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Session 1 – Legacy Cities

Led by Bob Gradeck – Pittsburgh

Notes by Maia Woluchem

Present: Bob Gradeck, Cheryl Knott, Sarah Coffin, Kristen Murray, Taryn Hochleitner, John Killeen, Jake Cowan, Joshua Long, Preston Rhea, Nancy Jones, Bob Gradeck, Samantha Teixera, Charles Rynerson, Brandon Nida, David Epstein, Jamie Boothe,Mary Ohmer

B.Gradeck - Today we're talking about legacy cities—with my Executive Committee hat on, we've been talking about bringing together partners to share ideas and communicate more often, but organized through affinity groups. Legacy Cities, we've been facing the same issues - blight, vacancy, etc. but we don't talk as much as we should. Wrangled you all to pick your brains about issues that you're dealing with in your cities and how we can talk about projects and things we can do together. With that, we can start with some quick intros. Why are you interested?

I’m Bob from Pitt—here we face legacy issues, whether it’s finances and pensions, abandoned property, environmental legacies, etc.

N. Jones - Baltimore. We have pressing issues in Baltimore but I'm interested because we have legacy housing issues and I want to hear what others have to say.

J.Killeen - Things that interest me—problems with out of town and out of state ownership, market affordability, disinvestment in minority neighborhoods, and how to work with communities in terms of data collection, but I'm here to learn more.

C. Knott- BNIA, echo what Nancy says. Lots of national attention to inequality, housing issues, and economic opportunity. Hoping we’re on the cusp of data-driven change and I hope that for we can be part of the participants in the conversation and affect change.

T. Hochleitner - Work primarily on education data, mostly here just to learn

S. Coffin - With St. Louis University. Like Baltimore, we’re still struggling with inequality, blight, racial issues. And as a legacy city, it's an issue of collaborations, which we struggle with. I always hear from Eleanor about how we can get ideas implemented in St. Louis and it's the challenge that we face. How to collaborate, how to bring ideas to life.

J. Cowan – Work in a legacy city…

J. Boothe - at the university of Pittsburgh, do neighborhood disparities, comma ileitis and differences and also interested in civic engagement

S. Teixera – At West Virginia University but a Pittsburgh resident

P. Rhea - Code for America, here to see Bob facilitate a meeting but I'm also from a legacy city. We're experiencing the effects of malinvestment in housing and cities and communities that have been pushed away because of this malinvestment

J. Long – From D3. Just struck by the commonalities in the cities, and the solutions aren't unique to any one place.

K. Murray - Drawn by the title of legacy cities. I just learned that Minneapolis is a legacy city but also in terms of what that means in other cities, where race and place and poverty all kind of meet. In the renters’ space, I’m interested in housing condition, wealth building, and communities of color.

M. Ohmer - Also from the University of Pittsburgh, native Pennsylvanian, teach about these issues of poverty, racial inequality…

B. Gradeck – Heard about a lot of things—absentee investors, data collection, economic opportunity, inequality, race, foreclosure, poverty, many all are negatives. What are examples of positive engagement?

S. Coffin – The built environment and historic fabric. And a lot of you were there in St. Louis last year…

N. Jones - Thinking about our cities a lot this week, moving from a monocentric economy to a distributed economy. Six jurisdictions, 620,000 people. There’s a disconnect between the city and the surrounding jurisdictions. Some people in the region don't identify with the city and that in itself is disconcerting. The legacy means the movement away from the monocentric economy.

J. Long – Here’s a positive – the sunk economy and the cultural and philanthropic resources. Detroit, Cleveland, a lot of the same things.

M. Ohmer - Atlanta has a lot less resources too

J. Cowan - Interesting to look at the fabric the way you described it, how it compares across cities. What's that being used for? What's it matter if there’s an investment if it's not being used the right way?

S. Coffin - Cultural institutions, educational institutions, higher education, Atlanta has a lot of higher education but the cultural institutions they struggle with.

M. Ohmer - And the foundation resources are lower

J. Long - We work a lot with other organizations in Data Driven Detroit but they're not evaluating how much impact they're making between cities

S. Coffin – We’ve got a huge level of private wealth that's not invested philanthropically. When comparing that private wealth to Pittsburgh and other legacy cities, especially. To have that publicized would be important. Would be important to compare and publicize how well they're doing.

