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Pluralism and the Municipal Agenda: What Visions?

***Pluralism and the Municipal
Agenda: A General Overview***

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For many scholars, cities have become both the primary places for the welcoming of newcomers and hence the expression of diversity and the principal entities still able to promote social cohesion in an ethnoculturally diverse context marked by increasing social inequalities (Friskén and Wallace, 2002; Sandercock, 2003). Municipalities have had to respond to the challenges of diversity in the maintenance of public order, the development of public policies, the definition of offers of service and the hiring of new employees (Labelle et al., 1996; Garbaye, 2000). In 1991, following the international conference “Europe 1990-2000: Multiculturalism in the city—The integration of immigrants” held in Frankfurt, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CLRA) stated that “communes and, in particular cities with a high percentage of immigrants in their population, must have the right to be consulted and to participate in the decision-making process on immigration and integration policy at national and European levels.” Ten years later, a number of major studies have attempted to assess the policies developed in multicultural cities.

Local governments’ appropriation of the issue of diversity raises two concerns as illustrated by the evolution of reflection on policies: a symbolic one related to the vision which promotes pluralism, and a practical one related to the means of putting this vision into practice.¹ Indeed, the literature reveals a shift from a dichotomous reflection opposing integration and multiculturalism inspired by ideological/normative national models to a more comprehensive reflection on inclusion and the management of diversity. Cities today find themselves at a key turning point, having had experience with a number of programs and policies, which we will now summarize in the general overview presented here.

To do this, we will first outline the evolution of the issues at stake through a review of the literature on local policies and diversity. Next we will examine the principal findings that have emerged and their consequences for both practice and research.

From immigration to inclusion: an overview of the literature

With the transformations of the welfare state and certain socio-political events, the topic of diversity is being transposed to the local scene. Some authors also refer to the

¹ For a more detailed version of this text, please see Poirier, Cécile, forthcoming, *La gestion de la diversité ou l'émergence d'un champ de recherche : genèse et perspectives*. Montréal: INRS-UCS, Working Paper.

municipalization of questions related to the integration of immigrant populations (Labelle et al., 1996). It is no coincidence that the first studies of local policies concentrated on the conditions of their emergence. Researchers next became interested in the content of these policies, and then in models of cities and inclusion.

Conditions associated with the emergence of local policies for managing pluralism

Researchers have studied the emergence of local policies from three angles: socio-demographic changes related to immigration, situational socio-political factors, and the evolution of public policies.

In most western countries, ethnocultural diversity is a result of the migratory movements that have occurred since the beginning of the 19th century. During the second half of the 20th century, the face of immigration changed and the conditions of immigrant settlement evolved, shifting immigration issues towards questions of integration. In Europe, the most striking element was the settlement of immigrant workers, joined by their families—a process reinforced by decolonization movements. In Canada, where immigration is a means of populating the country, the elimination of ethnic criteria in favour of economic factors is affecting the composition of the population. These transformations are apparent in cities where specific concerns related to access to housing and adequate living conditions, as well as access to services and education, have emerged or grown more serious.

Added to these structural changes, other situational factors reinforce the stresses placed on cities. Research has highlighted three types of pressures: urban unrest, anti-immigrant movements, and the voicing of specific demands. Indeed, anti-immigrant movements appear when immigrants become settled, leading to their increased visibility as they are now seen as an integral part of society. Two forms of rejection of immigrants have been identified, one conservative, in the name of universal principles associated with a national culture, and the other racist and xenophobic, in the name of distinctiveness and the defence of a cultural identity (Lapeyronnie, 1993).

Urban riots, symptomatic of racial, social and intercommunity problems, have sometimes broken out in various countries in reaction to these movements. These riots stem from demonstrations that deteriorate, from an expression of malaise and anger with institutions, or from a confrontation with extreme right movements. They usually involve young immigrants

or second-generation immigrant youth, often male, who were socialized in families with different cultures. They are confronted with intergenerational and intercommunity problems, as well as with racism and discrimination, so that they simultaneously experience processes of exclusion and racism (Potvin, 1997; Germain, Dansereau et al., 2003; Amin, 2002).

Furthermore, organized groups, either ethnic groups or immigrants' rights groups, address specific demands to local authorities. Thus, the particular conflict or the immigrant proportion of the population may not always be determining factors (Lapeyronnie, 1993). In some cases, it is community participation and the expression of local citizenship that bring about a demand for intervention by elected officials.

