

Vancouver Centre of Excellence



Research on Immigration and
Integration in the Metropolis

Commentary Series

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**RIIM Research Consultation Retreat
September 7, 2006**

Diane Coulombe

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RIIM

Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis

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Views expressed in this manuscript are those of the author(s) alone. For more information, contact the Co-directors of the Centre, Dr. Don DeVoretz, Department of Economics, SFU (devoretz@sfu.ca) and Dr. Daniel Hiebert, Department of Geography, UBC (dhiebert@geog.ubc.ca).

**RIIM Research Consultation Retreat
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Summary of Proceedings

Diane Coulombe
Senior Research and Librarian, RIIM

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by

Dr. D. Coulombe

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Introduction

The fifth annual research retreat was attended by over 40 participants. As in the past, there were representatives from all levels of government, non-government organizations, and academic researchers. The retreat was built around four full-panel discussions arranged thematically. In the past, the objective of these panels was to serve as starting points to set research priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. This year, however, panels were structured to highlight and to orientate the main research issues and to further involve RIIM's policy partners in a dialogue. With that in mind, all panels focused on RIIM accomplishments of recent years, with an emphasis on its ability to draw from the local environment to bring immigration issues to the national level. The first panel focused on re-thinking multiculturalism, the second on issues pertaining to immigrants in the labour market, the third on the connection between research and policy, and the fourth on RIIM's role in shaping the national debate on immigration. In each panel four speakers gave 15-minute presentations and a question period followed.

The day began with Guest Speaker Mario Pinto (SFU Vice President Research) highlighting RIIM's various contributions to the university community and also to the community at large. Mr. Pinto considered the support and training given to graduate students at SFU and UBC as one of the main accomplishments of RIIM over the years. He also thanked RIIM's various funding agencies for their continuing support.

Next I will provide a brief summary of the presentations made in each panel. These discussions form the basis for reflection on future research themes in the event that RIIM funding is renewed at the end of the 2006-07 fiscal year.

Panel 1: Thinking about Multiculturalism: Perspectives on the Canadian Experiment

Facilitator: Meharoona Ghani (Ministry of Attorney General of BC)

Participants: Wendy Roth (Sociology, UBC), David Ley (Geography, UBC), Parin Dossa (Anthropology, SFU), Krishna Pendakur (Economics, SFU)

Wendy Roth began by comparing the success of Canadian multicultural policies to the reception of immigrants in the U.S. by stating that:

- a) the rate of naturalization of immigrants is higher in Canada than in the U.S.;
- b) the socio-economic and civic performances of immigrants are better in Canada than in the U.S.

Wendy further compared the admission rates of the economic and the family classes of immigrants for Canada and the U.S. Since Canada admits a much higher proportion of economic immigrants than the U.S., Wendy recommends that the following questions be kept in mind when comparing Canadian multiculturalism with the reception of immigrants in the U.S.:

- Is Canada actually “cherry-picking” its immigrants by favoring the economic class?
- To what extent is the success of multiculturalism more attributable to selection factors thanks to the context of reception?

David Ley invited the audience to reflect on the debate around multiculturalism raging in Canada and Europe. In light of the terrorist-driven violent events of recent years, David warned against lending faith to the following media-driven misrepresentations:

- a) multiculturalism separates, encouraging parallel lives and a lack of cohesion and integration;
- b) multiculturalism is complicit in social dysfunction.

David reminded us that the intent of multiculturalism was integration, not segregation. He also noted that multiculturalism has evolved, its focus now on guaranteeing groups’ rights to respect, to employment equity and to the absence of racism in society.

Parin Dossa reminded the audience that multiculturalism was adopted in 1971 by the Canadian federal government as a measure to ease the tension between the English and the French linguistic groups. She emphasized that multiculturalism was created for visible minorities, not for English and French speakers. The ensuing structural polarization between visible minorities and the “founding peoples” has not been diluted ever since the adoption of the multiculturalism policy.

Parin examined the representations of Muslims disseminated by the media in the post-9/11 era to better understand the implications of contemporary multiculturalism. Overall, the discourse behind the coverage of the 9/11 events and subsequent violent terrorist events depicted the West as the savior of the non-Western world. Further, set in a feminist framework, the discourse became, “white men saving brown women from brown men.” Moreover, Parin deplors that multiculturalism has failed marginalized Afghan women in Canada where the focus is on military involvement.