P. Rhea - To unite those points - especially with Detroit and Pittsburgh, these are places where the deep investment came at a time when they're was greater mobility for whites generally but lessening economic inequality overall at the time those cities were becoming prosperous. So this is a growing picture of prosperity. But today, the prospering of certain sites like San Francisco and DC isn’t benefiting all people in the same way, in the way that the growth in Detroit and Pittsburgh was. So that's why today the cool people in DC move to Baltimore.

Bob - One of the things that I like about living in a legacy city is the network of the relationships that you have. You have the cultural institutions where you can have groups come together. I draw a lot of personal value from those kinds of things. You can't just recreate it.

M. Ohmer - I think I feel embedded here, and that's valuable. Also speaks to the issue of engagement.

S. Coffin - You see that in the neighborhoods. Following on what some of the Twitter feed was talking about earlier, you don't broad brush the neighborhoods—there are sub-neighborhoods there that you just don't broad brush. It's very important to the people in the neighborhood that you properly identify them. But yet, I've lived in St. Louis twelve years—that's the thing in a legacy city, it can be a negative for people moving in. It's hard not to be from St. Louis and it's hard to not be from Cleveland.

B. Gradeck - Any people moving to a legacy city?

M. Ohmer - Yeah, I felt that way when I first moved to Pittsburgh. If you're hanging out with townies, then yes. But it's the networks that matter.

[Unknown] – Dependent on the amount that people are outside in their community—you can feel not alone. In Phoenix, it's not like that, because there's no character. But the layout of the city sort of fosters a connection to place.

B. Gradeck - True for non-Pittsburgh?

S. Coffin – In St. Louis it's hard to break in.

J. Cowan – That’s 100 percent true

C. Rynerson - Is it stratified by income? In Portland, they're shocked that I'm a native. In other places, where it's a blue collar environment, you go to other neighborhoods and you won't find that.

J. Cowan - How does neighborhood identity map onto low income and minority neighborhoods?

J. Killeen - In Durham I think that’s true. East and West Durham were incorporated later and they had their own segregation within them. Some people feel like it is a black neighborhood or a white neighborhood but that’s based on the perception of better schools, etc.

P. Rhea - How many of us would readily identify ourselves as a member of a low income or a minority community? It's useful to acknowledge.

M. Ohmer - I'm making contracts in Atlanta and Pittsburgh and the thing that Atlanta does have going for it is diversity. Even though it's the hub of the south, the relationships between racial minorities and whites, there's less segregation and less abject disparity than Pittsburgh. Because of the way it was built, there so much more separation.

N. Jones - I want to say something about race—this week our city has been compared to the sixties. The racial issues today are not the racial issues of the sixties. We had everyone together cleaning up the city, it is very much the case now, not the case in the sixties. Diversity is increasing such that someone living in a white neighborhood feels very connected to a black neighborhood. There's been a lot of over-simplification about how we evolved in the past.

J. Long - Your question about whether it's the same in all legacy cities? We lost so much of our inner city community. There are large swaths of the city where you can't even identify a neighborhood anymore. There are still those places in Detroit, but there are places that are blank because there's such loss of identity.

B. Gradeck - We talked about both negative and positive. What are the issues that you really want to focus on? That you'd like to address and that you can reach out on?

C. Rynerson - It's in the very eastern edge, Homewood. I didn't see what's to the west of that. Different metro regions have different levels of regionalism but there must be something out there beyond that city limit, and I think that Balkanization is a huge issue.

J. Long - Is the Balkanization an issue? The number of municipalities outside of the region? Politically.

S. Coffin - Big topic following Michael Brown’s shooting. Now their talking about consolidating police and fire jurisdictions. And everyone's overlooking the reasons why a lot of these jurisdictions ended up this way in the first place. It all has to do with race. If we can talk about the regional issues across cities, we can learn from them.

J. Cowan- Local, state and federal resources that come into cities can drive these issues but it all depends on how those resources are deployed.

S. Coffin - Would be interesting to see what drivers becomes the barrier to these issues

P. Rhea - The only city that doesn't have this regionalism problem is NYC. But in Atlanta, with the most recent vote that rips out assets from the center of the city to pull them away to the suburbs, T-SPLOST would fund transportation. The Braves station will move to Cobb County, and that funding only goes to two counties. I also thought about this moving graph in the New York Times recently, 360 cities in the country and their rates of job growth since 1995. In all of them, jobs were growing in the 90's and since then, except for NYC, Francisco, and DC, cities have been bleeding jobs since 2008. We're experiencing trends and forces that are causing disinvestment in a lot of the country in many ways. I would challenge us to think about what is the river of activity that is eroding or bolstering my city and how can we affect that flow. The racial issues have a different dimension now than they did in the 60's. We should be able to determine these indicators.