The conjunction of structural and situational factors influences the placing of the topics of immigration and integration on the local agenda. In other words, the problem is defined as an issue that should be the focus of political intervention. Researchers also refer to the opening of a window of opportunity corresponding to a favourable configuration of the environment in a given space and time (Berthet and Poirier, 2000). This opportunity results from changing representations linked to migratory phenomena and the legitimacy of localized social action (Berthet, 1999).

The manner in which the issue is placed on the agenda depends on the institutional framework (relations between the central and local authorities, political party organization, and local government organization). Consequently, the process of placing the issue on the agenda has occurred from the bottom up in Great Britain where local authorities are seen as service providers and local democratic institutions have clear areas of responsibility (Garbaye, 2000). In France, on the other hand, municipalities are defined as means of local community representation to the central government, without distinct areas of responsibility, but rather with intertwined responsibilities (*Ibid*), resulting in the issue being raised from the top down. Likewise, in Canada, municipalities do not have precisely delineated areas of responsibility and intervene in those of the provinces.

Furthermore, the ideological change associated with the progressive withdrawal of the state has contributed to the emergence of cities in the social arena. This retreat has coincided with a process of decentralization aimed at granting cities greater responsibilities, if not in policy development, at least in the management of programs. The "territorialization" of social policies has also been accompanied by significant financial transfers that have allowed cities to assume responsibilities in the areas of immigration and integration (Joly, 1992; Frybès,

1992; Labelle et al., 1996). On the other hand, this is often a case of the local implementation of provincial or federal programs or those developed in partnership, rather than of genuinely local policies.

Various issues related to diversity in cities

Once the need for action has been determined, in what areas does one act? Researchers have attempted to answer this question by examining the content of local policies. Studies have focused on two overarching themes that illustrate the types of local policies: an analysis of policies affecting living conditions and an investigation of those promoting human rights.

Historically, immigration and integration have been linked to problems of habitat and housing (Mahnig, 1999), and by extension, problems involving neighbourhoods and interethnic relations. Therefore, scholars have been interested in measures implemented to combat socio-spatial segregation, such as the policy of distribution of the immigrant population and that of the renewal and rehabilitation of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Lapeyronie, 1993) or policies of spatial dispersal and those of territorial compensation (Musterd, Ostendorf and Breebaart, 1998).

These two policies, that is policies of compensation and of distribution of immigrants (which includes both the dispersal and intermingling of ethnic groups), can be found in most European countries. Particularly since the 1980s, they have been part of broader measures aimed at a comprehensive and territorial approach to integration. Accordingly, urban policies have addressed various problems such as urban renewal, "politique de la ville," and "quartiers sensibles," often concentrating on territories in difficulty in order to reactivate the integration process and heal ruptured social bonds. Rarely do these policies, which tend to focus on living conditions, explicitly target immigrant populations as such. Yet targeting has in fact occurred as a result of interventions in districts with large immigrant and minority populations. Indeed, most researchers have shown that urban renewal—through interventions affecting the built environment, access to housing or improved access to services and facilities—has been implemented mainly in areas with high concentrations of immigrants (Lapeyronie, 1992a; Solomos and Singh, 1990; Moore, 2001a).

Today, especially in France, researchers are studying questions of discrimination and "ethnicization" in social housing allocation (Battegay, 1992); in Great Britain, these topics

have been investigated since the early 1970s (Solomos and Singh, 1990). Indeed, the subject of discrimination has been of particular interest in countries that have set up programs to combat discrimination, such as Canada and Great Britain. In Quebec, a number of studies, notably the study headed by Micheline Labelle on leaders of ethnocultural groups, have revealed the specific challenges faced by Quebec society (Labelle and Lévy, 1995).

From a more analytical perspective, some researchers have noted the importance of the national context in producing local integration policies (Lapeyronnie, 1992), which leads them to question not only the autonomy of these policies, but indeed the existence of genuinely local policies. Furthermore, scholars themselves often present their research as studies of particular countries' policies with an empirical focus on specific cities (Moore, 2001a; Ireland, 1994).

Cities' ability to intervene in the sphere of intercultural relations strongly depends on their autonomy vis-à-vis higher levels of government. For example, North American cities are more independent than their European counterparts (Rogers, 2000; Berthet and Poirier, 2000). Urban policies, or at least their emergence, very often result from state strategies (Le Galès, 1995). Certain studies specifically concerned with local initiatives have concluded that these initiatives are strongly linked to national measures. States' involvement in the very definition of policies, for example, territorialized measures managed in partnership with cities who are not the only participants (Kirszbaum, 1999), suggest that cities have little autonomy. This is exacerbated by their financial dependence on other institutions or levels of government whose interests may differ. While the granting of funding allows local policies to emerge, the inadequacy of this funding probably limits their scope.

