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Introduction to Creating Opportunities: A Vision for the Future

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Special Issue Article



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Introduction to Creating Opportunities: A Vision for the Future

Abstract

We are pleased to present the Creating Opportunities: A Vision for the Future Special Issue of the Osgoode Hall Law Journal. The topics that make up this Special Issue were originally presented at the Creating Opportunities Summit held at Osgoode Hall Law School on 26-27 January 2017. The Summit explored challenges and opportunities regarding local, regional, and national economic development in Canada. Participants learned about strategies, initiatives, and policies that create the conditions for economic success as well as the indirect effects on a range of communities, with a particular focus on those that are disadvantaged and underserved.

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Special Issue

Introduction to Creating Opportunities: A Vision for the Future

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MICHAEL THORBURN[‡]

WE ARE PLEASED TO PRESENT the *Creating Opportunities: A Vision for the Future* Special Issue of the Osgoode Hall Law Journal. The topics that make up this Special Issue were originally presented at the Creating Opportunities Summit held at Osgoode Hall Law School on 26-27 January 2017.¹ The Summit explored challenges and opportunities regarding local, regional, and national economic development in Canada. Participants learned about strategies, initiatives, and policies that create the conditions for economic success as well as the indirect effects on a range of communities, with a particular focus on those that are disadvantaged and underserved.

Along with a focus on underserved communities, the Summit also sought to empower youth. To do so, topics ranged from education, employment, and civic

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1. Osgoode Hall Law School, "Creating Opportunities Summit," online: <<http://cos2017.osgoode.yorku.ca/>>.

engagement, with a specific focus on the Jane-Finch locale. We firmly believe that the success of Osgoode Hall Law School is directly connected to the economic, social, and political health of its surrounding neighbourhoods. In the same vein, we believe that Osgoode has a distinct role in contributing to leadership capacity building among youth in the surrounding neighbourhood. This Special Issue is meant not only to celebrate Osgoode's recent successes in the Jane and Finch corridor, but to lay the groundwork necessary to move the relationship forward.²

The idea for the Summit started with Lorne Sossin, Dean of Osgoode Hall Law School. What began as a proposal to invite a political leader to deliver a speech at Osgoode snowballed into a greater goal of hosting a symposium. Once we realized that there was demand among community groups, students, and the private sector for an event of this nature, we turned a one day symposium into a two day summit with presenters from across Canada and the United States.³ The Office of the Dean, the York University Canada @ 150 Fund, the Citizen Empowerment Project, and Stefania Piacente-Battisti from the Osgoode Hall Law Journal were instrumental in providing the funding necessary to make the Summit a success.

This Special Issue, which presents a sampling of ideas from business leaders and entrepreneurs, social change-makers and community activists, and academics and students is in the legal theory tradition of promoting dialogue in the public sphere in order to cultivate a culture of meaningful participation.⁴ While some of the pieces are academic in nature, and others are conversational, what binds each contribution together is the unified aspiration to put forth a better way of approaching economic challenges that face Canadian society. While the language of creating opportunity may not be universal among each author, the sentiment

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2. As a part of Professor Jamil Jivani's course at Osgoode Hall Law School, Community Organizing & the Law, Jivani and Thorburn participated in a number of community organizing opportunities throughout Toronto, with specific emphasis on the Jane and Finch community. To learn more about some of the projects, visit Citizen Empowerment Project, online: <http://www.citizenempowerment.ca/our_initiatives>. To read about one project in particular, #JaneandFinchVotes, see Neil Price, "Jane-Finch's 1 per cent solution" (14 October 2015), online: NOW Magazine <<https://nowtoronto.com/news/jane-finch%E2%80%99s-1-per-cent-solution/>>; see also, Tara Deschamps, "Osgoode Law School targets low voter turnout in Jane and Finch" (24 September 2015), online: Toronto Star <<https://www.thestar.com/news/federal-election/2015/09/24/osgoode-law-school-class-targets-low-voter-turnout-in-jane-and-finch.html>>.
 3. For a program from the Creating Opportunities Summit, see online: <<http://cos2017.osgoode.yorku.ca/files/2016/11/COS-Program-Jan-20.pdf>>.
 4. Thomas B Stoddard, "Bleeding Heart: Reflections on Using the Law To Make Social Change" (1997) 72:5 NYU L Rev 967.

of seeking to impact positive change surely is. Our hope is that by providing an eclectic cross-section of contributors, we can ultimately empower our readership to participate in some of the solutions that are mentioned in the pages that follow.

