

**Study Tour on fighting urban poverty in Winnipeg through community economic development
(21-25 October 2013, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)**



From October 21-25, 2013, visitors from Albania, El Salvador, Italy and Mexico and students from the University of Manitoba's Asper Business School Master in Business Administration explored a number of ongoing experiences that are successfully addressing different dimensions of poverty in Winnipeg's inner city and on First Nations Reserves in Manitoba and engaged in lively discussions with the institutional and community leaders of these initiatives. The week concluded with the annual Manitoba gathering of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet-MB) where international participants presented their own experiences of local economic development and social inclusion

during three dedicated workshops. The study tour was organized jointly by the Winnipeg international laboratory on urban development and poverty reduction and by the Universitas Programme of the KIP International School. It was the first concrete activity of the international laboratory, based on an agreement signed in March 2013 by the Province of Manitoba, the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (Manitoba), the Canadian Community Economic Development Network – Manitoba, Ma Mawi Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc., the Community Education Development Association and the KIP International School.

The study tour was an opportunity to highlight successful approaches, strategies and tools being used in Winnipeg and elsewhere, exchange experiences among practitioners and researchers from Winnipeg and from other cities, identify common challenges and discuss future collaboration. It also provided an opportunity for some Winnipeg graduate students in business administration to learn about community economic development initiatives in Winnipeg and open new avenues for future research and internships.

It was made possible thanks to contributions from:

- The Government of Manitoba;
- The University of Manitoba, Faculty of Arts and Department of Economics
- The Asper Business School of the University of Manitoba
- The University of Winnipeg Research, Conference and Workshop Grant, Centre for Inner-City Research, Community Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and its Urban and Inner City Studies Programme
- The Canadian Community Economic Development Network
- The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba
- The Manitoba Research Alliance
- The Winnipeg Foundation
- Manitoba Hydro
- MaMawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
- The KIP International School, Universitas Programme

Background

Winnipeg has the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada, which is concentrated in the Inner City and is disproportionately poor with high rates of unemployment, street-gang and sex trade activity, violence and inadequate housing. Many people migrate back and forth between Winnipeg and Aboriginal communities throughout the Province. Winnipeg's inner city is also the destination of growing numbers of poor refugees and immigrants who face major economic, social and cultural challenges and whose presence increases the complexity of inner-city problems. In this context, Community Economic Development (CED) and social economy initiatives are increasingly used as a strategy to address urban poverty and there are several complementary initiatives in operation.

Most of these initiatives are grounded in a set of principles that were initially crafted by members of Neechi Foods grocery store, an inner city worker co-op. The Province of Manitoba has integrated these principles into a CED policy framework, which is used in government to guide policy and program development, and to determine support for community led initiatives. The "Neechi Principles" are built around a convergence approach to economic development but they also take a broader holistic approach to development. The principles include: local production of goods and services for local use; production of goods and services for local use; local re-investment of profits; long-term employment of local residents; local skills development; local decisions making; promotion of public health; improvement of the physical environment; promotion of neighbourhood stability; promotion of human dignity; and mutual aid support among organizations adhering to these principles. The Neechi principles have been adopted broadly by many social enterprises and community-based social service organizations that were visited during the week's events.

Activities

The **first day** began at the Circle of Life Thunderbird House, an important Aboriginal meeting place in the heart of Winnipeg's inner city. Participants were introduced to the indigenous experience that has shaped the holistic community development model that has evolved in Winnipeg.

The morning was hosted by the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre that was established by Aboriginal community leaders in the 1980s to provide prevention and support programs and services for children in care and the community at large.



The Circle of Life Thunderbird House

The afternoon featured a visit to the Social Enterprise Centre, which houses several social enterprises that focus on capacity development and employment insertion in Winnipeg's construction industry, particularly building and green retrofitting of low income housing.



The Social Enterprise Centre



Lucas Stewart, General Manager, Manitoba Green Retrofit

The Social Enterprise Centre is also home to organizations such as CCEDNet, whose advocacy and networking work provides a range of supporting services to social enterprise and community economic development organizations in Winnipeg and Manitoba.



Brendan Reimer, Director of CCEDNet Manitoba

Afternoon discussions centred on the role that the provincial government has played as a result of the Community Economic Development (CED) Policy Framework and Policy Lens, the various public and private funding mechanisms for community economic development and the challenges faced. Through the day's visits and discussions with practitioners, researchers and government officials, visitors were able to appreciate the positive efforts to build a network among CED organizations in Winnipeg and Manitoba, create local value chains and develop creative partnerships with Government, the research community and local public and private funders including, importantly the credit unions.



John Loxley, Professor of Economics, University of Manitoba



Jesse Haier, Senior Project Manager, Priorities and Planning Committee of Cabinet Secretariat, Government of Manitoba

On the **second day**, participants visited Winnipeg’s historic Selkirk Ave to learn about several community-based initiatives that illustrated the network of innovative ‘cradle to college’ education-focused programs



The Urban Circle Training Centre Teachers and students in class

working from an Aboriginal cultural framework. Sites visits included the Urban Circle Training Centre, the University of Winnipeg’s Urban and Inner City Studies programme and the University of Manitoba’s Social Work Programme. Visitors were enthusiastic about the holistic approach to education, which aimed at addressing the

multidimensional barriers to formal learning and professional insertion faced by many people in the inner city, in a wide variety of culturally sensitive settings for different age groups. The fact that each individual programme adopted a shared educational approach in a range of different but complementary services, and that these had emerged through an in-depth analysis of the needs and aspirations of local people, appeared to be an important contributor to the overall success and innovative quality of these programmes.