Citizenship and inclusion

In the 1990s, researchers turned their attention to the question of inclusive policies. Some of these studies of citizenship and inclusion in cities have led to attempts to define models of cities.

A number of findings on the gulf between the anticipated goals of integration and the actual situation have brought to the fore questions of representation and access to equality for minorities, as well as questions in regard to the place of second- or third-generation youth. These have led to a broader reflection on the notion of citizenship (Solomos and Back,

2000). Cities have not escaped this trend, especially due to their designated role in terms of citizenship and the recognition of differences. For example, Alisdair Rogers distinguishes between four ideological/normative models of the good city: the city of exclusion or the divided city, the city of assimilation, the multicultural city and the city of difference.²

Employing a more empirical approach, the *Multicultural Policies in Multicultural Cities* program within the MOST-UNESCO project launched in 1977 triggered in-depth studies of European cities. For each of the cities studied, the research identified “channels of mobilization,” in other words, the organizations, actions and institutions that successfully fostered immigrant and minority participation. Researchers found significant variations from one city to another, both in terms of the philosophies conveyed and the concrete measures implemented (Tillie, Rogers and Vertovec, 2001).

Aside from acquiring knowledge about the actions undertaken by cities, the project’s goal is to develop a theoretical typology of modes of citizenship and participation in these cities. In a number of the cities studied, researchers have identified a shift in local interventions from a *group-specific* model to an *issue-based* or *problem-oriented* model. In other words, these interventions are less often targeted to particular groups and are more likely to focus on the issues (*Idem*; Alexander, 2003).

Once again, the question of cities’ autonomy arises, this time from the perspective of the philosophy of intervention. Indeed, it seems that these changes illustrate the transposition to the local level of a comprehensive reflection on citizenship. The various governmental levels produce norms and laws constituting a restrictive framework for cities. Thus, the 1988 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* and the existence of the Canadian and Quebec human rights charters establish guidelines that cities are obliged to respect. Moreover, cities are part of networks of vertical relations, where there are significant interactions between levels.

² The first two correspond to two extreme and opposite models. The divided city is one where ethnic segregation is maximized, as opposed to the city of assimilation where segregation is practically nonexistent. The multicultural city and the city of difference are two variants of the “differentialist” model (Rogers, *Ibid*). The multicultural city can encompass two meanings of multiculturalism, that is, an institutionalized multiculturalism which establishes collective identities and where boundaries are imposed from the top down, or an “integrationist” multiculturalism where social identity is relational, leaving room for negotiation and the acceptance of differences. Finally, the city of difference makes the city the ideal place for different groups to live together. In this city, one may find an expression of social differences without exclusion, a multifunctional differentiation of space, the attraction of the other and political action in the public space.

Therefore, the policies implemented by municipalities cannot be completely divorced from the national level, if only for financial reasons (Ansellem, 1998).

Still, one might wonder whether certain cities do not set themselves up in opposition to national principles or, on the contrary, do not use the existing framework to limit their interventions. Thus, the question changes from “How much autonomy do cities have?” to “How much autonomy do cities want?”

Parallel to the rethinking of citizenship, the concept of pluralistic planning has appeared. This stems from reflections on inclusion, no longer in a political community, but rather in the planning of the spaces in which this community develops.

Indeed, this pluralistic planning concerns the ways in which planners take into account the pluralism of the communities in which they are working. In this sense, it is part of the larger movement of postmodernism in cities (Fillion, 2003). However, it practically amounts to a plea for a renewal of urban planning practices (Germain and Gagnon, 2003) and raises the dilemma of trying to develop different policies for different groups (Wallace, 2002). This is a frequent critique of postmodernism, which, according to some authors, tends to favour fragmentation (Fillion, 2003).

In contrast, the main contribution of pluralistic planning is to call for a certain awareness of differences, a sensitivity on the part of public authorities, institutions and organizations. This awareness is to be reflected not only in the measures implemented to foster access to equality and acknowledge diversity but also in the conditions of their implementation, in particular the capacity of individuals to appropriate the idea of inclusion and the principles of urban planning. In short, inclusion in the management of diversity is not solely a matter of procedures, but also a question of practices and representations, as recent studies have demonstrated.

