At Langs Farm, unlike the majority of health centres, physicians are employed by

the centre instead of working on a fee-for-service model. They are part of a team, including nurse practitioners, nurses, dietitians and social workers. They are salaried and accountable to the organization; in fact, the residents were invited to interview all the candidates. The result, Bill feels, is that the physicians are more involved, more present in the community and responsive to community needs. Like everything at Langs, the health centre was created for the community by the community and not in isolation of what the community needs. The community services committee, made up of residents, must approve all proposals for new projects.

I inquire how his organization liaises with the community, lets people know what is going on and gets them involved. He responds that most of their promotion and advocacy happens through word of mouth. Langs Farm employees also take information door to door, and make use of local community facilities like school gyms and church halls. They also have special events several times a year and invite the entire neighborhood to participate. There are also many volunteers participating and helping out.

Adding spokes to the hub: strengthening the model by including external partners

Changing gears, Bill tells me that resident participation and involvement is only half of what makes Langs Farm unique. From its initial conception as a hub, Langs has developed many partnerships with other organizations. Over time they have partnered with Lutherwood and Catholic Family Counseling Services. Both are now on site. Cambridge Career Connections has youth employment counselors on site, and Lutherwood offers employment counseling for adults there as well. Family and Children's Services offers a family visiting centre, a place where parents can see their children with supervised access. Additionally, Kids Ability provides speech and language services on site.

The outreach worker program is illustrative of how community ownership and partnerships can be combined. As also described by Lynn Randall, the Regional government initiated the program in an attempt to empower local, often rural communities to support themselves. Instead of being dependent on the support of workers coming from the City, workers are hired from the community, by the community.

Bill tells me that he thinks having multiple service providers on site means more inclusive and all encompassing care.

I want to know how this came into being and how and why other agencies end up partnering with Langs Farm. Bill answers that the agencies often join together because of shared philosophy and a shared outreach approach.

"Does this work well?" I wonder.

Bill acknowledges that it can be challenging to work in partnership and explains

that it means a shift in thinking and doing, a move away from the prescriptive way of doing things.

Despite this, Bill says that the agencies will often approach Langs, wanting to get involved and to set up partnerships so they can service the Langs Farm community. Puzzled about this, I pondered whether or not this is common; in my understanding people usually go to agencies, not the other way around. In fact, I feel as though it might be rare for organizations to seek out clientele; usually they have more than they can deal with. But perhaps, as Bill says, it is because Langs Farm fills a real need, a gap in the system. Organizations that might not normally partner are brought together around a common goal, and in a venue where they feel comfortable. To Bill, it's all about "how to get back to basics." People don't know their neighbors and Langs allows them to harness the power of the informal networks.

Trying to understand this better, I asked Bill how Langs Farm in particular has managed this. He emphatically repeats the philosophy: "People needed the services, they requested them, they helped implement them and now they are served by them." He suggested that Langs Farm was born organically out of the need to survive, "to take care of ourselves or die." He also suggests that it has a lot to do with the people involved, like Paul Born of Tamarack and Cathy Brothers, with whom he has worked in the past.

Proof of success: growth through replication

I find myself wondering whether Langs Farm's emphasis on self-reliance, a theme now very familiar to me from other interviews, might limit its capacity for growth. I am surprised when Bill tells me that, since its inception, many similar organizations have sprung up here. In Cambridge alone there are now eight such neighborhood organizations. Currently, similar projects exist all across Ontario, and with equal success.

People from all over the country have come for workshops where they learn how to implement this methodology.

As Bill says, in what is clearly an understatement, the model is catching on. With pride, he tells me that Langs Farm has gone from a small grassroots operation with a tiny staff and \$10,000 a year in funding to a large organization, which occupies several buildings, has a 50-person staff and \$4.5 million a year in funding. Moreover, they are currently scaling up, getting more professionals, bringing in more people.

Somehow, I find this in contradiction with the grassroots, community spirit that Bill has so emphatically insisted on up to this point. On the one hand, Bill seems to be the modest advocate unwilling to single himself or this organization out as special; on the other hand, he is the fearless and ambitious leader, making the necessary alliances, vigorously promoting the Langs Farm model.

This contradiction sheds light on something I have been trying to make sense of: despite all of Langs Farm's accomplishments, and the widespread proliferation of their model, not a single person I interviewed mentioned them as an example of social innovation in this area. In fact, more than one person I spoke with had never heard of them. As illustrated by Rick and Andrew, I wonder if success in this community means moving away and separating yourself.



