Immigration, Urban Citizenship & Municipal Governance in the Greater Toronto Area

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Project Synopsis

Few city regions in the world have been more dramatically transformed by recent immigration than Toronto. And few institutions have a more direct impact on immigrant settlement and integration than municipal governments. This project explored the extent to which global migration is creating new expressions of urban citizenship among immigrant communities in Toronto. Our analysis was particularly focussed on 4 dimensions of recent immigrant experience across the Greater Toronto Area: 1) mapping the new geography of immigration, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status; 2) analysing municipal government responsiveness to immigrant communities; 3) analysing immigrant community expressions and assertions of urban citizenship; 4) analysing policy fields where conflict between immigrant communities and municipal governments have been particularly acute.

Our findings identify both achievements and barriers that continue to obstruct full urban citizenship (equitable participation and belonging) among immigrant communities in Toronto.

Project Overview

This project covered considerable scope in taking up the challenge recently posed by UCLA sociologist Roger Waldinger "to bring the ‘urban’ back into immigration research". Immigration settlement is overwhelmingly an urban phenomenon, and few institutions have a more direct impact on immigrant integration and well-being than municipal governments. With its extraordinarily large and diverse immigrant communities, the Toronto city region is a particularly rich setting in which to examine urban dimensions of settlement, integration and belonging among newcomers.
Underpinning our research has been the concept of urban citizenship as a dynamic, contested process. We conceive of citizenship broadly -- not only as a set of legal obligations and entitlements which individuals possess by virtue of their membership in a state -- but also as the practices through which individuals and groups formulate and mobilize to claim new rights. Our research has explored the nature of urban citizenship across diverse immigrant communities by analysing four broad dimensions of recent immigrant experience across the entire Greater Toronto Area (GTA): 1) immigrant settlement patterns and socio-economic characteristics; 2) municipal government responsiveness to immigrant communities; 3) immigrant community expressions and assertions of urban citizenship; and 4) identifying policy fields and services where conflict between immigrant communities and municipal governments have been particularly acute.

This project has been pursued through a variety of disciplinary lenses and research methods. Substantively our work has been enriched by scholarship in political science, geography, cultural studies, urban studies, philosophy and history. Methodologically we have embraced both quantitative and qualitative approaches to our subject. Accordingly the following research activities were conducted as part of this project:

1. Comprehensive mapping of immigrant settlement across the GTA based on data from both the 1991 and 1996 census.


3. Conducting a 34-question survey of all 35 GTA municipalities in the summer of 1997 to determine their responsiveness to immigrant communities.

4. Reviewing major municipal policies related to immigration and diversity.

5. Exploring the role of immigrant communities in the 1997 campaign against the amalgamation of the City of Toronto through government documents, participant interviews and media coverage.

6. Exploring the role of immigrant communities in the 1997 municipal elections across the GTA through participant interviews and media coverage.

7. Analysing immigrant community claims on public space such streets and civic squares through a review of municipal parade permit applications.

8. Analysing examples of land use conflicts involving immigrant communities through extensive examination of government documents, participant interviews and media coverage. Particular emphasis was devoted to zoning conflicts over the location of mosques across the GTA, the establishment of a new Jamaican Canadian Community centre in Toronto, and retail establishments serving the GTA’s Chinese community.
Research Results

In a publication based on this project we have written that "global migration is nurturing new expressions of urban citizenship among immigrant communities in Toronto...rooted in immigrant demographics, identities, spatial settlements and adversities." Among the more notable manifestations of a redefined urban citizenship emerging sometimes through success and sometimes through setback in immigrant Toronto are the following:

1. One powerful expression of immigrant urban citizenship in Toronto is their spatial claim to the entire city region. Immigrants no longer feel constrained to reside in traditional newcomer areas of the central city; rather the highest immigrant concentrations are now found in the GTA’s post-World War II suburbs and more recent edge cities. Conversely, the original core city of Toronto is now spatially and politically dominated by professional and managerial class residents of British ethnic origin.

2. The mass citizens’ movement (Citizens For Local Democracy) which arose to challenge the amalgamation of the city of Toronto in 1997 failed to build bridges to immigrant communities. While newcomer communities were not mobilized to oppose the creation of a ‘megacity’ in Toronto, they did rally autonomously to influence the direction of the new city through the activities of organizations such as New Voices For The New City.

