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ABSTRACT

Planning Amidst Diversity: The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Urban and Suburban Greater Toronto

This dissertation explores the varied ways in which demographic changes from immigration are challenging traditional planning practice in Canada. The research is tied together around three themes: diversity, planning and citizenship. These themes provide the means to examine the impact of ethnocultural diversity on participation and belonging as seen through local decision making. Focusing on the experience of the Toronto area, the redevelopment of George Brown College in the urban community of Kensington, and the development of retail condominiums (or Asian malls) in the suburban community of Markham are used as case studies.

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As always I am indebted to my parents for instilling in me a desire to reach. And for times when the task seemed too daunting I thank Ted, who never failed to be my support, my cheerleader, my friend.

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CHAPTER NINE: Multicultural Planning and Citizenship

Canada's Urban Immigration: The Themes of this Dissertation

Immigrants represent 17.4 per cent of Canada's total population, and a much higher percentage in many cities. In Toronto, for example, immigrants account for 42 per cent of the population (Statistics Canada, 1997). Choosing to settle in cities for a variety of reasons (including employment, access to services, and cultural family ties), immigrants are changing Canada's urban landscape. Their impact, however, is not simply the result of growing numbers. Changes to federal immigration policy have contributed to a growing ethnocultural diversity in Canadian cities. Moreover, immigrant settlement is changing, with some newcomers not entering Canadian society through more traditional inner-city areas. The result is that Canada's urban and suburban communities are experiencing similar demographic changes -- albeit in different ways, and to varying degrees. These changes require adjustment on the part of both newcomers and residents alike.

In this dissertation, two case studies were used to examine how ethnocultural diversity challenges the way citizens participate and belong in their communities. Using urban and suburban planning processes as a lens through which to explore these challenges, land use planning case studies were used to examine the link between immigration and cities in general, and the impact of ethnocultural diversity on participation and belonging as seen through local decision-making in particular. What emerged can be addressed in terms of three inter-related themes: diversity, planning and citizenship.

Diversity

As was described in Chapter Three, the ethnocultural diversity that characterizes Canada's cities is the product of the evolution of Canadian immigration policy. Beginning with overtly racist policies and regulations in the first half of this century, significant revisions were made to the Immigration Act in 1976, with an aim to creating a fairer, universal immigration policy. While the motives for this shift, and the degree to which discrimination was removed from Canada's immigration system are disputed (Hawkins, 1988; Troper, 1993; Satzewich, 1989), these revisions mark a discernible change in Canadian immigration. Canadian immigration has shifted from a domination of European immigrants in favour of Asian newcomers over the last 25 years. In fact, Canadian society is now extremely diverse, with immigrants arriving from all over the globe. This reality is evident in Canada's cities, especially Toronto and Vancouver.

Although most Canadian cities, and all of the largest ones, are experiencing the effects of ethnocultural diversity resulting from immigration, their experiences are not uniform or universal. Toronto is an interesting location to explore the impact of diversity, because beyond the large number of immigrants that settle in the Toronto area -- it is home to one-third of Canada's total immigration, and attracts 42 per cent of new arrivals (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997; Statistics Canada, 1997) -- it is also a metropolitan region with both multicultural urban and suburban communities contained within its boundaries. As was discussed at length in Chapter Three, this is a reflection of changing settlement patterns as the socio-economic status of Canada's immigrants has shifted.

Kensington, a long-time immigrant reception area in the urban inner-core of Toronto and the subject of Chapters Four and Five, is a good example of traditional immigration settlement patterns. As Canadian immigration policy has evolved and the source countries of immigration
have changed over the last century, layers of ethnocultural diversity have taken hold, evidenced in the community's architecture, businesses and residents. Given its long history with immigration, ethnocultural diversity is a distinct part of life in Kensington for those who live, work and visit the community. Diversity has also wrought a series of cleavages and tensions between groups and individuals. Yet when presented with an issue of community-wide concern in the George Brown College redevelopment (discussed in Chapter Five), Kensington was able to overcome these divisions. Not everyone in the community agreed on what should be done with the site, or the role they should play in the decision-making process. Through the work of a core group of individuals who formed the Working Group, however, an ultimately successful community planning process was undertaken that strove for consensus amongst Kensington's internal divisions.