An ambivalent relationship: some advice for the University

Bill tells me that this is the first time that anyone from SiG has even enquired about the work at Langs. Bill has had a stronger relationship with Wilfred Laurier University, which is smaller, less institutional and less bound. Their community psychology program has been involved in the Langs Farm community, placing interns there and doing research.

Bill wants to talk more about the University, which he criticizes and praises in turn. He suggests that SiG should let the community have a say in what it works on; it should take a step back and hear from the community about what they want and what they need. He says there is huge benefit in learning from each other, and grants that research and evaluation can give us insight into what works and why, which allows us to replicate success.

Bill thinks that studying innovation in this region will help people perpetuate the innovative spirit here: "If you want innovation to be sustainable then you need it to be understood." He believes that innovation is a natural organic process to be supported and built on, but not constructed. According to him there is already a culture of innovation here, and that regardless of SiG's efforts to bring people together, they will be drawn to each other naturally: "It would have happened naturally, without you, it is already happening." Bill suggests that innovation needs to be supported by government and needs to be researched. Langs Farm is a model that people come to learn how to reproduce. Thus it can be scaled up and spread. He thinks perhaps SiG's program could support more linking and bridging, both with the university and with the technology and business sectors.

Roots and ambition: how to both maintain and expand

Like the Langs Farm Village Association, Bill himself is both from and part of this community. He tells me that he was a teenager when he started working at Langs Farm as a Youth Worker, and he has been involved with the organization for most of his life. I assume he would not take the credit for its success, but his powerful presence and force of conviction seem to infuse Langs Farm.

Bill's account of Langs Farm reveals a community that values connections and ties, self-reliance, and community ownership. These things, however, can at times be in conflict with social innovation. Though Bill's efforts are impressive, they are understated. Ambition and upward mobility seem to be met with ambivalence, perhaps because it means breaking some of the bonds that allow a new idea to take shape in the first place. More broadly, is there an issue to be faced squarely in this Region if achieving success by challenging the status quo leads to diminished support? A community that prizes new ideas and entrepreneurship needs to continue to support people once they have broken with convention.

This region seems to have the right ingredients to support the birth of innovations like Langs Farms, or for that matter Neruda Productions, RENDER, The School of Architecture, and others, but I wonder, does it have the means to hold on to them?

SiG recently hosted a scenario-planning event. The idea is to come up with possible scenarios for the future, extrapolating from a set of circumstances that are happening in the present. One of the major themes that came up was around inclusion. This region is experiencing unprecedented population growth, and how it deals with this will have a huge impact on its identity and make-up in the future. I gather that Bill did not attend the event, but then, neither did I. I think this speaks to the real and ongoing difficulty of creating space at the table for everyone, and the impossibility, and yet necessity, of doing so. Not attending one event is of little relevance, and in a bigger city, no one would even notice. But in this "big, small town," this "community of firsts," the questions of integration, inclusion and diversity sit at the forefront of the agenda. As Bill's story so perfectly illustrates, this community has unique and amazing capacities to generate and support real novelty, through a fiercely self-reliant, entrepreneurial and occasionally underdog spirit. Deep bonds and powerful connections allow for initial start-ups and lateral growth. But what are the processes for embracing divergence, difference and newcomers in a community where "deals are made with a handshake"? How can we build and scale long term innovations in a place that defines itself by firsts and being grassroots and organic?



FINAL WORDS

Reflections on a System — Joy Roberts

For Christmas this year, Ola and I received cross-country skis. It has changed my relationship to Waterloo Region winters, which, as I mentioned in my introduction, I previously experienced as quite long and isolating. Someone told my mother, who told me, about a great ski spot called Schneider's Woods. I imagine many of you may be familiar with this lovely section of the world. It is an extensive stretch of woods, fields and hills that is used by the community for walking, hiking and skiing. Since discovering it, Ola and I return as often as we can and always marvel at this exquisite resource. It is not obviously noted on any map and you won't find it listed in phone books or on the official Internet sites. This is because it is private property. Elsewhere, like in Sweden, citizens have a right to travel across any piece of land, according to Allemansratt's "every man's right." Here, we are usually very wary of trespassing, fearing angry landowners shaking their fists at us. At Schneider's Woods, however, you are free to roam. As I am finishing this piece, Schneider's Woods is often in my thoughts. I think it is a fitting metaphor for this Region: open, welcoming, neighbourly, unique and a secret. You have to know someone who knows someone to find out about it.

