

Envisioning a school for civil society

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Summary notes

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INTRODUCTION (KERRY DALY)

Visioning

- Early stage of planning. Conversations will continue with staff, faculty and students
- Considering new ways of engaging. Focusing on opportunities. Being bold

DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALIZING 'CIVIL SOCIETY'

OVERVIEW OF CIVIL SOCIETY (ADAM SNEYD)

Overview: Meanings of Civil Society (CS) have varied over time, place, theoretical perspectives, and political persuasions. This discussion draws on the work of Jan Aart Scholte.

Definition of CS: *Political space where voluntary associations deliberately seek to shape the norms, principles, rules, and other decision-making procedures governing one or another aspect of social life.*

- Actors include those who **consciously and actively seek to shape** legislation, policy priorities, social constructs, or the social order, as a whole. *For example:* Academic associations, business organizations, consumer advocate groups, development advocates, environmental movements, ethnic lobbies, labour unions, neo-fascist groups, philanthropic organizations, think tanks, youth associations and more. Much broader than NGOs.
- **Note:** Definition contrasts with those who define CS as any social activity that occurs outside of official bodies, political parties, firms and households.

Diversity of CS: Great diversity among groups seeking to shape social life, including a range of: organizational structures, capacities, geographic scopes, resources, tactics, decision making procedures, objectives (reform, conform, transform), doctrines, etc.

Rise of CS: Six reasons why CS is becoming a focus around the world:

1. **Response to globalization:** Traditional state-based regulations have proven inadequate to govern transworld phenomena
2. **Globalization has promoted expansion of CS:** Spread of transworld relations has encouraged a diversification of collective bonds beyond nation-states (Individuals are part of broad communities).
3. **Dissatisfaction with party politics**
4. **Sympathetic dispositions of official agencies**
5. **New communications technologies**
6. **Heightened awareness around limitations of institutions in modern society**

Impacts of CS: Difficult to chart, but massive. Evidence suggests that CS actors have impacted:

1. **Language of governance** (human rights, corporate citizenship, etc.)
2. **Governance processes** (networks, procedures, and process)
3. **Policy content** (e.g. international crime)
4. **Deeper social structures** (reconfiguration of community)

Legitimacy of CS: There is no inherent legitimacy or illegitimacy of CS engagements. However, it is important to consider questions of morality, efficacy, democracy, and social cohesion.

PLENARY DISCUSSION

What would you emphasize/ change regarding the definition or concepts of CS?

Emphasizing core aspects of definition:

- **Actors:** Multiple levels (micro to macro), Fluid membership (depending on intent)
- **Intentions:** Deliberate efforts to create a change within the existing social structure (range of scales of impact, 'political space' defined in context, recognizing 'moral' considerations)
- **Activities:** Efforts resulting in direct action or influence on local, national, or global structures

Reflections on language/ defining CS (from across the day):

- **Is Civil Society the right term?** What about Community engagement, Social engagement, Citizenship, Liberal education, civil engagement, etc.?
- **How broad/ specific should it be?** Is a firm, specific definition possible, desirable? Do we need different levels of specificity depending on the audience (i.e. funders, on-campus and off-campus partners, etc.) or in regard to intent (i.e. organizing work, getting money, marketing)

Critical questions:

Understanding the actors in CS

- What about: Third sector, Individuals, Market, Groups we don't 'like'?
- Can organizations move in and out of CS?
- How do you draw boundaries between who is in and who is out?
- Is this a position dependent on privilege?
- Is this always voluntary (might perceive no other choice)? Can this be selfish?

Understanding the focus of CS

- Intention, rather than actors? Question of agency/ structure?
- What is being changed (tacit or formal structures/ rules)?
- Does our Western lens limit us? Are other ways of knowing reflected?
- What is 'political space'? A continuum?
- What is being done, in whose name? Whose morals matter?
- How does social capital fit into this?
- How is CS distinct from Community Engagement? Is CE a piece of CS, the greater whole?
- What 'isn't' CS?