Chapter Six introduced Markham: a dynamic, economically-thriving suburban community that has undergone rapid demographic changes over the past decade. Markham is a good example of the new immigration settlement patterns that are being facilitated by Canada's business immigration programs, and federal policy-makers' preference for economically self-sufficient immigrants. This new diversity poses a challenge for local decision-makers who face a community straining to adjust to rapid demographic changes. Economic immigrants settling in suburban communities may not need the traditional settlement services of employment and language training, yet as Markham's political tensions over Asian immigrants and the development of Asian malls reveal (discussed in Chapter Seven), these newcomers are not automatically integrating into their new suburban community. In Markham, the political battle that erupted out of a local politician's statements over the impacts of Asian immigration was a symptom of rapid demographic changes. While local planners see retail condominiums as an innovative development alternative, to many in the community they are a striking example of growing Asian immigration and the visible impact this immigration is having on the social and economic life of Markham.

Planning

Immigration is an area of federal jurisdiction, but not an area of exclusive federal policy activity. The federal government is mandated to consult with the provinces over its annual immigration plan, although in practice the priority assigned to provincial involvement has been at the discretion of individual federal ministers (Vineberg, 1987: 316). Beyond federal planning of immigration inflows, provinces have actual interests in immigration settlement, particularly in the areas of education, health and welfare. With some flexibility in the role of provinces in immigration policy and implementation, "provinces have as much or as little responsibility in immigration as they want and are capable of assuming" (Dalton, 1976: 80). As a result, some provinces (most notably Quebec) have chosen to take a more active role in immigration than others.

At the local level, the nonprofit sector plays a large role in immigrant settlement, often the primary source of service delivery for both federal and provincial immigration programs. Municipalities have a much less defined interest in immigration, yet given the increasingly visible ethnocultural diversity found in Canadian cities, this may change. Local governments with the longest history of diversity have understandably done the most in addressing urban immigration and multiculturalism, with efforts such as targeted grants, race relations, translation services and equity or access programs (Frisken and Wallace, 1998).

In cities like Toronto, where immigrants represent a sizable portion of the population (42 per cent), the impacts of immigration and ethnocultural diversity reach beyond these specific areas, and into the general functioning of municipal government. In particular, the reality of multiculturalism is colliding with established assumptions in everyday planning practice. Planners often use demographic analysis to make decisions about economic and physical growth, so an understanding of how their community is changing is undoubtedly useful to the practice of planning. More significant are the challenges planners face in facilitating public participation in local decision-making. Traditional planning tools and practices that assume a homogeneous
public or neglect language barriers and ethnocultural differences can prove ineffective in multicultural communities. Planners in these communities are forced to recognize that a diverse population not only requires diversity in the way services are delivered, but also structural changes to the process of planning so that diversity may be reflected at the decision-making tables and in the policies and plans created.

In Kensington, both the informal and formal planning process attempted to solicit participation from the community’s ethnoculturally diverse population with translation services and multilingual documentation. Despite these efforts, some of those involved acknowledged that the newest immigrants and those most marginalized from sources of power and influence were absent. Alternatively, in Markham, ethnocultural diversity was never directly addressed in the planning process. Yet the new development form of retail condominiums originated in the community’s demographic changes, and a neutral planning approach to ethnocultural diversity did not avoid messy political battles, as the “Carole Bell incident” clearly showed.

As was argued in Chapter Eight, planning is a profession rooted in the neutral application of plans and policies, where diversity is treated as an exceptional circumstance to be accommodated. Urban and suburban multiculturalism, however, is not a passing trend in Canada. If planners are to be successful in creating and maintaining communities where all inhabitants feel comfortable, the reality of ethnocultural diversity must be reflected in the process of local decision-making and the evolution of pluralistic visions of plans and policies. This requires a recognition that ethnocultural diversity is already imbedded in the social, economic and political construction of the city, and is not something that can be adequately addressed through periodic accommodation when tensions arise.

Citizenship

Involvement in local decision-making can be an active expression of community membership. Frequently described in this dissertation in terms of the challenges posed by diversity to “participation” and “belonging”, conceptually what has been explored is citizenship in the two communities. Citizenship in this sense goes beyond formal rights and obligations, and encompasses the active practices of decision-making in local communities. Thus the planning process offers a way to explore how citizens participate and belong in their communities.