As I conclude this story, I find myself wondering how this community came to be, and why it has the particular qualities I have come to associate with it. In late August of last year, I had my last interview, which turned into yet another conversation, with Joy Roberts. We met in Guelph (interestingly, at a distance from Waterloo Region) and as I described my findings, she offered insight and analysis. As someone who grew up here, and who in fact is an eighth generation Waterlooian, she may know the essence of this community as well as anyone. As the first and only person I interviewed to describe herself as Mennonite, she allowed me deeper understanding of a culture that everyone mentions as definitive of this community's spirit.

Defining community, acknowledging culture:

When Joy and I met, she immediately asked me to describe my project, and when I did, she asked, coyly perhaps, which community, exactly, I was trying to understand. She pointed out that this community is in fact an aggregation of many different communities and that its boundaries have been shifting over time. It is not something I had considered at all before talking to her. Afterwards,

in a second discussion with Andrew, we ended up talking about the issue of physical boundaries, and subsequent community identity. At this late stage, I find myself wondering what community I am trying to get to know. Is it Kitchener and Waterloo? Is it Cambridge and the towns that make it up? Is it the region surrounding the Grand River, which, as Andrew informed me, was once the home of the Six Nations, a sanctuary to escape discrimination, and then later was bought by a Mennonite community and served as a safe haven from religious persecution?

Let's suppose boundaries and histories do not define a community; they do, nonetheless, affect it and infuse it with meaning. I find it fascinating that this place, like Schneider's Woods today, has a history of openness. It has been a refuge for outsiders, for people who seek freedom to be themselves, and to live according to their own beliefs.

Pondering this, I ask Joy to speak about the influence of Mennonite culture on this community. She tells me that Mennonites are committed to a cooperative spirit, as well as an individual responsibility; a reliance on community rather than on government. There is a spirit of perseverance; the community has had to reinvent itself again and again. She recalls being young and being surrounded by all sorts of people, from those in a lot of need, who her family assisted, to the very wealthy. She says that out of the significant sense of community comes dedication to taking care of others. This reflects much of what I have learned about this community. When I ask how being Mennonite has affected her life personally, she laughs and says it affected her relationship to money. And then, thinking, adds that she received a powerful message around money, one that relates to social innovation directly.

Money signifies success, she notes, and I agree. She explains that ours is a system focused on money, but we do not talk about it. In the Mennonite community, people are not driven by money but they are not afraid of it either. She tells me the story of being young and surrounded by piles and piles of cash because her father did not believe in debt and, moreover, didn't use the bank.

Joy is interested in examples of an indifferent or neutral attitude to wealth and power. From her perspective, an underlying desire to make a difference, combined with a "blindness" to things like wealth and power, really makes change happen.

She explains that in her lifetime she has spent time with the very rich and the very poor, and ultimately feels that we are all motivated by the same thing: we want to be recognized and valued, we want to have a sense of accomplishment. As Joy sees it, most people of good will and intelligence want to do something. I am a little sceptical about this, but recognize that this is a deeply held value

for Joy, and one that I think she shares with others in this community. I find myself thinking that this kind of emphasis on doing, helping and accomplishing might be another important characteristic of this area. It is true that throughout my conversations with interviewees I have felt in them a steadfast dedication to helping others and improving the lot of everyone in this community. When I continue to probe, as I have throughout this narrative, into what in particular helps this community achieve its goals, Joy points out that our system is working perfectly. I am a little surprised at this and ask her to clarify. She tells me that in her mind, each system has specific inputs and outputs. She emphasizes that our system is not broken or bad, it is what it is: a set of inputs that result in outputs. Imagining how to design a better society means thinking hard about what we are inputting, what the ingredients of the soup are.



She mentions how difficult it is to encourage or make change happen in a place, how innovation needs dissenters, people who are willing to rebel against the system from which they often benefit. This makes me think of Bill, acting on a world stage, but outside of this community.

Joy asks me whether I have met such social innovators in my interviews. I reply that I have definitely encountered pieces, parts and signs, and that I wasn't sure if I had met the quintessential 'social innovator'. She nodded and then replied: "You have to be a dissenter to change the system," and again, as was said by another contributor to this narrative: "It would be a very lonely job to be a social innovator in Waterloo Region." I pushed her to explain why that might be particularly true in this community, and she responded, as though catching herself, that being a dissenter is generally a lonely job. I think this is probably true, but I also

think her comments apply to this community specifically. Perhaps the inputs of high connectivity and internal cohesion result in the outputs of social innovators who are outliers and are isolated.

Joy notes that this community is not too homogenous and that diversity does exist here. She is happy when I tell her about Langs Farm, as she had never heard of it before, and this to her is indicative of the diversity within her community. It seems that whether on purpose or despite itself, this community is drawing in a diversity of people, and with them, a new landscape is emerging.

