

IMPLEMENTING REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES

The Fifth Annual Conference of The Technopolicy Network

A Summary Report for the Canadian High Commission – London and all interested parties

**Professor Alan Barrell – Cambridge University Centre for Entrepreneurial
Learning**

Introduction

I have been associated with the work of Technopolicy Network for some years – having been a speaker, moderator and delegate at previous events. I will not take time here to describe the Technopolicy Network here. The attachment gives details as does the website at www.technopolicy.net

I write this short report because over the years, I and my colleagues in Cambridge UK have come to know the work of the Canadian High Commission in London and have received a lot of support for The Cambridge Enterprise Conference over a period of years. This led me to meet the Canadian Minister for Science in London last year and I am interested generally in Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Regional Economic Development generally, and found the event in September 2008, held in Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada one of the most stimulating and inspiring I have attended in many years going to such events. I wanted to express some of my thoughts on WHY I felt this – and to encourage Canada and the powers that govern it, to take note and take heart from the Halifax meeting.

The Programme

Is fully described in the attachment. It was especially well balanced, and the speakers addressed the theme and subjects. An excellent balance of plenary sessions and break outs – and speakers from around the world – of very high quality. I learned a great deal.

From my knowledge of Canada and my meetings with the Minister last year, it had become clear to me that in Canada there is a great deal of creativity but that innovation per se – turning great ideas and technology into great companies – had been historically disappointing (not my assessment – it was conveyed to me by Canadians) Therefore, the specificity of the topics dealt with in this programme, and their relevance to this point were especially telling.

Further to this it was most encouraging, and I am sure had a lot to do with the efforts of Douglas Robertson of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and his colleagues there, to see every Canadian Region represented at this event – except one – Manitoba. I have never attended an international conference in a country said to be

interested in Regional Economic Development, where such attendance, support and enthusiasm were demonstrated.

I invite the reader to scan the programme and note how the subjects were planned and connected to make this an international event – with great interest for people like me – but in way, also a Canadian event – showcasing some exemplar companies and activities, and relating these to Canadian regional situations – which came out strongly in the breakouts.

Some Highlights

The “highlights” I am going to mention here will not include the excellent international contributors. I am at pains to point out the outstanding nature of just a few companies ,organisations and people I saw and heard – who were from Canada.

- **Innovacorp**

Before the conference began we visited this excellent company. The attached presentation indicates the extent of the work they do. I found this organisation and its CEO – Dan McDonald an inspiration – as did others, notably Dr. Mike Grandinetti from Entrepreneurship Centre MIT – with whom I am now working on a project (started at the Halifax meeting)

I visit and work with many Business Incubation Centres. My assessment of Innovacorp is that it is an *exemplar* of its type. The model and the practice are amongst the most successful I have seen. The provision of its own Venture / Seed Capital Fund is a justification for making public money available to highly commercial people to invest in innovation , growth and companies with global potential. I rate the management of Innovacorp very highly. This model, if replicated could benefit other regions – in Canada specifically. Very impressive. I am following up with Dan McDonald on European activities of some of the Innovacorp portfolio companies seeking European help and connections. Some are penetrating European markets effectively.

- **MaRS Discovery District – Toronto**

A model different from Innovacorp, presented by CEO Ilse Treurnicht seemed to me to have significant potential in taking innovative initiatives in building an entrepreneurial culture and community and giving space and human resource support to innovators. I’d like to spend time visiting this operation.

- **National Research Council of Canada**

Very positive presentation and outlook – record of activity from Ron James , indicating energy and focus on Cluster development. I was asked by Rob to participate in a future event in Canada in 2009, and will be pleased to do so.

- **Communitech Technology Association – Waterloo ON**

Iain Klugman, the CEO was inspired in his presentation of this community activity. Myself and my colleagues in Cambridge, at Judge Business School are convinced of the value of the Entrepreneurial Mindset as a key driver of Social Change – not just Economic Performance. The work presented by Iain Klugman indicated to me an advanced programme in place here, and extremely people focused.