In this dissertation, “community” was used in both a sociological and spatial sense, and was the level of analysis for the case study research. As explained in Chapter Two, Markham and Kensington are communities of obvious unequal size, yet both evoke a mental and physical boundary of belonging for residents. The character of their bounded spaces, however, is strikingly different.

Both Kensington and Markham are ethnoculturally diverse communities, but are distinguished by their distinct quality of life. Discussed in terms of community solidarity, Chapter Eight noted that urban/suburban differences go a long way in explaining what is different between Markham and Kensington. Patterns of communication, sources of ethnocultural diversity, expectations of the planning process, and the values of residents differed greatly between the two case studies, and reflect the urban or suburban context in which local decision-making occurred. Although the planning process in each case study was identical -- developer brings a proposal to the planning department, planners make recommendations and report to Council -- how that process worked in practice, and in particular the level and location of influence members in each community had was very different (see Figure 9.1).

In the Markham case study, the community had influence over local decision-making to a very limited degree. One avenue was through the traditional planning venue of the public meeting. Community members in this particular case had additional access to Council through the
presentations made at the Mayor's Advisory Council, and through the concerns they brought to their elected representatives. Community influence over developers was marginal. It is worth noting, however, the community's demographics was a primary motive for developers bringing the development proposals to Council.

By contrast, in the Kensington case study the community had greater influence over local decision-making due to their proactive approach. The planning department played a hands-off role for much of the process, but the community was able to exert influence upon both Council and prospective developers through their intensive lobbying efforts.

As was explained in the beginning of Chapter Eight, these two communities are not generic examples of urban and suburban planning. For example, an interest in protecting Kensington's unique ethnoculturally diverse character was in part what made the redevelopment of a significant plot of land a community concern, and influenced efforts on the part of community leaders and the City's planning department to reach out and develop an inclusive planning process. In Markham, ethnocultural differences contributed to an alternative development form spawning widespread political tensions. Planners approached the community's planning concerns with a technical and neutral perspective, leaving it to the politicians to address diversity and the problems of community solidarity.
Multicultural Planning and Citizenship

Incorporating the multicultural reality of Canadian society into a substantive understanding of citizenship remains a challenge not only for national decision-makers, but also for local decision-makers. How members of multicultural local communities, often in Canada’s larger urban centres, may actively participate in their community is not at all clear to urban and suburban planners. Yet as was evident in this research, ethnocultural diversity does in fact enter the realm of urban and suburban planning. As Canadian cities become increasingly diverse places, the practice of planning must recognize and reflect this reality.

Ethnocultural diversity, in combination with urban or suburban concerns, presents a challenge for planners. A reality that is changing Canadian cities, ethnocultural diversity does not fit well with
the neutral language of planning legislation, or the tendency within traditional planning frameworks to see difference as something to be accommodated as an exceptional circumstance. For those planners who recognize the challenges ethnocultural diversity poses and seek to develop inclusionary participation strategies and even alternative planning practices (as was posited at the end of Chapter Eight), they will be entering the terrain of the practice of local citizenship. That is, in adapting the process of local decision-making and addressing the importance of participation, planners will be working towards improving the quality of community membership, or achieving substantive local citizenship. While this would require a noticeable shift away from traditional planning assumptions of a “public interest” and the neutrality of technical planning decision-making, it need not necessarily demand wholly new planning outcomes. Nor, for that matter, is the suggestion being made that planners in and of themselves have the means to ensure substantive citizenship for community members. What needs to be addressed in planning practice, however, is that planning decisions are not neutral, and that the process of planning is an important venue for the practice of substantive local citizenship within communities.

Within the context of this dissertation, the two case studies illustrated the challenges for both belonging and participation in ethnoculturally diverse communities. Interview participants readily identified Markham as a vibrant, suburban community that was different from the more urban Toronto. Many expressed a very conscious decision to locate in Markham. A sense of belonging to a shared community, however, was not present among the participants. While some referred to Markham’s historic roots as a point of identity, the reality of a population composed 40 per cent of immigrants makes shared history an unlikely source of solidarity. Despite Markham representing a social and geographic boundary that residents identified with, a substantive community membership (or citizenship) beyond their shared status as Markham residents was not evident. Clear cleavages exist within the community, cleavages that emerged as divisive political tension, as was described in Chapter Seven. Moreover, participation in decision-making was not universally achieved in Markham. In fact, ethnicity, length of time in the community, and the particular issue at hand all combined to create variable local participation. Home to a newly multicultural population, Markham offered a shared suburban status, but there is very little evidence that the practice of such a status translates into anything resembling substantive local citizenship. That is, that people took meaning from their collective membership, and expressed their shared status as local citizens through active participation in local decision-making.

