Diversity Without Divisiveness: A Role for Social Capital?

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How do we sustain social development and harmony at a time when our societies are increasingly multi-faith, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual? This is a challenge that Canada, as well as other OECD countries, currently face and will continue to address in the decades to come. Immigrants and their descendents have transformed Canada into not only a country in the world, but also a country of the world. Over 200 ethnic origins were reported in the 2001 Census and more than 18% of the Canadian population was born outside Canada. Such multicultural reality brings opportunities and challenges.

The role of social capital in managing diversity

In the 1990s, an old concept, social capital, gained prominence as a potential tool in policy development.[1] This could be a useful concept in designing policies that promote diversity without divisiveness in pluralistic and multicultural societies. This is because social capital may foster mutual understanding and respect between different groups. It enables individuals and groups to get by and to get ahead in the society in which they reside.[2]

What is social capital? As defined by the OECD, social capital consists of "networks together with shared norms, values and understanding which facilitate co-operation within or among groups"[3]. Networks constitute the objective component of the definition and relate to the behaviour of actors who enter into associative activity. By contrast, shared norms, values and understandings relate to the subjective dispositions and attitudes of individuals and groups, as well as sanctions and rules governing behaviour, which are widely shared.

Generally speaking, three basic types of social capital have been identified: bonding, bridging and linking[4]. *Bonding* refers typically to relations among members of families and ethnic groups. *Bridging* refers to relations between ethnic and other social groups. *Linking* refers to relations between different social strata in a hierarchy where different groups access power, social status and wealth. In multicultural societies, the relation between bonding and bridging social capital is essential in understanding the dynamic of ethnic relations.

Even though a good deal of research has been devoted to social capital, networks and values, many of the social capital concepts have yet to be translated into policies and practices. How does social capital facilitate relations among ethno-cultural groups? What is the role of social capital in immigrant integration? How can governments and institutions in pluralistic societies use social capital as a tool to manage relations among ethnic and immigrant groups? Responses to these questions will enable decision makers in Canada and in other OECD countries to develop policies and programs to manage and benefit from its cultural diversity. The Government of Canada's Policy Research Initiative, in partnership with the OECD and several federal departments, is planning an international conference to address the role of social capital in the social and economic integration of immigrants and in managing diversity.

Integration through bonding, bridging and linking social capital

The relation between social capital and immigrant inclusion is complex. Individuals acquire their networks differently. How well immigrants can participate fully in the receiving society depends on the type of social capital that they are able to acquire both within ethnic communities and in mainstream society such as the workplace, schools, and the community at large.

Bonding social capital has already been identified as a possible contributor to the concentration of immigrants in urban areas. Through generations of migration, some ethnic groups have developed an infrastructure such as businesses and social services that often parallel those in the mainstream society, hence the term, 'institutional completeness'[5]. Co-ethnics can often provide valuable information on the local labour market. As well, these ties can provide a social safety net by meeting material and financial needs during lean times and caring for children and elders[6]. On a structural level, Isajiw[7] concludes that retention of home language and of ethnic identity derive from a high level of 'institutional completeness' and the viability of the ethnic group.

Bridging occurs when individuals of one group interact with others who are of different cultural heritage. Most immigrants do not want to remain in their own ethnic community, nor do they wish to reproduce their home country in Canada. As they immerse in their new country, immigrants are becoming 'the locals'. They become citizens, learn French and English, and become aware of the value and norms of the receiving society. Bridging capital enables immigrants to fully participate in their adopted country socially and economically.

However, the acquisition of social capital is a two-way street. To accumulate bridging capital not only requires the willingness of immigrants to connect with the society at large, but also the willingness of the receiving society to accept newcomers. Immigrants may be excluded from the mainstream society because of race, ethnicity or religion. For example, a recent survey in Germany shows that 49 percent of the respondents would not want to live in a neighbourhood with high concentration of Muslims, and 20 percent would not want to have foreigners as neighbours. Public attitude towards immigrants varies depending on the social, economic, and political environments in the receiving country as well as internationally.

Immigrants and ethnic minorities want to be represented in the decision-making process. For immigrants, 'participating in politics is a way of gaining a voice from the muteness of being uprooted in one society and transplanted in another.'[8] By doing this, they will have more social and economic opportunities. Through *linking*, ethnic groups, regardless of immigration status, are able to have a say in the type of society that they want.

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Not all forms of social capital are equal

Particular forms of social capital have the potential to impede social cohesion in certain circumstances. Although strong bonding ties give particular communities or groups a sense of identity and common purpose, without "bridging" ties that transcend various social divides (e.g. religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status), bonding ties can become a basis for the pursuit of narrow interests, and can actively exclude outsiders[10]. Relatively homogeneous groups may be characterized by strong trust and co-operative norms within a group, but low trust and co-operation with the rest of society. High levels of 'institutional completeness' also mean that immigrants work and conduct daily business within the ethnic community. In other words, they can be self-sufficient or even advance themselves socially and economically without having to acquire the official language of the receiving society.

