INTERVIEW WITH DAVID LEY

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How can we most effectively measure the impact of multiculturalism, both as a policy and in the message it conveys to Canadians?

This is an important objective, though it may well be unattainable. The measurement *per se* of the impacts of a policy like multiculturalism is bedevilled by at least two complications. First, how does one calibrate in measurable units a policy that creates the conditions for integration? The best one can do is to find some outcomes that are measurable. For example, Irene Bloemraad (2006) uses naturalisation rates as an output, and argues that the differential levels of naturalisation in Canada and the US work to Canada's favour due to the 'warmth of the welcome' and, in particular, the positive impact of multiculturalism. Another output could be rates of immigrant political participation, minimally voting, and more ambitiously running for office.

But here we encounter the second difficulty. Does multiculturalism alone generate such outputs? Bloemraad herself notes that it is not only multiculturalism, but also settlement policy, itself tied to the welfare state, that contribute to positive outcomes in Canada. And here's the rub – just how can one separate out the differential effects of multicultural and settlement policies and other relevant contexts? Multiculturalism unfolds in a broader political culture. If we accept Bloemraad's assessment that the impacts are generally positive – and I do – we need to note as well that conditions have been propitious in Canada for a number of particular reasons. Backlash in Europe and in the United States both to immigration and multiculturalism have resulted from events that, largely through good fortune, Canada has been spared. Illegal immigration, for example, with estimates now up to 10-15 million in the United States, has not become an irritant in Canada to anything like the same degree. Kymlicka (2005) has added two other conditions that have incited negative reactions to multiculturalism: a high proportion of asylum seekers among the immigrant flow, taxing the treasury of the welfare state, and a significant share of radical Muslims who are perceived to challenge some of the presuppositions of Western liberalism. The relative absence of these circumstances in Canada has shaped the political culture in which multiculturalism has prospered.

There is another reason to see multiculturalism as only part of the institutional and ideological context of immigration and integration. In the present anxiety concerning immigrant integration in Western Europe and North America, considerable uncritical opinion is blaming virtually every integration failure on multiculturalism. For example, some media writers in Canada readily attribute the creation of immigrant enclaves, limiting social interaction among diverse cultural groups, to the effects of multiculturalism (see Fulford 2006, Gregg 2006). But in fact, segregation is a product of high levels of immigration in conditions both of assimilation and of multiculturalism. Social science approaches to measuring and theorising segregation, including operationalising the idea of the social distance between ethnic groups, were developed in Chicago and other American cities in the first half of the twentieth century, where large immigrant numbers had created distinctive enclaves during the period of unmitigated assimilation. It is no different today, for a study that sought to measure relative levels of segregation in paired cities in multicultural Canada and the more assimilationist United States was unable to find significant differences, save for the higher segregation of Blacks in American cities (Peach 2005). Thus, multiculturalism has no clear relationship with patterns of ethnic and immigrant segregation.

This is an example of the broader need to deflate multiculturalism as a causal factor. Its role in establishing group rights through such legislation as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Multiculturalism Act*, and the *Employment Equity Act*, has provided backbone to the widespread view of Canada as a country committed to respect for cultural difference and equal treatment in public and private settings. But multiculturalism does not have the capacity to go much further, for example to affect patterns of residential segregation or income inequality (unless discriminatory practices can be proven). Part of respecting multiculturalism is to clearly demarcate its limits.

What are the policies and initiatives of other government departments that influence multiculturalism?

There are two ways of approaching this question. The first, beyond the scope of this brief commentary, would be to document the intersection of multiculturalism policy with the work of other government agencies, federal departments like Citizenship and Immigration or Human Resources and Social Development Canada, their provincial counterparts,

and municipal services such as education and the police. This would be a lengthy empirical assignment.

A second, more normative approach, would be to require all government departments and agencies to embed multiculturalism within their policies and practices, in the same way that it was required that gender be seamlessly embedded in public policy in the 1990s. Some school curricula already take this position. Multiculturalism is not another module, an add-on to an existing curriculum, but is integral to the content of humanities and social science pedagogy.

What type of research would you recommend be conducted to enhance our understanding of multiculturalism and diversity the most?

First, a clear operational definition of multiculturalism is necessary, recognising that both the term and its policy framework have changed through time. This definition could presumably be drawn from formative government documents. Such a definition should be compared with popular perceptions, revealed in longitudinal opinion polls. These two response sets in turn should be compared with the media that have in recent years assumed particular responsibility for inflating multiculturalism to become the 'fall man' for any failure of integration, including segregation, immigrant poverty, crime and disorder, and even terrorism (Ley 2006). It is essential that, in assessing multiculturalism, we are in agreement concerning the boundaries of the subject in question.

Second, cross-national comparison of multiculturalism in theory and practice would be profitable. Its ideology and policy content invariably bend before particular national contexts. Dutch multiculturalism, for example, is built upon the national practice of pillarisation that readily contributes to separateness through an extended set of culturally specific institutions. In international conversation, there again needs to be a clear recognition of the precise terms of reference.

Third, in assessing the effects of multiculturalism, there must be a clear identification of the full range of contexts that shape particular integration outcomes. Multiculturalism is just one part of a bundle of policies, economic and geographic contexts, and immigrant characteristics that need to be considered in judging the conditions of cultural diversity.

References

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