The Urban Circle Training Centre, Classroom, with Haven Stumpf and Eleanor Thompson



The University of Winnipeg, Urban and Inner City Studies Program, Jim Silver’s Classroom

The day also included dialogue with researchers and activists about issues related to urban planning and to low income housing which continue to be challenges for the local community.



Josh Brandon, CCPA Manitoba, Clarke Brownlee, Right to Housing, Molly Johnson, Institute of Urban Studies, UW



George Crate, Director of OSEDC, Fisher River Cree Nation

A visit to Fisher River Cree Nation took place on the **third day**, where visitors learned about the local economic development initiatives that are taking place on this First Nations Reserve and contributing to positive educational outcomes and encouraging employment opportunities. Band councillors and the local economic development officer presented the twenty-year strategic development plan, that included plans for developing the tourism and fishing sector as well as the development of geothermal power

through a creative partnership with Manitoba Hydro (public corporation) and AKI Energy, an Aboriginal social enterprise that works with First Nations to help train local people to install geo thermal heating for homes in their community and, eventually, in other communities.

The **fourth day** of the study tour focused on the role of partnership research in taking forward and scaling up community economic development in Manitoba and in Winnipeg's inner city with international visitors participation in the annual meeting of the Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA). The MRA is an alliance of the governments of Manitoba and Winnipeg, the province's four universities, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and a number of community



Lynne Fernandez, Coordinator, MRA - CCPA Manitoba

organizations that are engaged in identifying community-based solutions to aboriginal and inner city poverty in Winnipeg. Visitors were particularly keen to hear about this approach to partnership research and the important results that have been generated so far both in terms of policy innovation and building research capacity within the inner city community.

On the **last day**, international guests joined 500 community economic development practitioners in Manitoba during their annual gathering. Three workshops were dedicated to the presentation of international experiences and generated very lively discussion with Manitoba CED practitioners. Visitors from Italy shared their experiences of fighting social exclusion, starting with the movement in Italy to go beyond segregating institutions such as psychiatric hospitals and special schools for children with handicaps and the influence of these experiences in the world of international cooperation. Visitors from



Luciano Carrino and Sandra Rogialli on fighting social exclusion

El Salvador and Albania described the work of local economic development agencies (LEDA) in their countries and the role that these agencies play in the strategic planning of local economic development by bringing together local public and private actors, identifying local value chains, facilitating producer associations and providing support to the development of local businesses including social economy enterprises. In the El Salvador experience, the work of women's entrepreneurship centres as part of the LEDA, to assist small women-headed businesses, was also presented. Finally, the Mexican Government-European Union programme to create a Laboratory of Social Cohesion in Mexico and the role that can be played by innovation processes was the subject of the third international workshop.



Mirela Koci on Local Economic Development Agencies in Albania

The week's activities, two evening events and the many informal occasions for questions, dialogue and debate not only were a learning experience for the international guests, but were an occasion for practitioners from Winnipeg and abroad to compare their different realities and understandings of poverty as well as the different solutions being experimented in a variety of contexts. Visitors noted the supportive role played by the Provincial Government that is often absent in their own realities. For the MBA students, it was an opportunity to learn first hand about the social



Mario Claros and Giulia Rucireta on Local Economic Development Agencies in El Salvador

enterprise model and CED, and more generally, about sustainable approaches taking place in Winnipeg, to address poverty.

Future Prospects

In a meeting of the study tour participants and the Winnipeg organizers, several proposals were put forward for continuing the exchange in a variety of contexts. One such context is the World Urban Forum (WUF7) that will take place in April 2014 in the City of Medellin, Colombia. The KIP International School and the Winnipeg laboratory, together with the City of Medellin, the Huairou Commission, UN Habitat and other international networks associated with KIP, will host a networking event during the Forum, whose central theme is "equity in urban development". This event will be an occasion to highlight innovative practices from around the world that foster inclusive urban development and that could lead to policy recommendations for mayors and local government leaders. The visitors encouraged the Winnipeg organizers to support documentation of the innovative experiences they had visited, especially related to education and capacity development so that they could be presented during the WUF7 event. During a skype conference, colleagues from the City of Medellin reiterated this invitation.

As part of the process leading up to the WUF7 and following from it, the Winnipeg laboratory partners and the KIP Universitas Programme will produce a special issue of the electronic journal Universitas Forum to disseminate these innovative practices to a wider international audience, with funding from the Canadian International Development Research Centre and other international organizations that collaborate with KIP.

Other proposals were put forward by the visitors from El Salvador and Albania who extended invitations to Manitoba and Winnipeg CED practitioners to their countries to explore the work of their agencies in Vlora (Albania) and Morazán (El Salvador). They saw great potential in their communities for developing research partnerships along the lines of the MRA and invited the Winnipeg laboratory to explore ways of taking forward this idea around issues of common interest such as safety, education and capacity development.

The representative of the Mexican initiative on social cohesion also invited representatives of Winnipeg's aboriginal community to participate in the activities and policy dialogues that are being launched as part of the Mexican Government-European Union initiative "Laboratory of Social Cohesion".

Finally, a recommendation was made to the Winnipeg organizers to continue and to strengthen collaboration with students and faculty from interested university programmes. The students who participated in the study tour throughout the entire week felt that they had learned about initiatives of which they were not aware previously and considered that it was not only an opportunity to increase their awareness of successful social and economic initiatives in their own city, but that these initiatives represent significant opportunities for student research and practical internships in the future.