Recent findings and research avenues

Studies of local policies to some extent reproduce the linear schema of universalism—interculturalism—multiculturalism that predominates at the national level. This schema is based on various normative principles that clearly permeate local policies and actions but that mask what is actually happening at the local level. Therefore, since the late 1990s, studies on practices for managing diversity have attempted to identify the concrete

responses of cities and local organizations to specific demands or issues. These studies have yielded findings on various approaches to developing and implementing policies to manage diversity that open up new avenues for both action and reflection.

Adhocracy, pragmatism and governance

Diversity management policies, regardless of the intervention model adopted (intercultural, multicultural, republican, etc.), are designed to respond to a given problem or crisis situation. Transversal in nature, local authorities' responses are also intended to disappear once their objective—whether this be integration or employment equity—is achieved. Accordingly, cities' responses are generally reactive and rather improvisational (Germain and Dansereau et al., 2003). Few cities have opted for a planned, proactive and comprehensive approach to the issues. In fact, cities' policies are based on principles that are linked to political choices. For example, in France, municipal integration policies are likely to have limited impact and are often merely symbolic, above all proclaiming a municipality's anti-racist commitment (Gaxie et al., 1999).

Pragmatism is also characteristic of the management of diversity, even in the absence of a formal policy. Strategies such as learning about cultural codes, and categorization and identification to control situations of interaction (Rinaudo, 1999; 2000) may be adopted locally for intervening in a diversified milieu. In addition to this usage of ethnic categories, we also find practices of reasonable accommodation that illustrate the flexibility of this field of intervention.

Moreover, the growing number of actors increases the complexity of the process of establishing standards for actions taken in managing diversity. Indeed, municipal actors are intervening in a context of urban governance characterized by partnership and the involvement of local groups and organizations, amongst other features. Governance implies both multiplication of vectors of information and of definition of standards, and the diversification of the actors involved (Jouve, 2003).

The local context reveals particular attributes reinforced by the context of governance and the normative quality of these principles, which are now subject to interpretation. As a result, practices range from external adaptation (for example, in response to demands in the area of urban planning or the provision of adapted recreation services) to internal adaptation (hiring

personnel that reflect the diversity of the population, translation services, etc.). This underlines the pragmatic character of the management of diversity, which continually fluctuates between the goals of respect for differences and individual development, and the promotion of social integration. While this allows for a flexibility and openness that are helpful in such a complex and sensitive area of intervention, these ambiguities in the very definition of intervention result in practical ambiguities since the actors responsible for implementing the orientations lack guidelines and frameworks for decision-making. It follows that there should be more attention paid, not only to policies and measures, but also to the actors that implement them.

Intercultural skills

So it is useful to go beyond an approach to the management of diversity that is based on larger ideological/normative models transposed from the national to the local level, and instead work from the bottom up, in studying the capacity of actors to position themselves in a social environment characterized by diversity, to negotiate their own identities, both individual and collective, and to understand the cultural dimensions of the social situation. The notion of intercultural skills encompasses three dimensions: past experience, socialization and learning. These skills may be acquired through a journey of self-discovery (this is in fact what leads managers to succumb to the temptation of matching the origins of their personnel with specific clienteles, which never guarantees an effective management of diversity), through a personal journey, in other words, by a decentration and the capacity to open up to others, and finally, through training, intercultural or otherwise.

It should be noted that these skills are generally developed in the context of strategic behaviours such as getting a community to participate, explaining a regulation, managing a demand for accommodation, etc. Thus, they are part of the process of mobilization of ethnicity, seen as a resource for action, and a component of interactional strategies (Rinaudo, 1999). Adopting such a perspective allows one to stop placing managers and clienteles in opposition, with the former often perceived as embodying the majority, and the latter, as minorities. On the contrary, identities mingle and influence decisions and negotiations in the context of local governance (Poirier, 2005).

Conclusion

This overview of the literature and current research avenues has highlighted three basic dimensions in the management of diversity: principles, which remain important if only for the message they send in the community; local dynamics, accentuated by various partnerships; and actors, who have identities that influence their interventions.

This raises a number of questions:

How can we help the actors involved in intervention to understand cultural differences and give them adequate space for reflection in which to examine their own values and practices?

How can we foster a sustainable management of diversity?

What role does the model or vision of pluralism play? Is this vision of pluralism a limitation or necessary precondition?

Should we plan and/or more effectively develop measures to manage diversity?

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