RESEARCHING COMMUNITY, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE:

What Does the Literature Say and What Do Leaders Want?

BY Jack Jedwab, McGill University

THE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND IDENTITY IN MINORITY COMMUNITIES BENEFITS FROM AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH THAT COMBINES THE HISTORIC, SOCIOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP. ELCOCK CONTENDS THAT STUDIES OF LEADERSHIP IN MANY COUNTRIES SUFFER FROM AN ABSENCE OF ANALYTICAL AND COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORKS THAT ARE SUFFICIENTLY ROBUST TO MAKE SENSE OF THE COMMON ISSUES AND PROBLEMS LEADERS CONFRONT.

Leadership can significantly influence identity formation and community vitality. As it relates to identity, leadership is very often intertwined with the issue of governance. It might be said that leadership is a product of the surrounding environment and is thus affected by group structures and the type of services they deliver or benefits they offer to members of the community.

Much of the work dealing with the history of ethnocultural communities focuses on the settlement experience of immigrants and their initial efforts at community formation. The communities' histories remain crucial to an understanding of the current state of their governance and leadership. Comparative studies of the community experience across several markers of identity can be very useful in expanding our knowledge of institutional development.

The length of time that a community is established in a given society does not imply that it will either have an elaborate institutional infrastructure or strong leadership. In many instances it is quite the opposite, as such rootedness results in less institutional development. Over the generations, the sense of attachment to the source country may diminish; therefore, the leaders' capacity to mobilize the members of a group around such identification is also likely to decline. Mobilization often depends on the extent to which group members share particular identity needs that are best served by community institutions. Research needs to focus on the evolution of community formation, with a focus on how community needs and priorities change over time.

Governance, leadership and identity are very much affected by the sociodemographic conditions of a particular community. The critical mass and geographic concentration of the community are important factors in its development. Dual and multiple identities represent yet another important consideration that influences community involvement. The early histories of ethocultural communities point consistently to strong ties between ethnic and religious identity, both in terms of governance and leadership. The extent to which leaders reflect the multidimensional nature of the community, as well as their ability to appeal to its various elements, can serve as important agents for mobilization.

The growing diversity of immigrants' origins has resulted in a proliferation of community organizations which reflected the increasingly multiethnic character of the population. By the late 1980s, however, it became more difficult to establish institutional infrastructure based on ethnocultural identification. This was, in part, the result of government making greater efforts to incorporate and recognize community needs within the institutions of the state while at the same time significantly reducing support to organizations that promote ethnic identification.

Prior to the 1960s, this generally involved non-elected structures and leadership, and limited intervention from the State in what was considered to be the private domain. Although the State provided some institutional support, the community organizations were generally required to provide services to their members.

Since then, the decline of organized religion has affected the status and prestige of the clergy, and in many cases – though by no means all – community leadership shifted to more secular bodies. Secularization tended to strengthen the ethnic dimension of a group's identification and, with the encouragement of the State, ethnocultural organizations were to a great extent able to fill the institutional void left by the clergy.

Community initiatives and decisions can have ramifications, directly or indirectly, for the entire society and therefore government is interested in its orientations and its activities. How that interest manifests itself and what form it takes are important areas of inquiry.

The rise of the welfare state meant that the provincial government offered most of the major services previously provided by the community organizations. The State's abiltity to reasonably accommodate the needs of minorities has modified the approach of certain community organizations and comprehending these evolving roles is an important area for further inquiry.

Geography is an important contributing factor to the expansion of provincial associational life, as higher residential concentration makes for greater opportunities for interaction amongst community members. Bringing together ethnocultural community leadership from across the country requires a resource base that not all groups possess.

Reductions in federal government support may render more complex the cooperation of ethnocultural communities on a national scale. At the same time, ethnic community organizations may not possess an easily defined common national agenda. The respective roles of federal, provincial and municipal administrations in relation to diversity issues and community needs is a critical area for research. It is also important to examine the expectations that community members have as regards the respective levels of government and where and when they think that state involvement is relevant.

The democratization of community structures has drawn increasing attention to the numbers and / or influence of persons involved with a given institution. In the case of the ethnocultural communities, few studies have closely examined the relationship between leadership and governance in terms of the nature of the community's constituents. Institutional legitimacy remains tied to the real or perceived representative character of a given community organization.

Since the 1970s, the increasing number of ethnocultural organizations has in part been attributed to the advent of multiculturalism. The support for community development provided under the multicultural policy was said to have played an important role in the expansion of formal, ethnocultural organizations.