3. Results of the 1997 municipal elections reveal a statistical over-representation of politicians of British ethnic origin on every municipal council in the GTA. Visible minority politicians are particularly under-represented, to their group’s tangible disadvantage, immigrant community leaders believe.

4. Immigrant communities have staked out a particular claim to public space in Toronto. Overwhelmingly the streets of Toronto are marched and paraded immigrant, ethnic and visible minorities expressing their collective identity.

5. Half of all GTA municipalities surveyed in 1997 reported experiencing some urban conflict involving an immigrant community. Zoning and land use were by far the most common source of conflict with mosque locations, Asian-style malls and community centres serving the Jamaican community proving the most divisive. These zoning disputes are particularly revealing of transformed urban space and citizenship in Toronto.

Research Outputs

A. PUBLICATIONS


B. SCHOLARLY & STAKEHOLDER PRESENTATIONS


C. MEDIA CITATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

** Interview, M. Siemiatycki on "Immigrant Community Political Participation", for CJRT-FM series, Strangers Becoming Us, 8 July 1998.


D. ADDITIONAL DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

** Myer Siemiatycki will present results of this project at the Third International Metropolis Conference in Israel.

** Publications from this project are being used in reading materials for a variety of courses at Ryerson and York Universities.

- **Contributions To Policy Development**

Through this project our closest governmental linkages have been with the City of Toronto’s Access and Equity Centre, and the Government of Canada’s Canadian Heritage Department. At the municipal level, our research has been directly incorporated into speeches and background papers presented by Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman at the G-8 "Summit of the Cities" in Birmingham, England, May 13-15, 1998. Additionally, Prof. Siemiatycki’s invited presentations at two conferences organized by Toronto’s Access and Equity Centre have emphasized dimensions of municipal governance (esp. political representation and land use) requiring greater responsiveness to immigrant communities. Federally M.Siemiatycki has worked with staff at the Canadian Heritage Department to advance research on immigrant political representation in Canada’s major metropolitan centres. E. Isin organized a major international conference on "Rights To The City" at York University, with support and participation of staff from the Canadian Heritage Department.

- **Training Opportunities Provided**

This project benefitted greatly from -- and in turn enriched the training of -- three student and two community researchers. Stacy Clark joined us as a Masters’ student in Environmental Studies at York University, and as a result of her work on this project wrote her graduating Major Paper on planning for diverse immigrant communities in Toronto, and is now beginning doctoral work at Queen’s University in cultural geography, specializing in Immigrant Spaces in Toronto. Mark Fitzgerald joined us in his final year of undergraduate Applied Geography studies at Ryerson, and contributed to the production of maps and tables portraying the diversity of immigrant Toronto. Based on recommendations from the Chinese Canadian National Council, the Jamaican Canadian Association and the Urban Alliance on Race Relations two community researchers were hired. Natalie Prince, a Masters student of Social Work at the University of Toronto researched conflicts over the Jamaican Canadian Association’s efforts to establish a new community centre. Kelly Thorarinson, completing her undergraduate SocialWork studies at York University, researched relations between the Chinese community and municipal government in Markham. Finally, thanks to additional research funding from Ryerson,
Shaheen Ramputh, a Journalism student interested in diversity reporting was hired to research the experience of Muslims attempting to establish mosques in Toronto.

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**In Appreciation**

Working on this project has been an extraordinarily gratifying collaboration for us. We have felt encouraged and assisted by several concentric circles of supporters. The afore cited research assistants were uniformly thorough and insightful in their work; stakeholders consulted during our research -- especially municipal officials and community leaders -- generously shared their experiences and views; CERIS staff Anneke Rummins and Ted Richmond provided unfailingly helpful counsel; Kenise Kilbride and Valerie Preston were tremendously helpful in sharing their expertise at many stages in this project; and Ryerson provided superb institutional administration of our project for which we are particularly grateful to Dr. Rena Mendelson, Associate Vice President Academic and Ms. Rose Jackson, Co-Ordinator of Projects & Administration with the Office of Research Services. Without the support of CERIS funding we could not have embarked on what was for us a new field of academic research, which has now become a primary focus of our scholarly interests.