B. Gradeck – We heard about regionalism, are there any other cross-city issues we'd like to throw onto the table?

N. Jones - We want to get data into the communities and want the communities that are striving on the ground to use the data. Are there partners that are good at integrating data into the communities?

C. Knott - There’s a lot of resistance, not believing data, maps, stats. Anybody in a community meeting, working in the nonprofits, other researchers, the trends, challenging it. This doesn't match up with what I'm experiencing in my everyday life. That goes back to a lot of mistrust. People questioning that original data source.

S. Teixera - Have you worked directly with residents to see if they can map it themselves?

C. Knott – There’s one neighborhood in East Baltimore that we’re participating in a data collaborative with. Here's how you can analyze data, use google maps, collect data, combine it with the context, the demographics, etc. We’ll be combining the qualitative and the quantitative data.

S. Teixera - The answer for me was just having people who are in communities on a long term basis. I was an intern at that moment, and I asked for a desk and I stayed there with my little data geek stuff. And now they typically completely believe it. It's the long term investment.

C. Knott - In Baltimore it can be tricky. It's right next to Johns Hopkins, they've been guinea pigs for decades. The university does research, with no on-the-ground results.

B. Gradeck - Is there a way that we communicate that kind of thing? Do you write about your experiences and how do you do it?

S. Coffin - I thought the community revitalization society did that. I don't know at what level they do that but they were more…

M. Ohmer - As social workers we do it. There's an association and we talk about these things, there's a journal, etc. We are very focused on these strategies and teach our students about them, when we teach about research. So in terms of the academic community, there are some in the field going, that's a space for social work. When I was an organizer, we would talk about it all the time. There is a disconnect between data wonks and social workers. They’re collaborations that need to be built.

S. Coffin - I'm familiar with CDS. They were founded by a group out of the University of Missouri but they do share a lot of this kind of stuff. The Journal of Community Revitalization, their next conference is their conference in July in Lexington.

B. Gradeck - Do we all read journals?

S. Teixera - There's a listserv. Community based participatory research listserv. They are on Twitter. It's interdisciplinary. I'm a social worker but it does touch upon traditionally academic circles.

J. Long - Isn't that what NNIP is supposed to do? It's just a greater commitment, to gather the list of things that we are committed to sharing.

J. Cowan - An indicator or performance manager

P. Rhea - I've always found Detroit to be the most amazing place to do this kind of work. The Allegheny Conference, very participatory, lots of examples of radical community organizing. Maybe the Alameda conference? Also the Code for America brigade.

K. Murray - Art and design based community development, Bruner-Loeb forum. It's a recurring gathering that brings people through community development work,

J. Cowan - Center for Community Builders, it might be useful to figure out why that ended. It was Urban Strategies that ended that.

B. Gradeck - How many of us are disciplined enough to write up what we do? Time is the biggest obstacle for me.

J. Long - Has there ever been a commitment among NNIP partners to do these ten things and share them amongst each other? Common indicators? We have a data catalog but others can step in on that one? Through the website we update our indicators list…

B. Gradeck - Go around the room and throw out what's your takeaway? What do you want to work on?

S. Teixera - As a person that is interested in this forum, if we think about ways or indicators that we can partner with academic focus, I can do the data on the writing end. There are ways to collaborate that don't add a ton of work to everyone's plate.

S. Coffin - If we want to throw that in as well. I like the idea of the cultural institution and investments, I think that would be a great little project. We could have several authors on it. And we all get a pub!

B. Gradeck - Anything that is definitely fair game?

J. Killeen - The more participatory model is more important for where we are now. Isn't as exhaustive as door-to-door work. It took a whole staff and it was organizing block by block and terrible. Something more specific like best practices, bridging the gap between researchers and the communities. I'm going to keep my eyes peeled about things like that.

B. Gradeck - One thing I would love to know, does it involve reaching out to other cities before starting a project? How do we all approach our issues?

J. Long - A suggestion from someone in the big conference room, looking at areas of concentrated prosperity in addition to concentrated poverty. Figure could show to apples to apples comparison of our suburbs so we can compare

S. Coffin - We're hosting a conference as Washington University on that topic. There are several of us around the country who are writing on that. About concentrated affluence being a problem. What about the concentrated affluence? Further widens the gap especially in the context of wealth.