

# Proactive Cities and Cultural Diversity: Policy Issues and Dynamics

CHRISTIAN POIRIER

Institution national de la recherche scientifique (INRS) - Centre Urbanisation, Culture, Société

*Abstract: This article discusses the primary forms of intervention, both practical and discursive, used by municipalities that want to be proactive in managing ethnic diversity. It offers a review of the scientific literature on the subject and also presents the example of the City of Gatineau.*

Cultural diversity is a fundamental aspect of urban life, particularly in large metropolitan cities. This cosmopolitanism now extends beyond the metropolitan context and affects all cities that have experienced significant diversification of their populations in recent years. Municipalities such as Halifax, Gatineau, London and Calgary have adopted various measures to promote the harmonious cohabitation of differences. This increased involvement by municipal administrations of all sizes is not insignificant. Over the past 20 years, a number of major trends, including an increase in the political legitimacy of local governments, demands from civil society (citizens' groups), policy statements by agencies representing municipal interests, and political and administrative decentralization, have led to a greater assumption of responsibility for diversity issues at the local level.<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, according to Pestieau and Wallace (2003), the ethnic diversification of the population is felt most keenly at the local level. This article provides an overview and a discussion of the primary means by which proactive municipalities are intervening in this area.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 See, among others, Berthet and Poirier (2000), Fainstein (2005), Frisken and Wallace (2000), Garbaye (2002), Germain et al. (2003), Germain and Alain (2009), Gaxie et al. (1999), Graham and Phillips (2006), Jouve and Gagnon (2006), Labelle et al. (1996), Lapeyronnie (1992), Musterd et al. (1998), Paré et al. (2002), Poirier (2005), Poirier (2006a, 2006b), Qadeer (1997), Sandercock (2003), Siemiatycki (2006), and Wallace and Frisken (2004).

2 These reflections are the result of research projects funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities

## A broader definition of diversity and politics

Our research demonstrates the importance of adopting a broader definition of cultural diversity, encompassing both newcomers and people who declare themselves members of a cultural community, including second- and third-generation Canadians. The need to examine ethnic characteristics in conjunction with other identity markers, whether age or sex, is important.<sup>3</sup> The specific problems of, for example, immigrant women, the elderly or young people, must be identified. This perspective also includes all relationships between citizens, whatever community they belong to, which necessarily implies the society they have joined.

In terms of policies, Siemiatycki et al. (2001) identify four categories of institutional response to diversity: pioneers (proactive, implement major reorganization that takes diversity into account), learners (recognize the importance of diversity and initiate change), waverers (aware of issues related to diversity but refuse to get involved) and resisters (refuse to accept diversity).

---

Research Council of Canada, as well as research conducted while developing Together!, the City of Gatineau's policy on cultural diversity, for which we were the principal researcher and consultant (we would like to thank the Ville de Gatineau, Annie-Claude Scholtès and our research assistants, Cécile Poirier, Nevena Mitropolitiska and Amélie Billette).

3 See the special issue of Canadian Diversity/ Diversité canadienne (2004) on intersections of diversity.

We have already noted (Poirier 2006a) that the management of diversity has two main dimensions: policies and administrative mechanisms, and models. The repertoire of possible policies and administrative mechanisms includes the following: establishing a reception strategy, creating a unit responsible for diversity, creating an advisory council (or committee) made up of representatives of cultural communities, implementing an employment equity program in the municipal public service, increasing municipal employees' intercultural awareness and providing them with intercultural training, supporting multi-ethnic associations, providing information and translation/interpretation services, running activities to raise awareness (workshops, intercultural days, debates, exchanges, publicity campaigns, displays in libraries, visits to schools, work with media), establishing intercultural festivals and celebrations, adopting a declaration against discrimination and racism, adapting municipal services in general (culture, sports and recreation, housing, community life, and so forth) to take account of the intercultural dimension, promoting economic integration, establishing a multicultural centre for bridge-building activities, and forming ongoing relationships with partners (associations, institutions, governments, and so on).<sup>4</sup> Participation, particularly political, must also be encouraged.<sup>5</sup>

Many of these activities involve areas of authority shared by other levels of government. However, municipalities may play an important role, either directly or by encouraging other governments to adopt the necessary policies. More fundamentally, they may play a role in establishing relationships and creating an interface among the various stakeholders (Poirier 2006a).

With regard to models, the discourse of the main

actors and the discursive referents are important because they refer to the integration models implemented. There are usually three conceptions of public management of the sociocultural space (Alexander 2003; Poirier 2006b): assimilationism (assimilation in the public and private spheres), universalism (neutrality in the public sphere, expression of differences in the private sphere) and multiculturalism (expression of differences in the public and private spheres, institutionalization of differences). In response to, in particular, criticism of multiculturalism and specifically the lack of interaction among the different communities and a tendency toward their compartmentalization, a fourth model has emerged—interculturalism—that seeks a compromise between universalism and multiculturalism and formally encourages intercultural exchanges. These models are often the most visible aspect of municipal policy and receive the most attention in the public space and the media, and they necessarily influence the type of measures adopted. The important challenge remains one of reconciling the establishment of common practices and values with respect and the full expression of differences.

### The example of Gatineau

Quebec's fourth largest city in terms of population (281,650 in 2006), Gatineau ranks second among Quebec's urban centres for the size of its immigrant population (8.1%).<sup>6</sup> Several factors explain this diversification of the population: the Quebec government's regionalization policies, family relocation, the influx of refugees, the presence of an Aboriginal population and Gatineau's location next to Canada's national capital, Ottawa, which has a high proportion of citizens born abroad. Gatineau also has one of the highest retention rates in Quebec. While the City had already adopted a series of measures (creation of a position devoted to intercultural

---

<sup>4</sup> Graham and Phillips (2006) also establish a series of measures that can be found in our listing.

