WHY ARE (SOME) MUNICIPALITIES SUCH ACTIVE SITES OF ANTI-DISCRIMINATION?

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Municipalities are important sites of anti-discrimination for three basic reasons; their areas of activity, their ways of behaving (sometimes) and, finally, because many of them are already busy doing this kind of work: In particular, municipalities can influence access to public space and engage in effective public management. Municipalities face numerous challenges in carrying out anti-discrimination work and while there is significant work going on in Canadian municipalities, there is more to be done. CCMARD provides a support network, a series of new allies, and great information on good practices in anti-discrimination work. The work that has been to date within the framework of CCMARD evidences that municipalities are important sites for anti-discrimination.

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THEIR AREAS OF ACTIVITY

Municipalities have many areas of responsibility that influence access to public space. Public space is a very important element in our social world, as its existence enhances the building of community and democratic political life. Public space should be, by definition, accessible and open. Municipalities, therefore play a key role in ensuring that their policies ensure equal access to public space, without discrimination. For instance, the municipal role in planning gives them authority to choose where to place parks or recreation facilities. With this authority come important questions about parks: Are parks designed to deliberately create inclusive public space? Are they located evenly across the municipality? Are the parks better equipped in wealthier neighbourhoods? Were all neighbourhoods equally consulted in decisions to create a new park or renovate an existing park? Were minority views within neighbourhoods taken into account in the process? The municipal planning function also gives the municipality the tools to plan for new development and the capacity to plan mixed income neighbourhoods (or predominantly segregated neighbourhoods) by housing types and costs.

Public transportation is also a municipal responsibility and is an area where there are opportunities to provide equal access to public space. As a part of a research project, a focus group was held with women living in the inner suburbs of Ottawa,

mostly recent immigrants and very dependent on public transportation. Participants shared their disappointment over the weekend schedules for public transportation, as the weekends served as the prime time to take their children on excursions to visit museums and parks. The wait times involved in taking the bus made this a much less attractive option for those with small children. The assumption that the priority for public transportation is getting workers to their jobs is deeply engrained in most municipalities. It is more difficult to find examples of dialogue on citizens gaining proper access to public space. It is clear that access to efficient public transportation, is one important part of equal access to public space.

Equal access to public space can also be thought of as equal access to public buildings, such as public libraries. Are public libraries inviting, making everyone feel welcome? Is there material to read in different languages? Or, for example, is access to school facilities for community use equitable? Though there have been rules in place for at least twenty years in Ontario for shared use of municipal and school facilities, this rarely occurs.

Policing is another municipal responsibility and here again; there reside implications for equal access to public space. The whole issue of racial profiling relates directly to this question. Are non-whites more likely to be questioned about their presence in public spaces than are whites? In working with a youth program Youth Futures/Avenir Jeunesse, I learned that Muslim participants were regularly questioned by police while they were a small group gathering together in public. While this claim is anecdotal, it does illustrate the importance of the policing function in terms of access to public space and the inclusion of a range of identities within it.

Culture is also a municipal area of activity. What can, and should, we expect in terms of equal access to public space in the area of culture? That there be public places (community centres, neighbourhood houses) with cultural activities for all? That the places where cultural activities take place do not make people feel unwelcome? That the cultural richness of a variety of civilisations is celebrated as enriching Canadian cultural life? Municipal responsibilities vary across the provinces and in Ontario some municipal responsibilities exist in the areas of health and social services. In other provinces these fields of intervention are provincial. Ontario municipalities therefore have two opportunities to: *1)* hire people in health and social services who mirror the population as much as possible and *2)* offer culturally sensitive programming, either directly by the municipality or by funding third parties to offer the programming. Municipalities can therefore actively pursue anti-discrimination policies as they control multiple levers to influence access to public space and public spaces.

THEIR WAYS OF BEHAVING (SOMETIMES)

Municipalities have certain ways of behaving and some of these facilitate work on anti-discrimination. I am going to highlight three ways of doing public management where I believe municipalities have been particularly successful: *1)* partnering, *2)* being pragmatic and *3)* planning inclusive consultations. Municipalities have long traditions of working with other organizations in partnership. Of course, partnering can be tricky as it has also been a strategy of neoliberal governments to cut costs by off-setting the costs onto the community partners. This debate is briefly summarized (Andrew and Legacy 2013, 92) with the conclusion that, "the outcome of partnerships cannot be determined in advance," and that one must examine real cases of partnerships to see whether the lives of marginalized groups have been improved, or not. Including a group that represents and speaks for marginalized groups and enabling it to play a full role in the partnership may be a way of using partnerships to develop an inclusionary public management.

