

Title: Engaging the Migrant Community Outside of Canada's Main Metropolitan Centres. Community Engagement—the Welcoming Community Initiative and the Case of Greater Victoria

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Research Question:

What are the opportunities and constraints in implementing a community engagement strategy in smaller urban centres (such as Victoria), centres that often have few well established community organizations representing immigrant and ethno-cultural minorities? What are the main arenas for political participation and institutional change? To what degree and in what form are the main stakeholders involved in the political process and how do they interact with different levels of government in promoting institutional change and new policy initiatives?

Importance:

Political inclusion is one of the pivotal modes of promoting the successful integration of newcomers and minorities into Canadian society. This paper conceptualizes the urban context as both the primary site for political debates over the meaning of cultural diversity in public life and as an arena for policy formation.

Research Findings:

With a focus on political inclusion outside of Canada's main metropolitan centres, the authors argue that a meaningful community engagement process relies on a political-discursive and institutional context that is locally specific. The case of Victoria demonstrates that the relative small size of ethno-cultural groups, the severe financial constraints that settlement agencies have to face, and the legacy of relative indifference in particular by municipal authorities regarding issues of migration and integration all create a challenging environment for the implementation of a politically significant community engagement process.

Implications:

A genuine political engagement process is critically dependent on the ongoing fostering of trust among community stakeholders, as well as the facilitation of community involvement through the provision of necessary organizational resources. Accordingly, smaller urban centres require a long-term strategy designed to engage community stakeholders as well as to foster exchanges between those stakeholders and representatives in the (municipal and provincial) policy community.