In Kensington, a strong identification with the community existed among residents and business people. Kensington represents identifiable social and geographic boundaries that encompass a shared sense of belonging and membership. While interview participants did not agree on the meaning of “community” in Kensington, it was generally acknowledged that people who chose to live and work in the community were part of something beyond their individual situation. Public participation was a valued and important part of local decision-making, for both the City’s planning department, and local community leaders. Local planning was more participatory in Kensington than in Markham (due in large part to the parallel informal planning process, see Chapter Five). Given the widespread interest the redevelopment of George Brown College engendered in the community, the successful outcome for the community was generally attributed to public participation and could be interpreted as a positive example of the active practice of local citizenship. There is some evidence that substantive citizenship does exist in Kensington, although it is not without problems. Participation in this case study was not universal among community members, with the majority choosing to be informed of the planning progress over direct participation. Moreover, the representative nature of the participation achieved was a concern for some interview participants. Despite the community’s ethnocultural diversity, many ethnic groups present in Kensington, and especially the newer immigrant groups, were not found in positions of influence within local decision-making structures.

Most appropriately understood in a practical context, substantive citizenship is not a goal or ideal, but rather a messy reality. People in Kensington were willing to address local planning concerns
collectively, and in fact have a long history of doing so. More importantly, however, community members engaged in active participation in local decision-making. This was obvious in the informal planning process the Working Group spearheaded, but also in a multiplicity of local associations and the coalescing of interests around influential local leaders. Much more so than in the Markham case study, in Kensington residents and business people shared a status in their urban identity which in practice translated into active community participation. Granted, this substantive citizenship was only achieved because the issue at hand was considered serious enough, and the participation that did occur was not uniform or consistent at all times, or extend across all parts of the community. The Kensington case illustrates both the challenges of securing substantive citizenship, and the benefits that can be achieved through the practice of citizenship.

Planning Amidst Diversity

Citizenship is ultimately defined by the individual. It exists where the citizen feels a sense of belonging. For some, citizenship is most accurately understood at a global scale -- we are citizens of this planet, we share rights and obligations as a result of our shared humanity. For others, citizenship is tied to the nation-state -- we share membership in a political enterprise, and our citizenship is invested with a legal status and guaranteed political rights. Still others see citizenship as a concept relevant at a local level -- it is within communities that we take meaning from common membership, and participate in decisions that affect our daily lives. In this dissertation it has been the latter expression, local citizenship, that has been of interest.

Recognizing local citizenship does not negate the existence of national citizenship beyond legal status in Canada, or the importance that citizenship may hold for the Canadian-born and immigrants alike. What this dissertation addresses, however, is that the substantive elements of citizenship are being negotiated in practice within communities. Localities, then, become an increasingly important arena where citizens seek meaning in collective membership and participate in decisions that impact their daily lives.

By looking for what we have in common, we also see what distinguishes us from one another. This dissertation focused on the impact of ethnocultural diversity upon Canadian cities, and revealed a dynamic and challenging context in which local decision-making or planning occurs today. Contrary to the way issues of difference are sometimes addressed in the literature, this research found that ethnocultural diversity cannot be addressed in isolation. Despite the readily identifiable diversity found in both Markham and Kensington, and the fact that in the planning examples explored here diversity had an impact on the way participation worked in the two communities, neither case could be understood within the context of ethnocultural differences alone. This research illustrated the complexity and messy nature of local participation, as ethnocultural diversity combines with other aspects of a person’s life such as citizenship, period of immigration, age, income, and interests. The practice of local citizenship within this context is complex.

If it is true that localities are an arena where citizenship is being negotiated, and planning provides a lens from which to examine how people participate in decisions and seek meaning in their community membership, then what are the implications for planning practice? Reflecting on the criteria employed in this dissertation, this research points to some interesting policy implications.

