Buffalo, NY Since the Great Recession
A Workshop on Economic Restructuring in the Rust Belt
August 14-15 2017, Cornell in Buffalo and UAW Local 774

Buffalo, New York State’s second largest metropolitan area, occupies a unique place in the region’s economy. Although its finance, service, and housing market sectors lack the spectacular size and depth of those in New York City, its manufacturing sector still occupies a central role in the regional economy. Economic development in Buffalo’s manufacturing sector, however, is highly dependent on public resources, particularly those from Albany. This dependency, in the context of major transformations in the manufacturing sector since the Great Recession and decades of deindustrialization, is part and parcel of economic restructuring in the American Rust Belt broadly. Even though Buffalo metropolitan area was not affected by the Great Recession as much as other metropolitan areas in the country primarily due to the preceding deindustrialization, it experienced a similar process of economic restructuring following it. In this workshop, we will identify this unique position of Buffalo as part of both the Rust Belt region and New York State, and scrutinize its main economic troubles and trajectory since the Great Recession.

Sluggish national growth, the unequal distribution of the wealth generated by that growth among social classes, and the inability to create the long-desired dynamism in the economy since the recession have manifested in particularly interesting ways in the Rust Belt. Understanding the characteristics of Buffalo’s economic development, one of the key areas within the Rust Belt, will help us contextualize the Great Recession and its effects on the ground. Such academic interrogation is important not only for identifying the changing economic dynamics in the still highly populated and formerly deindustrialized parts of the U.S., but also for interpreting political leanings of working classes in these communities which have played a key role in general elections since the Great Recession and particularly in the recent election of Donald Trump. The workshop will bring together experts from wide ranging backgrounds to shed light on critically neglected communities and transformations, and contribute to ongoing debates on economic development.

The workshop is divided into four sessions spanning two days. The first session will explore the economic characteristics of the region as well as main efforts to revitalize the region following the Great Recession. The first afternoon session of Day One will place Buffalo in its wider geographical context in terms of its economic relationships with the rest of the state (Albany and New York City) and other Rust Belt economic geographies. The third and final session of Day One will focus explicitly on economic sectors in Buffalo. Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of these sectors will also lay the groundwork for the fourth and the last session of the workshop, which will focus on Buffalo’s manufacturing sector. With a specific emphasis on the auto industry, this session will crystalize the problems and potentials of a key economic segment, which has been one of the main targets of economic development programs since the Great Recession.

The assemblage of such expertise and interest in the region and its economic restructuring in this workshop is also expected to evolve into a book project which would fill a major gap in the literature. Despite interest in individual sectors, issues or cities in the Rust Belt region, studies with certain spatial and temporal focus to understand social class and economic development from a historical perspective lack in number and depth. This workshop also aims to address this need in the literature.
PROGRAM
DAY 1, AUGUST 14, Cornell in Buffalo

Welcome, Arthur Wheaton, The Worker Institute, Cornell University
09AM-09.10AM

Introduction: The Contours of Economic Development in the Rust Belt since the Great Recession
Evren Dincer, Uludağ University
09.10AM-09.30AM

Session I
Main Trends and Issues of Economic Development in Buffalo
09.30AM-12PM

The Performance of the Buffalo Economy Since the Great Recession
Jaison Abel, Federal Reserve Bank of New York

Healing Buffalo’s Economy: The Buffalo Billion and Priorities for Economic Development
John Slenker, New York State Department of Labor

General Trends in the Labor Market
Cesar Cabrera, New York State Department of Labor

Labor Market and Challenges for Workforce Development
Heather Gresham, Executive Director, Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board

Labor’s Role in Economic Development and Organizing
Richard Lipsitz Jr., Western New York Area Labor Federation

Economic Development from a Social Justice Perspective
Franchelle C. Hart, Open Buffalo

Lunch Break: 12PM-1PM

Session II
Placing Buffalo in its Geographical and Economic Context:
Buffalo as part of New York State and the Rust Belt
1PM-2.45PM

The Role of New York City in the Economy of New York State
James Parrott, Center for New York City Affairs at The New School

Buffalo’s Economic Relations with Albany
Bruce Fisher, SUNY Buffalo State

The Role of Community Organizations in Buffalo’s Economic Revitalization in a Comparative Perspective
Ronald Applegate, Cornell University

Buffalo’s Economic Development Compared: Buffalo as Part of the Rust Belt
Evren Dincer, Uludağ University

Coffee Break, 2.45PM-3.00PM
Session III
Sectors in Perspective I
3PM-5PM

Buffalo’s Housing Market since the Great Recession
Sam Magavern, Partnership for the Public Good

Buffalo’s Agricultural Economy since the Great Recession
Diane Held, Cornell University Cooperative Extension

The Finance Sector in Buffalo since the Great Recession
Gary Keith, M&T Bank

Buffalo-Niagara Medical Corridor Experiment: Perspectives on a Project for Economic Revitalization
David Scott, Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (TBC)

The Energy Sector, Community Development and Sustainability in Buffalo since the Great Recession
Rahwa Ghirmatzion, PUSH Buffalo

Concluding Remarks and Reflections on Day One
Rosemary Batt, Cornell University
DAY 2, AUGUST 15, UAW Local 774

Session IV, 09AM-12PM
Sectors in Perspective II
Manufacturing and the Auto Industry

A Historical Review of the Auto Industry in the U.S. and Western New York
Art Wheaton, The Worker Institute at Cornell University

Recent Trends in Auto Manufacturing in Western New York
Ian Greer, Cornell University

Canadian Auto Industry since the Great Recession: A Look at Buffalo from the other side of the Border
Mathieu Dupuis, School of Industrial Relations, University of Montreal

The Reindustrialization of the U.S.: Tonawanda Powertrain since the Great Recession
Evren Dincer, Uludağ University

Auto Manufacturing in Buffalo since the Great Recession: A Managerial Perspective
Steve Finch, Plant Manager, GM Tonawanda Powertrain

Labor Management Relations and Restructuring in Manufacturing since the Great Recession:
A Union Perspective
Wenceslao Valentin III, President, UAW Local 774

More Information about the Conference Venues:

Day 1: August 14, 2017
Cornell in Buffalo, 617 Main Street Suite 300, Buffalo, NY 14203

Day 2: August 15, 2017
UAW Local 774 Union Hall, 2939 Niagara Street, Buffalo, NY 14207

For more information please contact:
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