Parin argued that visible minorities have not been able to secure substantial citizenship rights. Social justice and equality for all should stem from a multiculturalism policy unfettered by historical differences, foster healthy diversity, and welcome pluralism.

Krishna Pendakur presented an overview of the main findings resulting from RIIM-sponsored research on visible minorities in Canada’s workplaces. He alleged that RIIM had been spectacularly successful in promoting research on Canadian visible minorities, and that very little was known of their performance in the labour market pre-RIIM. Some of Krishna’s and his co-author’s findings on immigrants’ economic performance follow:

- immigrant women tend to do better than immigrant men;
- visible minorities in Vancouver and Toronto tend to do better than others;
- overall the Chinese do better than other visible minorities.

With regard to the future of immigrants in the labour market, Krishna offered not only a pessimistic view due to the over-time downward trend in earnings, but also an optimistic view since immigrants

can move to Toronto and Vancouver where signs of a healthier immigrant labour market were apparent.

Krishna deplored the inappropriateness of blunt policy tools suited to homogeneous targets when visible minorities differed greatly amongst themselves. He argued that this mismatch between policies and needs occurs since our society tolerates differences in aspirations and preferences while it concurrently rejects differences in treatment.

Panel 2: Intersections of the Labour Market and Immigration: Emerging Issues

Facilitator: Kenny Zhang (Asia Pacific Foundation; Member of the Vancouver Mayor's Working Group on Immigration)

Participants: Clifford Bell (Language College and Career Services, Immigrant Services Society of BC), Roslyn Kunin (R. Kunin Associates), Silvano Tocchi (Foreign Credential Recognition Program, HRSDC)

Discussant: Robert Mundie (Strategic Priorities, CIC)

Clifford Bell opened the panel with his presentation on the effects of the labour market on immigrants' employment. He explained that the primary mandate of ISS is to provide language training and employment counseling to newcomers, and he provided some numbers about his organization: ISS caters yearly to about 29,000 clients, employs 60 staff in five locations in the Greater Vancouver area and derives 75% of its funding from the government and the remainder from clients.

Clifford identified five considerations that hinder the smooth integration of immigrants into the Canadian labour market:

- many immigrants get their pre-arrival information about employment in Canada by word of mouth. As a result, their information is skewed and often obsolete by the time of their arrival. Moreover, since the problem of credential recognition of skilled immigrants persists, an increasing number of frustrated immigrants go back home and “bad-mouth” Canada after their experience here;
- the language skills of many newcomers upon arrival are insufficient to gain immediate entry into the labour market;
- immigrants need to hone their communications skills and cultural skills before they can secure employment in Canadian firms;
- mismatches between employers' demands and immigrants' qualifications are frequent.

For example, highly skilled immigrants with low-level language abilities can only aspire to entry-level positions, or to part-time or temporary work.

In response to the problems experienced by its clients, ISS strives to strengthen its connections to the employer community by opening and maintaining two-way communication channels between immigrants who need to work and employers who need to develop an understanding of immigrants as potential employees.

Roslyn Kunin referred to the BC labour market of today as the tightest in 30 years. Human resources now act as a limiting factor, with economic activities postponed in the construction, mining, trucking, health, and oil and gas sectors.

Roslyn saw a mismatch between the local and immigrant populations and the labour market. She listed various factors that influence the labour shortage:

- the small number of young people entering the labour market;
- favoring First Nations workers cannot make a difference since natives represent only 5% of the Canadian population;
- late retirement means that the age of the labour force will increase overall;
- the trend towards automation in BC implies a need for fewer workers with skills;
- Canada has to compete for desirable immigrants and should revise its selection criteria to attract needed trades people rather than university-educated immigrants.

Roslyn recognized the need for new approaches to deal with the language problems experienced by immigrants and to prevent discrimination towards visible and audible minorities. She suggested that work permits valid for up to two years be granted to young people who want to come to Canada; the young could be landed thereafter upon request. This would be a welcome departure from the current rules whereby foreign graduates can apply for citizenship after two years of residency only if they work in their own field of specialization, a near impossible achievement.