Institutionalizing CS

- How do we institutionalize something voluntary? Is something voluntary if there are course credits attached? Is it a matter of incentivizing?
- How do you handle the moral questions as an institution?
- Can you separate research vs. pedagogy? Should you?
- How do we bridge knowledge systems? Models from ICES? Teaching 'intercultural' and other skills allowing individuals to hear and be heard, to cooperate?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR 'CIVIL SOCIETY' AT U OF G

OVERVIEW (KERRY DALY)

Aligning discussion with the U of Guelph context: Why this is the right moment

- **Internationalism at Guelph:** Intention to rejuvenate discussions and consider how we can move more assertively into this territory, building on strengths of international development program and considering how our program offers differentiated value in Canada, resource allocated.
- **Growing momentum of CE on campus:** Guelph is distinctive in its commitment to CE. We have tremendous capacity across colleges. Much of current reach is local, but there is opportunity to broaden focus and look at common dimensions in working locally and globally.
- **Better planet project:** About social impact, making a difference at a global scale. Entrenched in how we talk about the University, and CS is a part of this conversation.

- **Global engagement strategy in CSAHS:** Building research capacity, structures (Research Shop, local focus). Looking into a Convener Chair (ambassador to networks)

Envisioning possibilities

- **Key qualities:** Campus-wide, Interdisciplinary, Building on existing strengths (international development program, Community Engagement efforts), Local to Global focus
- **Opportunities:** Attracting international students, Offering something distinctly valuable in Canada, Strengthening and expanding current efforts in International Development

SMALL GROUP BRAINSTORMING (IMAGINING)

Considering where to focus this work at U of G:

- Emphasize what is shared across campus (e.g. Food)
- Build on the work already being done at U of G
- Align with Better Planet's themes (Food, Environment, Community, Health) while expanding.
- Integrate an understanding of what is happening in broader society

Considering CS involvement as related to University Strategy

Branding

- Reinforce, enrich, and demonstrate U of G's commitment to local and global communities and willingness to function as participants within a broader moral dialogue

Accessing resources

- Attract funders interested in supporting this work
- Align with funder's requirements for engagement

Building the University Community

- Attract students, faculty
- Create longer-term opportunities for Civil Society organization (beyond University) leaders to participate in teaching, mentoring, etc. (beyond conferences, lectures)

Enhancing the University and broader Community

- Enhance the curriculum offered at Guelph
- Develop the skills and capacities of students, faculty, and others
- Produce interdisciplinary, reflexive, critical, scholarly researchers and practitioners
- Break down boundaries between local and global, institutional and academic
- Support a "science of engagement" or scholarly discussion of engagement

Considering CS Involvement as related to University Structures

Note: Structures refers to how things work at University: programs, networks, centres, curriculum, etc.

Space

- Establish a collaborative space (virtual or physical) to foster engagement, ideas

Funding

- Enable revenue sharing
- Ensure targeted research funding

Leadership, Champions

- Establish an Ombudsperson
- Create a governing board, including representatives from CS organizations
- Ensure that core faculty support initiative

Networks/ Alliances

- Integrate expertise from outside of campus
- Build on existing structures/ programs/ resources on campus: e.g. Better Planet Project, ICES, Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, International Dev., CFWW, Library, etc.
- Connect research, teaching, and administrative bodies considering these matters
- Move beyond the 'silos' – develop structures that are interdisciplinary

Training/ Development/ Opportunities

- **Courses:** Expand or scale up existing courses, add new ones (including virtual and ‘field’ courses, undergraduate and graduate, short-term intensive and 1.0). Include attention to interdisciplinary opportunities, reflexive aspects explicitly attentive to impacts on CS.
- **Experience-based learning:** Co-op programs, placements, and internships for students. Placements for Postdocs, researchers, practitioners, non-resident fellows, partners.
- **Degrees/ diploma programs:** Cotuelles and dual degrees, diplomas, certificates
- **Professional development:** On-going opportunities for faculty, chairs, directors, etc.
- **New collaborations:** New research partnerships and support for efforts that integrate teaching, research, and engagement

Communication

- Share knowledge resources (resource dissemination, open access research)
- Enable on-going conversations around engagement, advocacy, volunteerism, development

Reward structures

- Ensure faculty are supported and rewarded for engagement in this work in T and P process.

PLENARY DISCUSSION

Exploring challenges, considerations in moving forward

Constraints within our current University system

- **Resource distribution:** Money flows through colleges/ dept - prohibits interdisciplinary efforts
- **Curriculum development process:** Has to go through program committee/ dean
- **Course structure:** the 12 week semester is restrictive (0.5/ 1.0 credit structure)
- **Perceptions of ownership:** Locating this effort within a single college will create silos
- **Teaching resources:** Faculty need a ‘teaching release’ to teach courses outside dept.
- **Reward structures:** Will involvement with be recognized in T and P decisions?
- **Time and opportunity costs:** Will it be worth the investment?

