

Metropolis British Columbia Annual Research Retreat

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Summary of Proceedings

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Introduction

Forty-four participants, including representatives of all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and academic researchers, attended the ninth annual MBC Research Retreat, held in downtown Vancouver. After opening remarks by the Metropolis British Columbia Co-Directors, the meeting proceeded with a keynote speech by Deb Zehr from the Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development, which focused on the role of the province for present and future immigration policy in British Columbia (B.C.).

The meeting continued after a short lunch with the presentation of research findings of three recent projects funded by Metropolis. This session was followed by a panel discussion on the directions for the 2010 Call for Proposals and on the future of Metropolis British Columbia (MBC).

Welcome and Opening Remarks by Co-Directors

The two Co-Directors of MBC, Dan Hiebert and Krishna Pendakur, opened the retreat. **Krishna Pendakur** stressed that the goal of this retreat is to discuss research at MBC in a systematic way, rather than domain by domain as was done in the previous years. The reason for this is that this may be the last call for proposals MBC will ever have because of the restructuring of Metropolis at the national level.

Dan Hiebert drew attention to the importance of the next Call for Proposals and the urgency to undertake projects that can be meaningful and useful for all stakeholders. In order to do this as effectively as possible, MBC research funding for the fifth year will be added to the fourth year funding available at the next Call for Proposals. This will allow researchers to undertake more ambitious and onerous projects.

Dan Hiebert invited participants to submit proposals for workshops and papers for the next National Metropolis Conference “Immigration: Bringing the World to Canada”, which will take place in downtown Vancouver at the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre on March 23rd – 26th, 2011. The organisers expect around 800 - 1,000 people to attend. On March 23rd a series of pre-conference events will take place, including focus groups on specific issues and study tours, organised with the invaluable help of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the City of Vancouver and a number of immigrant settlement organisations. Plenary sessions and workshops will be scheduled for March 24th – 26th. The submission deadline for workshop proposals is November 1st, 2010. There will be around 80 traditional workshops, as well as around 20 roundtables. All additional information and instructions for submission are available from <http://metropolis2011.net/>.

Keynote speaker: Deb Zehr, Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development

The province of B.C. has taken a leading role within the field of research and practice concerning immigration policy. Although larger jurisdiction over immigration has been given to provinces dating back to 1971, most provinces did not take up an active role until the 1990s, with the exception of Quebec where the role of the province in the selection process has been much more prominent.

The main legislative tool that provinces have been using for the selection and recruitment of immigrants is the Provincial Nominee Program. B.C.’s role goes beyond the Provincial Nominee Program as a recruitment tool. The Province is also interested in planning the future number of newcomers by category of immigrant, and a particular focus in recent years has been put on the attraction and retention of international students. Another example of the involvement of the Province concerns the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. The Province has taken up interests and responsibilities concerning immigration that go far beyond what is mentioned in the immigration agreements that were signed by the Province. Temporary migrants create new dynamics that have not been sufficiently investigated by researchers and policy makers.

In recent years, the overall level of permanent immigrants has been stable at around 40,000 per annum in recent years. However, the number of people entering through the Federal Skilled Worker Program has declined. Conversely, the numbers of humanitarian and international student entries are on the rise.

The Provincial Nominee Program has proved to be a successful tool for rapid integration. However, the goal of rapid integration and that of positive long-term outcomes may not be aligned and more attention should be devoted to the long-term integration of people entering through the Provincial Nominee Program. In terms of short-term economic outcomes, individuals that entered through the Provincial Nominee Program have an average yearly income of \$79,000, compared to \$32,000 for people that entered through the Federal Skilled Worker Program.

According to the Province, within the next decade there will be 1.126 million jobs that will need to be filled in B.C., of which 626,000 will be out of attrition, the rest being new jobs. The growth in the resident population will not generate a sufficient growth in the labour supply, and therefore around one third of these jobs will need to be filled by new arrivals of immigrants.

