York Region Infrastructure project Workshop

A workshop on the *York Region: A GIS Analysis of Human Services project* took place at the at York University's Schulich School of Business on Friday, June 16th from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm.

Participants

A total of 33 participants attended the workshop. The participants included: members of the York Region's Human Services Planning Coalition; York region community partners in education (e.g. YRDSB YRCSB, Seneca College); employment (e.g. Markham Board of Trade); housing (e.g. Housing Help Centre); transportation (e.g. VIVA); seniors' services (e.g. CHATS); community services (CCSYR, Care First Seniors); immigration and settlement services (COSTI , JIAS,); members of the research team and research assistants; as well as representatives from the federal and provincial governments.

Purpose of Workshop

The workshop was organized for the purpose of 'knowledge mobilization', bringing together researchers and practitioners to share their knowledge, experience and insights about the delivery of human services (education, housing, employment and business development, and settlement services) in York Region. An important aspect of the workshop related to the development of the survey to assess immigrants', seniors', and low-income groups' awareness, use and satisfaction with services in York Region. In order to effectively build the survey, participants who are knowledgeable with regard to education, employment, housing, and immigrant/settlement services were invited to attend the workshop to identify human service issues facing the poor, seniors and recent immigrants and subsequently assist in the formulation of appropriate questions for the survey.

Structure of Workshop (see Agenda)

The workshop began with a general plenary session in the morning. The lead researchers introduced the project, the objectives of the study, methodological approaches to be used, and data that is required. A description of the GIS Analysis was presented by the principal investigator. This was followed by a discussion of the survey questionnaire and an introduction to the breakout sessions which were going to be held shortly after lunch.

Four separate breakout session were held in the areas of Immigrant/ Settlement services, Housing, Education and Employment services. Participants selected which breakout session they preferred to attend and an academic researcher was assigned to act as a facilitator. A research assistant was assigned to each of the breakout sessions to take notes and complete summaries of the breakout sessions. Within each of these sessions, seniors, the poor and immigrants were discussed in relation to the above-mentioned services.

Participants reconvened after the breakout sessions to listen to presentations of the results of the breakout sessions which were presented by representatives from each of the four groups. A general discussion and questions of the issues followed.

Results of Workshop

An identification of the vulnerable groups and human services needed occurred in each of the breakout sessions. Participants noted that there are a growing number of immigrants and low-income populations as well as an increasing aging population. For low income, the struggle to find affordable housing with access to public transportation; for seniors, income and mobility constraints were mentioned as the most critical; while for many immigrants, barriers in the labour and housing market compounded by racialization, language and social capital were noted. The groups (low-income, immigrants, and seniors) are not mutually exclusive. Each group came up with a conceptualization of one of the four services categorized. In addition to discussing each of the services, a discussion of overlapping services also took place. Participants also made comments and suggestions with respect to the survey design and types of questions that should be asked in the survey.

To build a geo-referenced database of human services, participants recommended that location, and contact information for each agency be looked at. They felt that reliance on YorkLink (online) for information on human services and agencies that provide services is not comprehensive enough. They suggested that other data bases be examined including (1) use of CIVC and 211 for information pertaining to service organizations, (2) YRM regional database of all agencies and businesses, (3) GENIS, and (4) Inclusivity Action Plan which intends on developing a database for the services.

The four research assistants took notes during the plenary sessions and each of the breakout sessions and completed detailed summaries of the sessions. A final summary of the workshop sessions was completed and sent to the workshop participants, advisory group members and other interested individuals for feedback and additional suggestions.