Silvano Tocchi began by stating that, while 80% of immigrants to Canada find full-time employment, only 42% do so in their field of expertise. He attributed this situation to the newcomers' lack of Canadian work experience, to the non-recognition of their credentials, and to low language proficiency. Silvano explained that the main obstacles to foreign credential recognition (FCR) were:

- a very large number of assessment bodies and agencies;
- the duplicate levers at the federal and provincial government levels;
- individual employers are the ones who ultimately decide whether immigrants' credentials fit their needs.

Currently the FCR Program seeks to build the FCR capacity in BC and to improve the integration of immigrants in the labour market sectorally. In the local construction sector efforts are made to offer Canadian work experience to workers; local manufacturers are also called upon to facilitate the matching and placement of engineers.

To improve the outcomes of FCR, Silvano suggested that the credential assessment process and the language training of immigrants should take place before they arrive in Canada. Moreover, general information and databases about the Canadian labour market should be made available abroad. He finally referred to the new federal Bridge to Work program whose principal components include information prior to arrival, assessment and counseling, and targeted program interventions, such as skills upgrading, mentoring, cultural orientation and supported work experience in the Canadian labour market.

Robert Mundie brought to the forefront various aspects of the three panel presentations.

With regard to the anger and frustration experienced by some immigrants who lose the status they were used to in their country of origin, Robert reiterated the difficulty of managing expectations and disappointments, even if immigrants are forewarned that they may encounter problems during their settlement in Canada. He also pointed out that immigrants' self-assessment of their language proficiency often tended to be higher than their level as determined by standardized tests.

Robert mentioned that Ottawa held frequent consultations with stakeholders to reduce the labour shortage and he observed that there were limits to what immigration could do to alleviate it. He added that Ottawa was considering temporary immigrant flows as a possible stop-gap measure. He mentioned that the adaptability of immigrants had become as important as the skills they might contribute to the Canadian labour market.

Finally, Robert remarked that the problematic surrounding credential recognition did not apply to foreign students trained in Canada who were now allowed to work in Canada and encouraged to stay after graduation.

Panel 3: The Research-Policy Nexus: Ideas for a Better Connection

Facilitator: Barry Halliday (Ottawa Metropolis Project Team)

Participants: Tung Chan (S.U.C.C.E.S.S.), Dan Hiebert (RIIM; Geography, UBC), Tom Jensen (Ministry of Attorney General of BC), Neil Bouwer (Learning Policy, HRSDC), Robert Mundie (Strategic Priorities, CIC)

Tung Chan first reminded the audience that, created in 1973, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. now employs 350 people in 12 offices, oversees 9,000 volunteers, and offers services in 17 languages at its airport location. It totalled 560,000 contacts with immigrants in 2005.

According to Tung, the advocacy role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on behalf of immigrants takes place at three levels: at the bureaucratic level through consultation, at the political level via briefings, and at the community level where NGOs become opinion leaders. In addition, the survival of NGOs largely depends on government grants and on the on-going justification of the services and programs they offer. Since NGOs lack funding for community and volunteer development, they have to adopt cost-recovery strategies, including user-pay programs.

Tung concluded by offering the following insights on ways to strengthen the connection between research and NGOs:

- research should be conducted on issues highly relevant to NGOs' clients, such as language training;
- research based on reliable data could be used to justify the existence of NGOs' services and programs;
- RIIM can help NGOs to strengthen their own data collection capacity;
- RIIM can facilitate meetings and overall communication between NGOs that often have overlapping mandates.

Dan Hiebert set the stage for his exploration of the interface between policy and RIIM by characterizing two protagonists as follows: on the one hand, the “policy side” must monitor policy outcomes, needs real-time information on the quality of programs, has easy access to enormous databases and can generate new ones, *but* it has limited research capacity due to budget constraints and limited time to interact with outside researchers. On the other hand, on the “academic side”, researchers are groomed for scholarship and interested in rather abstract pursuits, do not call on their imagination when they access databases, and by tradition are more comfortable working solo than through collaboration.