The province will continue to be involved in a dialogue with all stakeholders regarding immigration in B.C., and will more actively pursue an evidence-based approach, for which we need detailed information about immigrants and their economic and social integration.

Reports: Research and Dissemination Project Summaries

Participants: Paul Bramadat (University of Victoria), Scott Graham (SPARC BC – Social Planning and Research Council of B.C.) and Kenny Zhang (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada)

Paul Bramadat spoke about his research project on religious diversity. The specific focus of the project has been on religious radicalisation and securitisation, and it involved both scholars and policy makers whose interests cover a spectrum between community advocacy and public safety. Two interrelated questions guided the research: ‘Why do people turn to religious radicalisation?’ and ‘How do society and the state frame groups as threats?’

Four major guidelines should shape research on radicalization and securitization: First, all generalizations ought to be resisted; this includes both the “ethnocentric” ones that posit particular religions as especially dangerous as well as the well-intentioned universalizing ones that posit all religions as basically the same (and basically good). Second, radicalization and securitization are dialectically related, such that it makes no sense to study either in isolation. Individuals who become radicalized are likely to have often irrational views about the kind of securitization to which they are subjected; those who choose to subject individuals to heightened scrutiny often have irrational views of the groups in question. Third, we should aim for an epistemological relativism when studying the claims of radicalized groups and individuals. To resist such imaginative leaps will make it impossible to understand the world views of the people involved. Fourth, we need to critically re-evaluate the disjuncture between media stereotypes of perpetrators (as ignorant, misled, and impoverished) and research on actual perpetrators (as often middle class, educated and independent). Fifth, the common view of the internet as just another way of communicating is limited and misleading. Many people who are liable to become radicalized and are therefore the subjects of state scrutiny function primarily in that reality, and the internet may represent their primary source that shapes their identity. The mollifying checks and balances that our face-to-face religious, ethnic, familial and social networks offer radicalized individuals may be severely compromised by the internet.

Scott Graham presented the work done by SPARC BC with the help of MBC concerning engagement and access to MBC research by immigrant settlement agencies. The foci were around the immigrant settlement agencies' connection to the research MBC has been involved in, the future of research in terms of procedure, and openness to various stakeholders.

Immigrant settlement agencies considered the work of MBC essential and beneficial to their activities. In terms of future directions many agencies rated accessibility as an important issue: there should be summary sheets of relevant research findings written in plain English and in multiple languages, the contacts of MBC to all the stakeholders should be kept strong, the involvement of researchers and practitioners alike is necessary.

Among the issues that are of greatest interest, immigrant settlement agencies mentioned the identification and promotion of best practices, research on anti-racism and inclusion policies, and on smaller geographies, the population of temporary workers and access to neighbourhood housing.

During the Q&A session a participant observed that community-based organisations that are willing to help researchers often do not have the resources to do so, and so more effort on partnerships should be spent at the proposal stage.

Kenny Zhang presented some of the findings from the project "Canadians Abroad", undertaken by the Asia Pacific Foundation with support of MBC and other organisations. The study estimates that the population of Canadian citizens that live outside Canada is around 2.8 million. Around 57 percent of these people are in the United States, Greater China, the United Kingdom and Australia. Around 4.5 percent of all naturalised Canadians and 1.33 percent of Canadian-born live abroad.

Among the many policy questions that this evidence can generate, one that is of considerable interest is related to the issue of integration or non-integration of immigrants. A question emerges around considering the probability of long-term retention in Canada as a factor entering Canada's policies around immigration quotas from different countries.

First Panel Discussion on the 2010 Call for Proposals and on the future of MBC

Participants: Melanie Stewart (Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development), Lynn Moran (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC), Annie Desgagné (Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

Melanie Stewart stressed the importance of the links between the research community and the government. The Strategic Information branch does research to support policy making across the

ministry. Together with other tools, the Strategic Information branch constructed an econometric model used to predict both labour demand and labour supply for British Columbia.