Uneven access to social capital can also have undesirable social outcomes. While those with a lot of social competencies and with strong social networks may be able to cope with change as they build new social capital, large proportions of immigrants may fail to derive benefits from getting access to new forms of social capital due to a lack of language skills and other barriers. This situation may be compounded in the future as some groups are likely to have access to new technologies and forms of learning linked to enhanced labour market opportunities.

Equally worrying is the possibility that some social networks may exclude others and that over time, social networks and civic as well as political participation may become more unequal in some societies. For those on the "inside" of particular networks and communities, there are important means of access to resources and assistance from which "outsiders" are effectively excluded. In fact, the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey reports disturbingly unequal access to social capital in many ethnically diverse communities in the United States[11].

These developments may have potential consequences. Rodrik found evidence to support the notion that social polarisation can impair an economy's ability to react to negative economic shocks12. Moreover, the existence of important social, ethnic and gender cleavages may impede the spread of shared norms (bridging and linking) thus undermining social capital. Accordingly, some people can be excluded entirely from accessing "quality" human and social capital.

Importing social capital

So far, the discourse on immigration has focused largely on the human capital (e.g., education and language abilities) that immigrants have. Less is known about the social capital that newcomers bring and how it impacts the social and economic development of the receiving society. For example, cultural vibrancy has often been considered to be a marketing advantage of a country when it comes to hosting international events. In the age of globalization, immigrants can also, through their cultural and language skills, facilitate trade and cultural exchanges between their home and receiving countries[13].

The role of governments and stakeholders

Governments can help create and develop social capital to facilitate successful immigrant integration and in fostering mutual understanding between ethno-cultural groups. Schools can play a central role in building social capital by instilling habits of civic and political engagement in children and teenagers. Schools and knowledge institutions have also become crucial nodes in social capital loaded networks through parents, private organizations and alumni.

Governments ought to consider the importance of "bridging social capital" in policies to encourage inclusion of various groups, while preserving cultural or other group identities, in educational programmes, employment and more mixed residential arrangements. In these areas, governments have to make sure that the transformation pressure is tolerable given the capacity to cope with the process of construction and destruction of social capital.

In order to promote equity and inclusiveness, governments can promote a fair distribution of human and social capital – through schools, job training, life-long learning opportunities and through community and social policy – in such a way that access to high quality human and social capital is achievable for all.

In conclusion, the role of social capital in fostering an inclusive yet diverse society deserves more attention. This PRI-OECD conference (Fall 2003) will shed new light on an old concept by bringing together a number of different perspectives and disciplines in the analysis of the potential contribution of social capital to the integration of immigrant and managing diversity.

Milner text – references

[1] Published in 2002 by the University Press of New England, distributed in Canada by UBC Press.

[2] For many years the US National Election Survey has been asking respondents which party is more likely to favour a greater role for government in the economy, and which is more conservative. The average answering "Democrats" to the first is less than 30 percent, while just over 50 percent answer Republican on to the second.

[3] John Pammett and Lawrence Leduc. "Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters." Ottawa: Elections Canada, 2003.

[4] This approach taken here is contrasted with the prevailing current in the contemporary literature on declining civic participation, which revolves around the concept of social capital, as developed notably by Robert Putnam (Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). When applied internationally, Putnam's conceptualization is not all that helpful in explaining differences in levels of voter turnout across countries. This is because, I argue, many of the kinds of activities associated with social capital by Putnam do not contribute to civic literacy and, hence, do not enhance political participation. Moreover, the promotion of civic literacy is also, to an important degree, influenced by a country's political institutions and the opportunities and incentives these provide for political actors to engage in the activities needed to nurture and sustain an informed polity, a dimension neglected in the "social capitalists" focus on civil society.

[5] Norway, Finland and Sweden subsidize daily newspapers that are not leaders in their markets. The subsidies traditionally account for 3 to 4 per cent of all newspaper revenues.

[6] This is one of many measures seeking to encourage reading. Also exemplary is that district public-health nurses, at the time of the first post-natal home visit, leave behind The Child's First Book, a compilation of rhymes and stories for children, to underscore that reading, like proper nutrition and hygiene, is vital to the development of a healthy child.

[7] For example, the ABF's fall 1999 program in Umeå (where I teach) offered the usual range of study circles in languages, computers, art, music, and nature appreciation, but also courses in organizing groups and co-operatives, in public speaking, writing and understanding media, as well as study circles on social and civil rights, the United Nations, war and peace, the future of democracy, feminism, various aspects of history, and important contemporary books.