Funding distributed to communities through the federal multiculturalism program has dropped considerably since the 1980s and this has had varying effects on the institutional development of ethnocultural communities. By the 1990s, the multicultural policy ceased providing support to most ethnocultural organizations and, consequently, a weakening of the national dimension of ethnocultural governance ensued. Kobayashi attributes the diminished capacity for concerted action on the part of leaders of ethnocultural organiza-

tions operating on a national scale to the reduction in departmental support. It remains unclear to what extent the policy shifts have implied an erosion of the population's attachment to ethnic identification.

Studies on governance and leadership have stressed the presumed opposition between the attachment to one's ethnocultural origins and the importance that those who identify with such groups attribute to the need for equality and non-discrimination of citizens. Nonetheless, community advocacy is often necessary to defend the group's interests. How and where does the advocacy role fit into the community organization?

Some contend that ethnic political activity can hurt democratic practice in that organizational leaders encourage citizens to focus on narrow communal interests above broader societal goals. Until recently, few studies examined this assertion. Further research on the discourse of contemporary ethnocultural leaders is required in order to support this notion.

In a series of interviews with Quebec ethnocultural leaders, Lapp examined their role in encouraging community members to participate in the political process. She challenges the idea of ethnic communities as places where electoral machine politics "reign supreme" and where ethnic blocs "vote en masse" for a particular party in return for community favours. Rather, Lapp contends that ethnic communities are places where civic duty and political engagements are taught and reinforced and that leaders are important agents of political socialization.

Lapp found that leaders' arguments were more likely to refer the individual to the broader political matters than to the particular interests of the ethnic community. In effect, ethnocultural leaders use national, provincial and municipal elections as occasions to reinforce community members' sense of belonging to the larger society. She concludes that ethnocultural leaders' discourse are both community-based and society-based. This is yet another area that requires more examination.

Do leadership positions in ethnocultural organizations offer opportunities to attain political office, or do those who occupy such functions encounter problems in pursuing such goals? Many politicians of ethnocultural backgrounds have had previous experience in such community organizations. There has been no extensive study of the transition from an ethnocultural organization to the municipal, provincial or federal political scene. It would be useful to look at the degree to which the discourse of politicians from ethnocultural backgrounds evolves when they embark on formal politics.

Reaction was solicited to the ideas and thoughts expressed above from leaders of a number of non-governmental, ethnocultural organizations. They identified directions for research and policy related to issues of leadership and governance that are summarized in the remainder of this text.

They summed some of the main issues they faced in the following way: With respect to individual leadership, they point out that minority communities experience difficulty in developing and retaining group leaders. Amongst the challenges in this regard are finding individuals willing to take on voluntary leadership roles, excessive demands on community leaders, scepticism over the motives of group leaders and limited financial or skills-development support for community leaders.

With respect to the interconnected issue of community organizational capacity, leaders identified several problems to be addressed: the ongoing challenge of keeping community organizations stable and effective in the face of declining government support for community organizations; the issue of dealing with conflict that can arise between local and national community organizations; and the question of determining who speaks on behalf of the community. This is said to be linked to the issue of the "representativeness" of community leaders when they speak on behalf of their community and how they address the multiplicity of divisions that may exist within any identity community based on such characteristics as age, gender, sexual orientation, religious observance and class. They note that it is realistic for the State and the broader society to expect that leaders represent all community voices.

The principal recommendations for future research put forward by non-governmental leadership focused on representational and capacity-building dimensions of leadership, both within ethnocultural and broader public settings. The following ten research initiatives have been identified:

1) The way in which members do or do not identify with particular communities;
2) the link between leadership in community organizations and leadership in the larger society – are they exclusive or complementary?
3) How to define leadership success stories or models?
4) How do social divisions within communities (e.g. gender, age) relate to who become leaders and how is leadership viewed by the members?
5) With a focus on youth within ethnocultural communities, what is their view towards ethnic identity and how does this affect their view of community leadership? Do they see ethnic associations as imposing a burden upon them, or is participation in ethnocultural communities seen as facilitating participation in mainstream society?
6) What alternative forms of political organization / participation would enable ethnocultural minorities to influence leadership in mainstream electoral politics?
7) What are the expectations of the community for ethnocultural community leaders, which would provide some measure of assessing their leadership and governance?
8) What are the opportunities for (or barriers to) participation in community leadership?
9) What has been the real impact of government policy, and the ongoing change of priorities in the area of funding meant for community organizations?
10) Finally, exploring community mobilization strategies – by whom, when, and why – and the reasons why they have or have not been effective.