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Surekha Rao

Indiana University Northwest

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Keynote Event from the 83rd Annual Meeting of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences

Introductory Note on the Ostrom Memorial Session and Panel Discussions

SUREKHA RAO
Indiana University Northwest

It was October 2009, and the Indiana Academy of Social Sciences was hosting its 80th annual meeting at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. History was made when Elinor Ostrom became the first female to win the Sveriges Riksbank Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in the 41 years since the prize's inception, and it was awarded to a Hoosier. The event was even more remarkable because the recipient of the economics prize was a political scientist by training. Elinor Ostrom was the first Hoosier social scientist to win the most coveted international prize in economics.

It was clearly a day of celebration for all social scientists. The Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences wanted to be a part of this celebration. Although it seemed almost impossible that we would be able to have Professor Ostrom as the guest of honor and a keynote speaker given the demand on her time, we set out to explore the impossible. Professor Ostrom was known to be an exceptionally magnanimous individual. She was a really down-to-earth academic and was totally unaffected by the glamor and pizzazz of all the honors and awards that she received. She accepted our invitation to be the keynote speaker for the 2012 annual meeting. It would be a historic day for the Academy. The Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences started out with grand plans of hosting our Nobel laureate at the 83rd annual conference of the Academy. Alas, it was not to be.

On June 12, 2012, exactly four months before the day we thought would be most memorable with Ostrom as our keynote speaker, Professor Ostrom lost her battle with pancreatic cancer. Unfortunately, the world lost an exceptional individual and a most illustrious social scientist. Ostrom's keynote address was replaced by a tribute and memorial session in her honor.

Elinor Ostrom was born on August 7, 1933, in California to the Awan family. She completed all her education, including a PhD in political science, from UCLA and later moved to Indiana University along with her mentor and husband, Vincent Ostrom. She encountered several challenges in her academic journey because she was female, but she was unstoppable. As she wrote on her home page, "I learned not to take initial rejections as being permanent obstacles to moving ahead." She kept marching along, demolishing old barriers and moving into research areas known as men's bastions.

She had a humble beginning in the academic profession as a spousal hire with a part-time teaching position at Indiana University. On the sheer strength of her brilliant research, she later joined the faculty and earned the titles of Arthur F. Bentley Professor of Political Science and Distinguished Professor. She was the senior research director of the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, which she founded along with her husband, Vincent Ostrom, at Indiana University Bloomington. She was also the founding director of the Center for the Study of Institutional Diversity at Arizona State University. She was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Philosophical Society.

One of the first books by Elinor Ostrom was *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions* (1990). The book was a landmark in the area of managing natural resources, referred to as common pool resources (CPR) by Ostrom. Ostrom challenged the conventional wisdom of economic governance that CPR such as fisheries, groundwater basins, lakes, and forests can be governed either by private property rights or, if the markets fail, through centralized regulation. She rejected the “tragedy of the commons” paradigm and suggested a fresh approach to the commons issue. She emphasized the powers of cooperation and collaboration that are built around trust. In situations in which individual interests are interdependent, individuals can organize and govern themselves to obtain continuing joint benefits.

The Nobel committee honored Elinor Ostrom for her analysis of economic governance. Elinor observed that resource users frequently develop sophisticated mechanisms for decision making and rule enforcement to handle conflicts of interest, and she characterized the rules that promote successful outcomes. Elinor Ostrom provided the world a winning formula for dealing with global issues facing mankind, such as climate change, that cannot be resolved by either excessive government regulations or free-market solutions like the cap.

Elinor Ostrom’s research style was very different from that of mainstream economists, who developed complex mathematical and statistical models to analyze economic questions. Ostrom worked on the ground and talked to the affiliated people, the fishermen and villagers, to develop the entire institutional framework that would explain how the commons such as forests in Japan and irrigation systems in the Philippines were so efficiently managed. She travelled widely from Nepal to Kenya and collaborated with several scholars, policy makers, and practitioners for an in-depth comprehension of the entire problem. She would not blindly follow the beaten path. She had her unique style of research and her own empirical approach to finding answers that made her stand apart from vanilla economists. Her approach to economic problems from the lens of a political scientist, hallmark of a social scientist, made her winning the Nobel prize so much sweeter for all us social scientists.

At our 83rd annual meeting at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, our keynote speaker could not be midst us. It was only befitting to commemorate numerous contributions of Elinor Ostrom and to pay our tribute to her legacy with a memorial session. We listened to brief excerpts from Ostrom’s Nobel lecture, which was an

executive summary of her lifetime of work. This was followed by a panel discussion with two stalwarts of the Ostrom tradition as lead panelists. Both scholars have been collaborators, coauthors, and colleagues of Ostrom at Indiana University Bloomington.

Our first lead panelist was Professor Mike McGinnis, a renowned scholar of Ostrom School. Professor McGinnis is a professor of political science at Indiana University Bloomington and a former director of the Vincent and Elinor Ostrom Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, an interdisciplinary research and teaching center focused on the study of institutions, development, and governance. Mike has a PhD in political science from the University of Minnesota and a BS in mathematics from the Ohio State University. He has published on topics in public policy, institutional analysis, humanitarian aid, arms control, game theory, and the role of faith-based organizations in public policy and has even introduced a course titled “Sustainable Governance in Ostrom Tradition.” His current research focuses on a highly debated topic of great contemporary relevance: the ways in which health care policy in the United States can be improved through increased collaboration among stakeholders at the community or regional level.

Our second lead panelist was Professor William Blomquist. Professor Blomquist is the dean of the School of Liberal Arts, a professor of political science, and an adjunct professor of public and environmental affairs at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). He received his PhD in political science from Indiana University Bloomington in 1987 with Professor Elinor Ostrom. His research interests concern governmental organization and public policies, with a specialization in the field of water institutions and water management—the areas of lifelong interest to Professor Ostrom.

Professor Blomquist’s publications include four books, of which the most recent, in 2008, was coauthored with Edella Schlager and titled *Embracing Watershed Politics*. Sharing of ground and river water resources has been one of the central themes of the Ostrom School. This is a huge political and economic issue in many countries, including India and Nigeria, and has resulted in loss of human life, of millions of dollars’ worth of resources, and of productivity. We do hope that from the work of Ostrom scholars such as Professor Blomquist, the world will learn to resolve these conflicts through cooperation, collaboration, and trust building.

What follows is based on presentations by the two scholars who were fortunate to have collaborated, coauthored, and worked together at Indiana University Bloomington with Ostrom for more than two decades.