Municipal governments tend to be pragmatic, finding concrete solutions to practical issues. One such example is producing documents in multiple languages. We recently did four brief monographs on Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa for a European Union project on multilingual cities (LUCIDE 2013) and we discovered numerous examples of information being produced in a range of languages, despite the absence of any official policy. These kinds of concrete solutions means that a greater number of residents can access information that can enhance their personal, political, and civic life and, thereby, facilitate inclusion into their community.

Although municipalities have sometimes undertaken banal and top-down consultations, many have also undertaken innovative and inclusive forms of consultation by co-constructing policies with the users. For example, the Department of Parks and Recreation of the City of Ottawa contracted with the City for All Women Initiative/Initiative: une ville pour toutes les femmes, a community-based women's group, to train a group of their ethnically diverse membership to animate focus groups. Participants then went on to hold community-based focus groups in their own networks in an attempt to bring recommendations on community priorities for sports and recreation back to the Department. As the Department knew that the formal consultations would only bring out the organised sports networks, they wanted to ensure a more inclusive set of community views by adjusting their approach.

It is perhaps because municipalities do not have a formal constitutional position in Canada (they are humble creatures of the provinces) that they are more willing to partner, less insistent in controlling the partnerships, more pragmatic, and more flexible in adapting to the changing needs of their constituents.

THEY ARE DOING ANTI-DISCRIMINATION WORK AND HAVE BEEN DOING IT FOR QUITE SOME TIME

Municipalities are great places for anti-discrimination work because we can identify several successful projects that already exist at the municipal level. The background to this more formal municipal involvement is described in a chapter (Andrew and Abdourhamane Hima, in press) which presents both the growing provincial role and, from this, a municipal role. The Metropolis project published Our Diverse Cities starting in 2004 focussing on:

> *The huge number of practices, policies and programs put into place by an equally huge number of public, private and civil society and organizations that inter-relate, coordinate and contradict each other and that all together affect the ways in which immigrants come to Canada, settle her and the ways in which Canadian cities have, or have not, adapted/been transformed/ successfully integrated these new Canadians. (8)*

The series continued for eight numbers (until 2011) and documented hundreds of examples of municipal, neighbourhood, and community practices. Issue one focussed on the arts (ethno-cultural festivals and urban life) and on health (health access and equity from Toronto Public Health, Research as informing municipal policy and practice from Dalhousie University in Halifax). Another publication illustrating municipal practices is *Welcoming Communities: Planning for Diverse Populations*, published in 2008 as a special edition of *Plan Canada*, the publication of the Canadian Institute of Planners. Some of the many examples included in the report are partnerships on immigration in the Peel region, the role of Neighbourhood Houses in Vancouver, political leadership in Surrey, BC, and the importance of adequate and affordable housing in the settlement of refugees in Winnipeg's Inner City.

Finally, but certainly not least, *Canadian Diversity*, pushes issues by theme and, as an example with municipal implications, released an issue on *Best Practices in Countering Racism in the Workplace* (9-1). One article (Banerjee 2012, 29) dealt with perceptions of workplace discrimination among Canadian visible minorities, making the point that perceived discrimination "is known to have important organizational and personal consequences, such as decreased productivity, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and well-being."

WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES FACING MUNICIPALITIES?

Municipalities face numerous challenges in carrying out anti-discrimination work. Without a doubt, the most significant is financial, as a result of constraints built into the municipal funding system. I have also identified two other challenges; the attitudes of some municipalities that still see themselves as creatures of the provinces and, finally, the very poor record of municipalities in representative democracy (in electing a more diverse group of political leaders). I will briefly touch on each of these.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Municipalities in Canada are very dependent on property taxes as their own source of revenue. Other primary sources are transfers from the provincial and, to a lesser degree, federal government, provincial transfers are almost all conditional in nature and therefore relate to provincial, and not municipal, priorities. Property taxes are generally viewed as a regressive form of taxation because the burden of taxation is not greater on those with greater wealth. This is a particular problematic when it comes to elderly property owners who acquired homes many years ago, but who, with the rising cost of housing, are now property rich, but income poor. If municipalities want to build more social housing, they would be raising taxes to increase inclusivity but taxing many of those who in fact have lower incomes.