Challenges in pursuing this new (and different) path

- **Uncertain outcomes:** What if this fails? What if it succeeds and there is too much demand? Risks for participants who are on-campus and off.
- **Sustainability:** Will institute be sufficiently funded, resourced, etc?
- **Need for flexibility:** Are we able to be flexible enough to deal with non-traditional paths? Students outside the undergrad/ grad framework?
- **Potential for criticism:** Are we opening ourselves up to critique (opening Pandora’s box). This could challenge how the U of G views itself.
- **Prioritizing:** Wide range of possibilities. Where do we start? Where do we focus? How do we know where to focus?
- **Managing engagement:** Will be a luxury if many are interested, but need to manage this.

Considerations for engaging others (university and beyond)

- **Definitions/ Language:** Will the language of Civil Society resonate? If we go too broad, it will be unclear, but if too specific, few will feel connected to it.
- **Marketing:** How will we attract non-traditional students? Others?
- **Getting Buy-in:** How do you get buy-in from the community, faculty, etc.?
- **Champions:** Can’t rely on one or a few people – need champions from across campus
- **Demonstrating authenticity:** Need to act the part – U of G as a role model (reflexive)
- **Locating work:** Will this be a presence on campus or off?

Ensuring accountability

- **Evaluation:** Ensuring that we research/ evaluate this process (Scholarship of the process)

Given the discussion today, what would you suggest as priority considerations

Next steps

- **Establish a working group:** Initiate a working group responsible for synthesizing learning from this session and organizing efforts moving forward, including much of the following.
- **Understand the 'lay of the land':** Engage a systematic process for highlighting: (a) what is happening on campus related to this work, and (b) what is happening off campus, including a consideration of other structures and systems for doing this. This effort should pursue and understanding (i.e. not just an inventory), and recognize a diversity of language for this work.
- **Work toward conceptual clarity:** Develop clarity around what it is we are doing: core values, attitudes, and principles important in the process and as a product of the process. Be able to describe this initiative in a few sentences.
- **Spread the word:** Participants at this meeting can discuss with colleagues in home depts.
- **Hear more voices:** January session will be a more a public conversation around this topic. Website with details: www.civilsocietyquelpheventbrite.com
- **Develop a plan of action:** Establish a process to identify key areas of resource allocation (start small). Integrate a 'phased approach' detailing short and long-term efforts.
- **Explore potential funding sources:** SSHRC Partnership development grant, IDRC, etc.

Objectives/ Goals related to this Initiative (Summarized from submissions)

Activities engaged

- **Build reciprocal relationships with** (a) colleagues in other disciplines, (b) national & international policy actors working on issues re: CS and international engagement, (c) funding orgs and others in efforts to advance research, develop curricula, and enhance resources
- **Obtain funding:** Apply for a partnership grant (within next year) and secure at least one partnership grant within the next 3 years.
- **Develop an understanding of current efforts on campus and off:** Inventory
- **Clarify institutional focus:** Identify core themes that the initiative will address within its first 5 years (e.g. Youth unemployment, climate change, emerging powers, etc.)
- **Provide opportunities:** Initiate new initiatives focused on CS (course units, research projects, relationships, other experiences) at local & global scale. Go beyond service learning.

Support structures/ systems in place

- **Structure:** Establish an inclusive unit distinct from College system with a designated resource base (e.g. student enrollment, foundation funds, democratically resourced etc.), and serves as:
 - A scholarly home for local and global engagement studies, interdisciplinary efforts
 - Supports teaching, research, and service efforts
 - Enables interdisciplinary connections
 - Builds on and reinforces current work, while also focusing efforts
 - Moves into new territory and fosters new platforms for learning, research, engagement
 - Encourages a scholarly approach to civic engagement (including reflexivity)
- **Systems:** Establish policies that ensure recognition of this work in T and P reviews

Impacts achieved

- **Enhanced University profile:** Enhanced national and international reputation of the university. Students, faculty, and funders attracted through strong programs & clear branding
- **Different ways of thinking:** Students and faculty attuned to systems thinking and social impacts. Enhanced understanding of how civil society can be created/ supported and the role of engagement and relationships in this process. Students instilled with sense of self as citizen
- **Increased knowledge and skills:** A stronger body of knowledge around CS & CE. Enhanced capacity of CS actors (through lens of CES), including students trained to be resilient and ready to build on knowledge and experience to replicate models in other communities
- **Changed structures:** Make a difference in local and global community. Improved society.