Universities and Networks of Innovation in Poor Neighborhoods: Challenges and Contradictions

Alvernia University
March 11, 2014
Reading, PA.

Ramón Borges-Méndez, PhD
Associate Professor & Coordinator,
Community Development & Planning
Clark University
Worcester, MA
Main Questions & Outline

- Why universities need a strategy to participate in networks of innovation in poor neighborhoods?

- What are the challenges and contradictions experienced by universities reconciling market-driven with mission-driven roles within such networks?

- What is the strategic approach?

- Case Study: Clark University, Worcester, MA.
Question 1: Why Universities Need a Strategy? 
The Embeddedness of University Agency
Why Universities Need a Strategy: Unpacking Embeddedness and Community Development

1. **Current Conditions of Inclusion/Exclusion:** Achievements, struggles, structural entrapments, new forces.

2. **Urban/Rural Differentiation:** Miami; NYC; LA; the Latino Magnets of the Southwest; the New Destinations (NC/Kansas); The Mill Towns of the northeast; farms & fields.

3. **The Diversity of Immigrant Labor, Characteristics and Selectivity:** Refugees; Highly-Skilled, Professionals, Para-Professionals & Graduate Students; Low-Wage Workers; Ethnic Entrepreneurs; Informal Economy.

4. **Environmental Justice & Social Epidemiology:** Co-morbidity with poverty; concentration of environmental hazards and the costs of brownfields; decayed infrastructure; chronic ailments & disabilities; productivity losses.
Unpacking Embeddedness and Community Development

5. **Political and Managerial Challenges:** Electoral and non-electoral participation in the municipal arena; school systems; devolution; fiscal shortfalls.

6. **Regionalization of Systems & Globalization:** Sectorial workforce development; transportation; Internet; green energy.

7. **Re-composition of Capital Markets:** Housing; banking & the unbanked; community and household assets.

8. **Local Civic Engagement Infrastructure & Non-Profits:** Asset base of non-profits; role in social policy; representation & advocacy.

9. **Education:** Public schools in poor & immigrant neighborhoods; transition to college; Dream Act and student loan debt; STEM.
Continued: Unpacking Embeddedness and Community Development

10. **Role of Institutions:** Hospitals; Universities; Banks; Large Non-profits; Foundations; Corporations; Professional and Business Organizations; Labor Unions.

11. **Networks:** Diaspora Philanthropy; Remittances; Social Networking; Learning Networks; Policy Networks.

12. **Immigrant Business Development & Social Entrepreneurship:** Incubation; Value-Supply Chains; Workers Coops; Place-Based Economic Development
Question 2: Challenges and Contradictions

Dominant “polarized approach” to university agency: Proprietary activity vs. Service non-pro prietary activity. Need a More Fluid Charter of University-Community Engagement, as most action happens in the middle of the continuum.
Detail of the Polarized Approach: Format and Mix of Institutional Tools

- **University in commercial proprietary activity**: Bayh-Doyle Act (1980); market-driven; public-private collaborations; privatization of public science; triple-helix systems; entrepreneurial university; Ed’s & Med’s; globalization; WTO.

- **University in service non-proprietary activity**: Mission-driven; university public science; equity and education; citizenship; placed-based action; collaborations; passive service learning vs. engaged scholarship.
Challenges and Contradictions of Universities in Networks

- **Structural Divides**: Spatial and Socioeconomic Distance; Inequalities.

- **Cognitive Dissonance**: What we think about “them” and what they think about “us” (reductionist thinking); Do actors have the capacity to do what they say (wishful thinking).

- **Outward/Inward Gaps**: Resource Asymmetries.

- **Policy Issues**: Model of Knowledge Transfer

- **Personal & Community Characteristics**: Leadership, Shortage of Boundary Spanners—individuals with interests on all sides.
Question 3: What is the Strategic Approach? Hybrid Networks

Shortcoming of the Polarized Approach: Fails to account for hybridization, mix of actors, networked activity, and transit of ideas and people from one realm to the other.

**Building Blocks**

- a) Fully Connected Topology
- b) Bus Topology
- c) Star Topology
- d) Ring Topology
- e) Tree Topology
- g) Hybrid Topology (example: combination of Star topology and Bus topology)
- h) Dual Ring Topology
- i) Linear Topology

Nodes - Branches
“Stages” and Challenges to Network Improvement Community

(1) Pre-Collaborative
* Mapping and Sizing Asymmetries (Info, $, HR)
* Determining Structure of Interests
* History of Collaborations & Nodes

(2) Anchoring
* Create a fluid charter of collaboration
* Determine functional areas of collaboration (WD, Ed, Housing)
* Sustainability Plan/ Capacity-Building

(3) Netting
* Network Improvement Community
* Governance & Maintenance
* Socio-technical platform
* R & D and Evaluation

Actors & Instruments

Anchors: Eds, Meds, Gov.

Netting
Clark University-Main South

- **University Park Partnership**: Long-standing collaboration between Clark University and its surrounding community that involves neighborhood residents and organizations, local churches, government officials, the business community and public schools. These groups are organized around the Main South Community Development Corporation (CDC).

- **Main South CDC-University Park Partnership**: HUD Grants & $18 Million in grants & tax credits; renovated 200 units and manages over 100; Boys & Girls Club new building; Clark’s new athletic fields; commercial locales; urban gardens.

- **University Park Campus School** educates 250 students in grades 7-12. Opened in 1997. 78% are non-English Speakers. 72% receive free lunch. Eligible students from neighborhood may go to Clark for free, including 5th Year ADP. Extended to Claremont Academy-Elementary School.

- **The Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program** with the Main South CDC ($900K) to reduce neighborhood violence.

- **Worcester Center for Public Health Practice (WCPHP)**, a health partnership between Clark University, the Mosakowski Institute, and the City of Worcester).

- **Clark-National Grid’s "Sustainability" Hub**: Working from a public utilities grant and vendor donations, National Grid, the regional electric utility provider, operates an educational center on Clark property at the corner of Main and Hawthorne Sts. Clark students serve as 'ambassadors' to tour visitors around the latest energy-saving home appliances and provide information about smart grid metering and connectivity.
Liberal Education and Effective Practice (LEEP): New Clark’s curriculum and student engagement, and the New LEEP Center.

Broke Ground March 2015: $18 Million
Conclusions: Learning Traps for University Network Building in the Poor Neighborhoods and City

1) The Problem of Scalability: Bifurcated Asset Base of the Non-Profit Sector.
2) Network Actors: Cheerleaders vs. Weavers, Builders
3) Building and Hosting Systems of Indicators: Layered Approach; Upstream/Downstream Information.
4) The Politicos and the Patronage Game: Democratic Engagement vs. Ward Politics.
6) The Legacy of Urban Decay: Brownfields: Weak Administration; No-Resources; Poverty; No regional outlook.
7) The Misuse of Empowerment Speech: They are “Out-of-Towners”.
8) The New Mix of Ethnic/Racial Groups: Understand the Multiple Streams and Diversity
9) The New Talent: Where is it? How to mentor it?
10) Accountability: Should fire people when they do not do their job. YES.
Thank You

Ramón Borges-Méndez, PhD
Associate Professor & Coordinator,
Community Development & Planning
Graduate Program,
Clark University
Worcester, MA
Rborgesmendez@clarku.edu