In the past, the primary focus of the ministry has been on refugees, now more research needs to be devoted to economic immigrants, and in particular to increase our knowledge of the specific needs of each socio-economic class to be able to meet those needs more effectively.

The province of British Columbia has a long-term commitment to evidence-based policy making, and in light of this recognises the value of MBC. In the future this cooperation may strengthen with additional funding by the province. The province of British Columbia will attempt to provide better data access to researchers, while at the same time valuing individual privacy and confidentiality. Internship programs could be another tool to help fill the gap between the province, academics and immigrant organisations.

Lynn Moran reinforces these considerations and advocated for research to be accessible to all practitioners in various communities in a form that they can understand. The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) has three main research areas: multiculturalism and health (a cooperation between the government, providers and communities), immigrant settlement, and multiculturalism and diversity.

During the last six years AMSSA has done extensive work on dissemination of MBC papers. In particular, they focused on works on the social determinants of health, so that people can access information on the functioning of the health care system for different populations and in different areas of the province.

Practitioners mentioned e-symposia as a very good way to reach all communities with training opportunities and to share research findings. Settlement outcomes and knowledge diffusion should be topics of future research by MBC.

Annie Desgagné of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) talked about some the topics that are of greatest importance in the BC context. These included international students, temporary migrants, and immigration and health in the context of an aging immigrant population.

The number of temporary foreign workers in BC increased by 83 percent between 2004 and 2009, making B.C. the province with the largest population of temporary foreign workers after Ontario. Despite this, there is still little information available on the profile of the typical temporary worker in BC and on their average labour market and health outcomes.

Other questions that are of interest to CIC include the role of citizenship in the formation of a national identity, differences in the level of civil engagement of immigrants in cities and rural and remote communities. There is also an interest in the integration of refugees in British Columbia, what services

are available to them, the gaps there are, and what their future outcomes are, especially in the case of refugee children and youth.

During the time for questions and comments, a participant raised the issue of a possible disconnect between the questions that policy makers and especially the government have and those that are addressed by researchers. Dan Hiebert and Krishna Pendakur argued that this disconnect is largely driven by data availability rather than by diverging agenda and goals. Many of the questions that governments would like to see answered cannot be addressed with the data that is currently available to researchers. Policies are rarely implemented with a built-in evaluation component, and as a consequence it is often impossible to credibly evaluate their effects.

Open discussion on the 2010 MBC Call for Proposals and on the Renewal of MBC

Moderators: Dan Hiebert and Krishna Pendakur, MBC Co-Directors

A participant argued that there is a demand for less technical projects for which a faculty member may not be necessary. Dan Hiebert commented that there is a route available for research teams that do not consider it necessary to have an affiliated researcher that is also a faculty member at a Canadian university. The method is to apply for one of MBC's Dissemination Grants, which are smaller but do not have the requirement of the presence of a MBC affiliated faculty member.

Other participants stressed the importance of producing systematic literature reviews around a particular topic that can be accessed by the government and by practitioners. These literature reviews should give a critical evaluation of the various relevant contributions, rather than only a neutral summary.

Dan Hiebert and Krishna Pendakur questioned the audience about the possibility of undertaking a larger project as part of the next Call for Proposals, which could potentially tackle more complex issues but would also absorb a large proportion of MBC funding for the fourth and fifth year. This project would have to see researchers, the government and a number of immigrant organisations involved. The majority of the participants were in favour of this proposal. Participants made suggestions as to the content of this large project:

- Employability of immigrants, soft skills development and English language proficiency;
- How do we measure success and integration? In order to implement outcome-based policies, we need to define what these outcomes ought to be;

- How can the successes of refugees be measured? Measures of mental health and subjective well-being among refugees as well as skilled workers is important, given the difficulties many of them face;
- Temporary residents, (which includes temporary foreign workers but also international students, working holiday visa holders etc.), is a population that can only be studied with an expensive project because there is no good dataset.