And, as Joy has taught me, no system is inevitable. New inputs can and will result in a different configuration. In my conversations, I have gauged a strong desire to see the Waterloo Region transform into a diverse and cosmopolitan place. I have also discovered new and novel partnerships and pairings emerging.

A commitment to transformation:

Joy herself is firmly committed to finding new strategies to grow the system. When I first met her, it was in the context of her work with Musagetes Foundation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to art and social change. Now as then, she speaks to the power of the arts to transform systems. She tells me that she thinks people have an enormous capacity to solve problems and are more inclined to do so when they have the opportunity to be creative. Art can be a vehicle; it has an amazing capacity to reach the average person, to open their minds and bring them into the discussion.

Harkening back to the beginning of our discussion, Joy tells me that in her perspective, borders should be porous, as this promotes diversity. She mentioned that this is what Musagetes is about: art and social change, the bridging and linking capacity of art work, its transcendence and ability to rally people together and to inspire them to believe in something. Personally, I couldn't agree more. The capacity that Joy and I ascribe to art is really one of inclusion and bridging. Further, at its best, it can be transformative and take the local to the global. But, as Joy noted, it is just one vehicle, and there are many others.



Evening close: wondering about tomorrow

Sitting outside again, a year after I began this project, I find myself observing my surroundings. The wind is rustling in the trees and the evening light softens. My neighbour, Bill, reaffirms his commitment to having us over. His renovations are moving along slowly, and he seems a little defeated: yesterday his car was broken into and his digital camera was stolen. I watch him come out and check and recheck the locks on his car. I wonder what a changing Waterloo Region means to him. I haven't the heart to tell him that we will soon be moving. We are relocating to Uptown Waterloo. This makes me a little sad, realizing as I do that this move is probably only temporary and that it's likely Ola and I will eventually move back to a big city.

I genuinely appreciate the opportunities that this community and this project have given me. I have been granted access to a complex and fascinating culture, and as a result, I feel invested in what happens here.

This region is rapidly changing. It seems clear that the challenge for this community lies in the inclusion and support of newcomers and diversity, and in bringing ideas to fruition and making them last; making them "grow-up-and-out," throughout and even beyond the boundaries of this region.

Thinking back on what this community does best, I ponder my favourite ski location as a metaphor. Imagine if we could access all private property for our outdoor activities. Imagine this community connecting its people through its land and a barrier free zone, accessible to those with resources and those without. Imagine we could walk, ski, swim and run anywhere. But, of course, any change comes at a cost. In another scenario, Schneider's Woods is so packed with people that I can't ski without tripping over someone. Would that be ideal?

In the end, it comes down to envisioning together what you want your community to look like now and in the future, and then making choices. Waterloo Region has plenty of visionaries, some of whom I have had the pleasure to meet. Harnessing these multiple voices just might produce the common purpose and creative energy needed to navigate the road ahead.

June 15, 2010

As I read through this collection of conversations and reflections recorded over the past two years, I'm struck by how much has changed and also by how much has remained the same. Projects and programs described in these pages have further developed, strengthened, or in some cases completely evolved into something new. Restaurants have closed or moved locations. Some of the individuals whose voices infuse this story have become our partners and have collaborated closely with SiG@Waterloo on such diverse initiatives as case studies, scenario thinking and speaker events. In other cases, our work paths have not yet crossed beyond this series of interviews. What seems to have remained unchanged is the uncommon sense of community pride, passion, curiosity and commitment that clearly rings through this story of social innovation in Waterloo Region.

It's important to say a special word of thanks to Paul Born from the Tamarack Institute for the walks around Waterloo neighbourhoods and the talks with folks he invited to come and chat that helped immensely to shape the initial thinking for this project; Paul wanted to celebrate the community which is his home and the incredible people who so skillfully weave the social fabric of this place. In addition, our thanks go out to the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation and the Frank Cowan Foundation for the financial support that made this local project possible. This writing project truly was a community effort.

But most of all, I want to express our warmest gratitude to the people who contributed their time and wisdom in the interviews that make up this fascinating community story. Their experienced, thoughtful and honest reflections on their home and work have contributed to a rich narrative that holds much learning for all who will read it. When we first began crafting this idea, we had hoped that through this writing project we would be able to shed some light on the often asked question, "What is it about the Waterloo Region community that makes so much new, good work possible?" This story holds clues to some answers to that question. But the truth is, it mostly serves to raise a whole collection of new questions to consider. Good questions. Important questions. Questions that can be catalysts for more conversation, strategic action, and positive change.

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