Further, municipalities have very little control over their sources of revenue; as these are given to them by their provincial governments. A 2012 Government of British Columbia report shows important differences among provinces, with Manitoba, Alberta, Quebec, and Newfoundland giving their municipalities' access to 4 or 5 taxes, whereas municipalities in Ontario and Nova Scotia were given access to only two. This is one indication of the degree of independence by each province to their municipalities and which has profound impacts on the level of accorded resources available for anti-discrimination work.

ATTITUDES OF SUBSERVIENCE TOWARDS PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

Most of the largest municipalities in Canada have begun to see themselves as real governments; capable of determining their own priorities and exercising political leadership. This however, is not true of many municipalities that still see themselves as creatures of the provinces. Adding to this perspective is the view held by some urban voters that municipal election issues are simply technical questions about specific services, and are not related to issues of political direction. This line of thinking promotes a narrow field of municipal interest attuned principally to levels of taxation, but not to strategic priorities such as the expansion of public transportation or policies for social inclusion. Seeing oneself as a government opens up a new way of thinking; instead of thinking of municipal policy in terms of a series of silo-ed activities directed from the provincial government, municipal governments can see themselves as being responsible and accountable to their citizens to improve the livability and inclusion of their cities.

THE UNSATISFACTORY RECORD IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

The municipal record in electing a more diverse set of politicians has been extremely disappointing. One finding presented in Electing a Diverse Canada (2008) is that municipal voters tended to elect elderly, white men who had lived in their neighbourhoods for more than 20 years. The data beg the question of whether or not voters see long-time residents as those most likely to keep taxes down, and if over-representation is therefore the outcome of most long-term residents being white. It also raises the question of whether or not it is an issue of municipal leadership. How many municipal leaders address the urgency for cities to treat the growing number of problems of our era? Homelessness, the substantial income divide, challenges associated with increasing diversity, and those of integration, are just some such issues. Perhaps if these issues were more visible, the need for a more diverse set of elected officials would be more evident. With a more diverse set of representatives, these major issues would be more visible and open to action. Whatever the reasons for a failure on behalf of certain municipalities to diversify their municipal governments, the record still falls short.

WHAT ARE SOME PROMISING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CCMARD IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS?

YOUTH

Engaging and mobilizing youth is a promising opportunity for two reasons. First, CCMARD can work to undo the harm that has been done to numerous non-white youth who have been stereotyped into pursuing restricted career paths and who have had their expectations dampened. Part of this work needs to be done by working with youth to understand the power of anti-discrimination work and to build their capacity to see themselves, not as others see them, but as they choose to be seen. Youth also need to play a role in leading CCMARD. There are some very good examples of youth engagement, but there have also been challenges on account that youth do not see the municipal arena as a priority area for their engagement. This is often for good reason as municipal governments have often treated them as peripheral and as citizens "in the process of becoming", rather than as full-fledged citizens.

FOOD

A second emerging arena for anti-discrimination work is ensuring equal access to healthy food. We know that immigrants show poorer levels of health after several years in Canada than when they arrived in Canada, and that access to healthy and culturally appropriate food is part of the solution. We know that poverty, limited mobility, age, and gender are all factors that can influence equal access to healthy food. Many municipalities already have interesting programs relating to food including; community gardens, collective kitchens, good food boxes, buses that bring good food to marginalized communities that lack access to healthy food, but more needs to be done to see these as significant areas for anti-discrimination work. Opportunities exist for CCMARD to encourage these types of programs and other food-related initiatives.

REACHING THE POTENTIAL OF MUNICIPAL INVOLVEMENT

Far from the commonly accepted view of the municipality as essentially a deliverer of basic services, one of the main roles of municipalities is to create, animate, and enhance public space and, therefore, illustrate the inclusive nature of cities where all can share public spaces and, through this, develop a sense of community and a shared space for collective decisions. For this to fully occur, it requires residents who understand the potential of municipal action for the quality of daily democratic life and municipal leaders willing to accept the challenges of using municipal resources to enhance the inclusionary nature of their communities. There is significant anti-discrimination work going on in Canadian municipalities but there is more to be done. An important resource for municipalities wanting to develop their capacities are support networks that can share information about what others are doing and can assure municipalities that they are alone in the fight against discrimination. Joining CCMARD provides such a support network, a series of new allies, and great information on good practices in anti-discrimination work. The work that has been to date within the framework of CCMARD evidences that municipalities are important site for anti-discrimination.

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