The most obvious place for planners to address the challenges of multiculturalism is participation in public decision-making. As was stated in Chapter Eight, planners seem most comfortable with adjusting their participation strategies to meet a diverse public through such measures as translation services and multi-lingual documentation. These are important efforts -- facilitating access to local decision-making.
As the case study research revealed, however, these measures do not seem to address inequities in the distribution of power within a community. With power concentrated in local leaders (as in the Kensington case study), or vested in a strong, formal planning process (as in the Markham case study), influence over decision-making and planning outcomes is invariably unequal. What this means for planning practice is that structural changes to the process of decision-making have to be made by planners. Questioning who is making decisions, and who is framing the context of the options considered, needs to occur. For example, planners might offer their expertise, access or limited resources to residents to help them take some control over the future of their communities, as City of Toronto planning department did in Kensington in support of the Working Group, and more recently with the Revitalization Plan.

In terms of social structure and associations, planners working in ethnoculturally diverse communities would do well to question the authority of local associations and to identify who they represent. With communities differentiated along a variety of intersecting axes (such as ethnicity, culture, period of immigration, citizenship, and/or interest), planning disputes or community conflicts are rarely simple or dualistic. This was most evident with the Markham case study, where tensions that erupted over the development of retail condominiums was inaccurately simplified as an ethnic clash between Anglo-Saxons and Chinese in the media, when in fact the situation was much more complex.

As the aim of this research was not to identify what community meant to the residents in the case studies, it did not (nor did it attempt to) uncover any ideal of community shared values, or a single common purpose amidst ethnocultural diversity. While planners may agree that their job is to help articulate a community's collective vision of itself, and regulate and manage with plans and policy to implement that vision, they are not responsible for fostering community solidarity. Planners are, however, in a position to identify possible areas of tension, and work with other professions and actors in urban politics to identify a community's strengths. In comparing Markham and Kensington, this research revealed that accepting ethnocultural diversity and seeing it as a source of strength is a long, and perhaps unending challenge.

Future Directions for Research

Predictably, this dissertation raises many new questions that could be addressed through further research. Working in an area that continues to need good case study data, this research could be replicated in other contexts. Subsequent studies that move beyond the most often studied cities of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, and examine the varied ways in which immigration impacts other Canadian urban centres would be a useful addition to this field. In particular, cities such as Hamilton, Calgary, Victoria, London, Edmonton and Winnipeg all have significant, and in many cases growing, immigrant populations (see Figure 1.1) that could be better understood with further research.

The experiences that various cities in Canada are currently making to reach out to their multicultural populations needs to be shared more widely among those interested in planning practice. While the cultural biases in a universal planning approach are far from acknowledged through broad structural changes at the local level, there are instances, especially in the three largest cities of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, where urban planners have stepped into the uncharted territory of multicultural planning. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, uncovering and documenting both the successes and failures with multicultural planning could help inform those interested in planning amidst diversity.

This research could also be extended to examine different variables. For example, the two case studies used in this dissertation were chosen in part for their ability to function well as communities in order to facilitate an examination of citizenship. An interesting corollary to this work would be to examine relatively unsuccessful communities -- communities with high immigrant populations where ethnocultural diversity has proven to be socially, politically and/or
economically divisive. Alternatively, another context of decision-making besides planning could be examined. From a political perspective, for example, the impact of ethnocultural diversity on a community could be looked at through the process of elections or local political activism.

Beyond the realm of planning practice, the exploratory research done in this dissertation also opens interesting avenues for further study in planning theory. As case studies highlighting the intersection of planning and ethnocultural diversity in Canadian cities become more widely known, they provide support for Sandercock's call for difference as a category of analysis in planning theory. Academic planners struggling to understand the multicultural city as it develops in many North American cities, should use ethnocultural diversity as a tool of analysis, just as class or gender is currently being used.

The idea of substantive local citizenship also offers potential for future planning theory. This dissertation made the argument that planning can be a lens to examine local citizenship, and that planners need to move beyond accommodating ethnocultural diversity and instead plan for "multiple publics". As academic and professional planners search for a way to articulate the social responsibility planners have that avoids the problems of "the public interest", the connection between planning and citizenship may prove useful. Issues of membership and participation (citizenship) must inevitably be addressed when the reality of multiple publics is acknowledged.

What this dissertation offers is an exploration of the practice of planning in multicultural urban and suburban communities, and the broader implications of that ethnocultural diversity for participation and belonging in such communities. Further research addressing these issues would aid in both an academic and practical understanding of the challenges of urban and suburban immigration and multiculturalism in Canadian cities.