While Dan recognized that policy makers and academics operate within different reward systems, address different questions and use different networks to answer them, he summed up the positive aspects of the dichotomy between policy and academia: policy needs more research; academics can offer broad perspectives and conduct rigorous research; academics want influence and strive for resources, especially data.

Dan described the existing various bridging strategies between the policy and the academic worlds by proposing the four following models:

- the passive model: areas of research overlap by hit and miss;
- the active model #1: research is contractual, whereby the government pays and gets what it wants;
- the active model #2: the Memorandum of Understanding format, like that of Metropolis;
- the active model #3: the collaborative team-based research design is built out of compromise, requiring very flexible participants; overall a process complicated by issues of accountability and differing work cultures.

Tom Jensen sought to offer ideas to *broaden* the connection between research and policy by asking, not whether or not research was relevant, but rather how to make research *more* relevant. He believed that knowledge ends up influencing policy making in any case.

Tom suggested that RIIM could network with those organizations called upon by the BC government to find out if their research interests overlap. He mentioned the Asia-Pacific Trade Council, the BC Progress Board for economic performance issues and the social index, the Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors’ Issues, and the Competition Council for temporary workers.

Tom commented that, since immigration touches on most policy areas, RIIM researchers could make submissions to, and/or become board members of relevant associations and organizations. An illustration of such involvement was Dan Hiebert’s participation in the Joint Federal Provincial Immigration Advisory Council for BC. In sum, RIIM could strike partnerships with various stakeholders in immigration, the BC Chamber of Commerce to name only one.

Neil Bouwer offered a diagram representing the policy making process in the current federal government environment. In essence, the decision-making stage central to the process starts from a vision translated into options funneled down as advice to decision makers. Once policies are adopted, the funnel widens as various measures are implemented. An open evaluation of these measures completes the policy-making cycle.

Two vectors accompany the policy-making process: *support* for the initial vision must be strong and broad-based to ensure the progress of ideas through the process described above, and it reaches its lowest point in the evaluation phase when the work is basically completed; conversely, the *challenge*

of transforming a vision into options, then into advice to policy makers grows as time elapses and finally culminates when the evaluation of the implementation is performed.

Research linked to policy making must be integrated, proactive and engaging, and Neil gave as an example the child care policy recently adopted by the conservative government.

Robert Mundie gave the following clear hints to researchers to engage policy makers:

- research must be relevant and convey a succinct and clear message;
- researchers must know their audience so that policies can be drawn from their results;
- researchers must maintain a dialogue with policy makers;
- databases must be exploited;
- the federal government favours quantitative research based on large samples that allow implications to be drawn at the national level.

Panel 4: Locally Relevant and Nationally Significant: How RIIM Research Informs National Debate

Facilitator: Marilyn McGrath (CIC)

Participants: Jennifer Hyndman (Geography, SFU), Neil Guppy (Sociology, UBC), Don DeVoretz (RIIM; Economics, SFU), Arlene McLaren (Sociology; Women's Studies, SFU)

Jennifer Hyndman set out to illustrate the vital role of research in fine-tuning and understanding the implications of settlement policy. Having worked extensively on the settlement of refugees, Jennifer noted that research is recursive in that it shapes and is shaped by policy makers.

Over the last five years, Jennifer has worked closely with refugee service providers. She examined the settlement of Kosovar refugees based on the regionalization policy and that of Acehnese refugees settled in the Vancouver area as per a policy of centralization. She also sought to identify the measures and the geographical areas associated with the risk of immigrant homelessness.

Jennifer and her associates conducted their research according to Community-University Research Principles based on the following parameters:

- equitable partnership;
- appropriate recognition and compensation;
- respect for findings;
- dissemination of culturally appropriate information;
- precedence of participants over research priorities.

Neil Guppy talked about his current research on attitudes towards immigration from 1975 to 2005 and on media representations of immigration in Canada for the same time period. He went on to give reasons why we should care if the attitude of Canadians towards immigrants turns negative: i) the immigrant population of Canada is continually increasing, ii) the number of attacks on foreigners is increasing, and iii) immigrants make up an increasingly larger proportion of the Canadian population.