[8] See "Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society: Further Results from the International Adult Literacy Survey. (Paris: OECD, 1997); and Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey. (Paris: OECD, 2000).

[9] See www.cmec.ca/pisa/2000/rapportcanada.fr.pdf.

[10] In another study, however, at least among first-year university students, the British outclass their North American and Canadian counterparts. On questions about past and present political leaders, the average percentage correct was 25 for both the U.S. and Canada; for Britain it was 42. In ranking foreign countries on the basis of population and GDP, it was 43, 45 and 72 respectively (Steven Holloway, "Through a Glass Darkly: Documenting Asymmetries in Neighbourly Knowledge," in the Bulletin of the Canadian Political Science Association, Spring 1995: 51-56.)

[11] http://geosurvey.nationalgeographic.com/geosurvey/download/RoperSurvey.pdf

[12] Paul Howe, "The Sources of Campaign Intemperance," Policy Options, January-February 2001.

[13] Paul Howe, "Where have all the Voters Gone. Inroads #12, Fall 2002. The 1956 Gallop surveys showed respondents a list of 10 prominent political figures, of which two were Canadian, and asked them to identify the country and position of each, as well as a list of Canada's ten provincial premiers and asked them to identify their province. The 2000 CES included an unprecedented number of knowledge items: the names of the leaders of the Liberals, PC, Alliance and NDP, the name of the federal finance minister, and the name of one's provincial premier.

[14] Nor are they any less distrustful of multinational corporations than older Canadians. In fact, they are less prone to see them as too powerful than all groups except those aged 28-37. (Brenda O'Neill, "Generational Patterns in the Political Opinions and Behaviour of Canadians: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff." Montreal: IRPP, 2001.)

[15] Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1997: A Global Report on Political Participation. Stockholm: IDEA 1997.

[16] In their study of New Zealand after its adoption of PR, Jeffrey Karp and Susan Banducci found that compared to supporters of large parties, supporters of small parties are more satisfied with the political process under PR ("The Impact of Proportional Representation on Turnout: Evidence from New Zealand," Australian Journal of Political Science, 33: 4, 1999.)

[17] See, for example, Arend Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performances in Thirty-Six countries. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

[18] Consider how States where the outcome is not in doubt are ignored in US elections. The Center for Voting and Democracy's statistical analysis of the 1994 elections for the House of Representatives, reports a clear correlation between margin of victory and voter participation, with a 13 percent difference in turnout between the 87 most contested and 54 most lopsided districts.

[19] "The National Journal … reports that … four of the nation's top eight media markets -- Boston, Dallas, New York City, and Washington, DC -- had a grand total of six presidential ads aired, while eight media markets in battleground states each aired more than 6,500 presidential ads." (November 22, 2000, electronic report of the Center for Voting and Democracy - www.fairvote.org.)

[20] See for example "The Civic Mission of Schools." Report from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE (University of Maryland), 2003

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[2] Brigg, Xavier de Souze (1997). 'Social Capital and the cities : Advice to Change Agents'. National Civic Review. 86(2):111-117.

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[8] Die Zeit (2002). http://www.zeit.de/2002/46/Politik/200246_heitmeyer.html

[9] Clarkson, Adrienne (2003). A Vision of the Imagination, Address to the Canadian Club of Ottawa. http://www.gg.ca/media/speeches/archive-2003/20030129-e.asp.

[10] Portes, A. and Landolt (1996), "The downside to social capital". The American Prospect 26 (May-June): 18-21, 94.

[11] Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey: http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/

[12] Rodrik, D. (1998), "Where Did All the Growth Go? External Shocks, Social Conflict and Growth Collapses", NBER Working Paper, No. 6350.

[13] Li, Peter S., (2003) Destination Canada : Immigration Debates and Issues, Oxford University Press.

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[1] Voir, en particulier, L'équité en emploi dans la fonction publique fédérale 2000-2001, Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor, 2002 [http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/report/empequi/2001/ee-01_f.html]

[2] Le Petit Robert, édition 1988.

[3] À l'occasion, entre autres, de la table ronde du Conseil national des minorités visibles, tenue à Ottawa le 25 novembre 2002.

[4] Allusion au procédé imaginé par Aldous Huxley dans son roman d'anticipation Le meilleur des mondes, qui permettait de produire des individus aux caractéristiques homogènes.

[5] Sondage auprès des fonctionnaires fédéraux 2002 – Voici ce que vous avez dit… Résultats pour l'ensemble de la fonction publique, Ottawa, Présidente du Conseil du Trésor, 2002 [http://www.survey-sondage.gc.ca]

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