Creating Opportunities begins with a keynote address delivered by Gillian Smith.⁵ Smith's remarks focus on the growth in economic prosperity that Toronto is experiencing, and how the private sector, government, academia, and community groups can work together to maximize the benefits from said growth. The Special Issue then moves onto the topic of sustainable development, with articles written by Lorne Sossin & Devon Kapoor, and Matias de Dovitiis, Juan Gomez & Raphael Gomez.⁶ Sossin & Kapoor's contribution examines the relationship between law and social enterprise, with a focus on how the law school can serve to refine and promote the development of the area. De Dovitiis, Gomez & Gomez's article investigates sustainable place-based economic development and industrial growth through the business improvement area model.

Osgoode Hall Law School and DUKE Heights, which de Dovitiis is Executive Director of, recently partnered to create a full-time position: The Community Impact Coordinator. The Coordinator works between Osgoode and DUKE Heights to facilitate projects that link the two institutions and surrounding community. This relationship was forged at this Summit, and is a clear indicator of Osgoode and DUKE Height's commitment to the ideas mentioned in both the Sossin & Kapoor and de Dovitiis, Gomez & Gomez articles.

The fourth piece from this Issue was originally delivered as a part of a Financial Literacy panel during the Summit. In their article, Stephanie Ben-Ishai and Tanner Stanley challenge the veracity of media narratives about debt held by millennials.⁷ The fifth, and final article from *Creating Opportunities*, is written by Nandini Ramanujam and Alexander Agnello.⁸ Their contribution focuses on the solutions that emerging technologies can bring to the legal profession, specifically the role that technology can play in facilitating access to justice. The issue concludes with two commentaries: one by Harpreet Gill and the other by

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5. Gillian Smith, "Meaningful Inclusion Creates Opportunity" (2017) 54:4 Osgoode Hall LJ 991.
 6. Lorne Sossin & Devon Kapoor, "Social Enterprise, Law & Legal Education" (2017) 54:4 Osgoode Hall LJ 997; Matias de Dovitiis, Juan Gomez & Raphael Gomez, "Fostering a More Inclusive Model of Local Development" (2017) 54:4 Osgoode Hall LJ 1019.
 7. Stephanie Ben-Ishai & Tanner Stanley, "Millennials in Crisis: Myth-Busting Millennial Debt Narratives" (2017) 54:4 Osgoode Hall LJ 1051.
 8. Nandini Ramanujam and Alexander Agnello, "The Shifting Frontiers of Law: Access to Justice and Underemployment in the Legal Profession" (2017) 54:4 Osgoode Hall LJ 1091.

Timothy Lang.⁹ Gill begins by exploring issues around youth employment in Toronto from the point of view of a social worker—she highlights problems within the Youth Job Connection program and areas where communities and the government can improve. Lang, then, concludes the Special Issue with an ambitious commentary on increasing youth employment throughout Canada.

Ultimately, *Creating Opportunities* is about bringing people together from different subsets of life in order to build collaborative solutions to problems. *Creating Opportunities* is about citizenship; indeed, it is about service. The essence of this Special Issue is to inspire individuals from all walks of life—from university students, to political leaders, to community workers, to entrepreneurs, to small business owners (and beyond)—to provide ideas and engage in debate in order to make people's lives, in an ever-changing world, better. *Creating Opportunities* is meant to provide a vision for the future: one that is big-hearted and inclusive, and yet celebrates the power of ideas and rigorous intellectual debate in spurring the development of a prosperous society.

9. Harpreet Gill, "The Conundrum of Youth Unemployment" (2017) 54:4 Osgoode Hall LJ 1117; Timothy Lang, "The Youth Employment Solution: From Universal Healthcare to Universal Employment" (2017) 54:4 Osgoode Hall LJ 1123.