Theories posit that individuals' attitudes towards immigrants become negative as a response to economic insecurity; at the structural level, attitudes are negative when the economy is weak and

when the size of the immigrant group increases. Based on Gallup polls and Environics surveys, Neil's findings showed that:

- attitude changes towards immigrants are incremental;
- sharp changes are observed during periods of economic recessions;
- support for immigration has increased over the last years.

Don DeVoretz proposed to demonstrate how research ideas percolate from the grassroots up by providing the background for his interest in return migration to China. Don was initially made aware of the return migration phenomenon through talks with Lilian To, late director of SUCCESS, in 1997. Some time later, Vancouver realtors informed the public that they had a surplus of high-end properties for sale. Then the *World Journal* asked Don in an interview why the Chinese were leaving. Don did not know the answer to that question and endeavoured to find out. A few years later over 500 Chinese have filled out a web-based questionnaire posted up on RIIM's site, and face-to-face interviews have been conducted in Vancouver, Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

The Chinese leave Canada mainly because of the gap between their expectations and the Canadian reality. Half the Chinese immigrants contacted felt that they had not achieved their goals in Canada, and 75% of them were not hopeful to do so within five years. Instead, they were going to go back to China after they obtained their Canadian citizenship. Moreover, they hoped that their children would do better than themselves. The immigrants likely to leave had not made use of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. or of other settlement agencies and deplored the lack of credential recognition.

Finally, Don brought his findings in the national arena via testimony to the House of Commons Committee on Citizenship and Immigration with the following questions: Should limits be imposed on Canadian citizenship?, Is the Canadian Chinese diaspora a liability or an asset?, Should Canada offer protection to its citizens in war situations?

Arlene McLaren has been conducting qualitative research involving elderly immigrant South Asian women sponsored by their parents. Arlene set the stage when she mentioned that the number of admissions in the family class had dropped by 50% from 2004 to 2005, but that the government had said that numbers of family-class immigrants would be boosted to 17 or 19,000 in 2006, after much lobbying. She reminded the audience that older family members are generally depicted as burdens to families and to Canadians, since, unlike independent immigrants, they cannot readily find employment upon arrival in Canada.

Arlene presented the following salient points of a preliminary analysis of interviews conducted via Punjabi interpreters with sponsored elderly women:

- sponsorship was not a unidirectional relationship since grandparents also offered financial support to families;
- women often took care of many children while they did housework;
- women played a crucial role in the house while their relatives were working since they cooked and cleaned;
- some women confined to their relatives' home viewed Canada as a prison;
- some women worked seasonally on farms seven days a week;
- some women depended on their family for mobility;
- relationships with sponsors could often be difficult, with some families demanding to be paid back by the sponsored women.

All in all, Arlene's work indicated that sponsored parents assisted families while they could also feel obligated to pay back their sponsorship.

Conclusion

The overall objectives of this fifth annual retreat were clearly achieved: RIIM research projects and their policy relevance were highlighted. If such compelling evidence of money well spent does not generate further funding, presenters cannot be blamed since they were well-prepared, some even riveting. Thoughtful panelists initiated discussions followed by lively question periods which needed to be curtailed given time constraints.

The much-maligned Canadian multiculturalism policy was not only revisited but also set in international, feminist and labour-market perspectives. In this context, the quandary of immigrants failing to find employment during a period of labour shortage was eloquently brought up, with the problem of credential recognition given special attention.

The case for more research useful to community partners was unequivocally made, and RIIM was encouraged to seek out new provincial partners. A stylized pathway to influence policy-making at the federal level was outlined, and various suggestions to optimize research impacts were offered. In addition, insights into the web of connections between policy-makers and researchers were shared.

Finally, past, present and future plans for RIIM research were described and convincingly situated in the national arena.

Since immigration flows to Canada are not likely to stop in the immediate nor the distant future, based on the evidence of this retreat RIIM can continue to provide valuable information to its partners and to policy makers. Like other Metropolis centres, RIIM's contributions to informed debates on immigration at the local, regional, provincial, national, and international levels are crucial. If ever in doubt, the dedication and competence of RIIM researchers shone throughout this last retreat, and one hopes that further decisions touching immigrant lives will be made with rational and thorough research-based input.

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