- **Visit to Dalhousie University and the Conference Speech of Tom Traves, Dalhousie President**

Excellent insights in these encounters which caused me to plan a proper visit to Dalhousie next year. The science and technology base is clearly very strong. Coming from the European Centre with the most advanced Brain Repair Centre in our continent – at Addenbrooke's Hospital Cambridge – which I know well I was stimulated to see what might be done to ensure the Dalhousie Brain repair Centre is connected for collaboration with our Cambridge Unit. This is a follow up item

- **First Angels of Canada**

Being an active member of Cambridge Angels, Cambridge Capital Group and Sophia Antipolis Business Angels in France, and working with the European Business Angels Network, I was especially pleased to attend the workshop run by Ross Finlay of First Angels of Canada. Ross and I are now working closely on connecting some of the First Angels portfolio companies to sources of venture capital in Europe and we now correspond on a regular basis. I was impressed with the organisation of First Angels of Canada, and Ross is now connecting some Canadian companies we work with in France to Angel Groups in other parts of Canada. I spent time in London last week with a First Angels portfolio company in the medical products / vaccine business, making introductions to VCs during a fund raising round. This company – Halifax based ITV – is creating interest amongst investors here in Europe. WE have been circulating the Business Plan and advising.

I could go on – there were many people I met working in Canada who impressed me at the conference. I have not made reference to the excellent international contingent – from Helsinki, New York, Washington, Ireland, Oxford UK, Boston, Leuven in Belgium and Eindhoven in Holland and Durban in South Africa. It was wonderful to see these entrepreneurs, development agency people and academics networking with so many Canadians. I felt the interchanges were outstanding. I make special mention of **Jeffrey Crelinsten** , a researcher, writer and journalist of The Impact Group, Toronto. He and I are now corresponding and planning collaboration. Also, **David Healey**, Director of Research and Assistance – Atlantic and Nunavut – who gave me important insights and perspectives on innovative research in Atlantic Canada and opened doors for future connections.

Others I found very useful in improving my knowledge and understanding of Atlantic Canada and indeed, innovation and the potential for entrepreneurial development in Canada as a whole, included the following:-

Johannes S. Larsen, Raymond Roberts, Lucien Godbout, Jean-Claude Gavrel, all in some way engaged with various aspects of enterprise and development in Atlantic Canada. Then Dr. Martha Crago and Gillian Wood, of Dalhousie University, Jean Belzile, University of Quebec, Andy Cutten of Halifax Global Partners and Daniel Rocheleau of the Greater Peterborough Innovation Cluster.

In Conclusion

It was a great privilege and a learning experience to be a participant at this event. It endorsed the excellence of the visionary work of Frank Zwetsloot and the Technopolicy - Science Alliance - company and advisors. This was very much a focused conference on Regional Economic Development, and the Impact of Innovation and Entrepreneurship on such developments, played out in the real world, and in real time. Having such numerous and enthusiastic participants from the Canadian Regions, and the organising drive of Douglas Robertson and all the Atlantic Canada Executives, mixed and mingling with a truly cosmopolitan and international group – all with a common purpose – made it a most unusual, in some ways, unique event. The networking is now ongoing for some of us who were there – and exemplar organisations such as Innovacorp are being promoted widely by us international guest – who, incidentally, also enjoyed Halifax and Canadian hospitality very much indeed.

I would be pleased to visit my friends at the Canadian High Commission in London and tell more of this experience. I certainly encourage them to feed back all incoming positive reports to “the powers that be” in the Canadian Government. The over – riding feeling, coming away from the event was of enormous potential for economic growth and development – and of an atmosphere of creativity and optimism.

I also sincerely hope there will be more events of this type and calibre in Canada – I feel sure this would enhance the potential for innovative development.

Professor Alan Barrell, DBA., FRSA., – Cambridge England – October 2008

00 44 (0) 1223 416466 and 00 44 (0) 788 764 4597

www.alanbarrell.com