<sup>5</sup> See, in this regard, Biles and Tolley (2004); Bird (2004); Fennema and Tillie (1999); Garbaye (2002); and Simard (2001).

---

<sup>6</sup> See Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles du Québec, *Population immigrée recensée au Québec et dans les régions en 2006 : caractéristiques générales*, May 2009.

relations, support of events encouraging intercultural bridge building, membership in the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination, appointment of a municipal councillor responsible for this issue, and so on), it chose to go one step further by formally adopting a policy and action plan.<sup>7</sup>

First, an inclusive and broadened definition of cultural diversity was proposed, refined and adopted: "the variety of all culture-related values and characteristics with which a person can identify, such as ethnic origin, language, religion, and multiple affiliations, including affiliation with the local identity." As can be seen, this approach concerns all of Gatineau society. Such a perspective must of necessity be supported by a broadened definition of the very essence of a cultural diversity policy, that is, "the set of models, actions and mechanisms that Gatineau can put in place and use to create conditions that foster intercultural bridge building; being open to what is different, and welcoming and integrating it into the local community; public participation in the new issues and challenges that this represents; and adjustment of the city's policies, structures and services ..."

All dimensions of the migratory process are addressed (reception, integration, participation, retention) and guidelines are established, including recognition of cultural diversity as a form of wealth and a force for development, respect for gender equality, the need to combat prejudice, racism and discrimination, the importance of French as a common language, and so forth. Six general aims leading to various commitments structure the policy: 1) in terms of models, an approach inspired by interculturalism; 2) unifying values based specifically on the guidelines; 3) a proactive leadership role based on partnership; 4) a barrier-free territory, a

neighbourhood approach; 5) an integrated, horizontal and intersectoral policy involving adjustments to internal governance; and 6) active citizen participation. A number of concrete activity sectors are identified to meet these aims: arts and culture, sports and recreation, the economy, employment, housing and territorial development, community life, health and the environment, safety and security (including policing), education, public services, and communications and participatory governance. Finally, an action plan serves to implement this policy.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Cities seeking to be the most proactive have adopted a broader definition of cultural diversity, as well as a horizontal approach with impact on all sectors in which they can exercise their authority. The models vary considerably, with cities in Quebec usually opting for the intercultural perspective for reasons that are both cultural and historic. More generally, our research reveals that these measures are intrinsically related to how the municipal government and the scope of its authority are perceived. It is also fundamental to ensure cooperative intergovernmental relations, as well as the active participation of civil society and other institutions. These are essential conditions for any effort at the local level to formulate and establish practical and conceptual conditions for a mode of living together that is pluralistic and inclusive.

## About the Author

Christian Poirier is a professor and researcher at the Institution nationale de la recherche scientifique (INRS) – Centre Urbanisation, Culture, Société. His research and publications focus on the analysis of organizations and cultural

7 See Together!, the City of Gatineau's policy on cultural diversity, 2008 (available at [http://www.ville.gatineau.qc.ca/docs/la\\_ville/administration\\_municipale/politiques\\_vision/politique\\_matiere\\_diversite\\_culturelle.en-CA.pdf](http://www.ville.gatineau.qc.ca/docs/la_ville/administration_municipale/politiques_vision/politique_matiere_diversite_culturelle.en-CA.pdf)).

8 Some measures have not been adopted, including the creation of an advisory committee, because the City is currently reviewing all of its committees. The policy is to be evaluated in a few years, and this will give an indication of its effectiveness.

institutions, governance and cultural policy, cultural industries, the cultural dynamics of cities, as well as identity issues and issues relating to ethnocultural diversity, particularly municipal diversity policies and relationships between art and cultural communities. He is a member of the Chaire Fernand-Dumont sur la culture; the Quebec Metropolis Centre-Immigration et Métropoles; the Laboratoire Art et Société, Terrains et Théories; and the network Villes Régions Monde.

## References

- Alexander, Michael. 2003. "Local Policies Toward Migrants as an Expression of Host-Stranger Relations: A Proposed Typology." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 29, pp. 411–430.
- Berthet, Thierry, and Christian Poirier. 2000. "Politiques locales d'intégration et immigrants aisés : une comparaison France-Québec." *Politique et Sociétés* 19, 2–3, pp. 181–213.
- Biles, John, and Erin Tolley. 2004. "Getting Seats at the Table(s): The Political Participation of Newcomers and Minorities in Ottawa," *Our Diverse Cities/Nos diverses cités* 1, Spring, pp. 174–179.
- Bird, Karen. 2004. "Obstacles to Ethnic Minority Representation in Local Government in Canada," *Our Diverse Cities/Nos diverses cités* 1, Spring, pp. 182–186.
- Canadian Diversity/Diversité canadienne*. 2004. 3, 1, Winter.
- Fainstein, Susan S. 2005. "Cities and Diversity. Should We Want It? Can We Plan for It?" *Urban Affairs Review* 41, 1, pp. 3–19.
- Fennema, Meindert, and Jean Tillie. 1999. "Political Participation and Political Trust in Amsterdam: Civic Communities and Ethnic Networks." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, 4, pp. 703–726.
- Friskén, Frances, and Marcia Wallace. 2000. *The Response of the Municipal Public Service Sector to the Challenge of Immigrant Settlement*. Toronto: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ontario Region, OASIS.
- Garbaye, Romain. 2002. "Ethnic Minority Participation in British and French Cities: A Historical-Institutionalist Perspective." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26, 3, pp. 555–570.
- Gaxie, Daniel, et al. 1999. "Les politiques municipales d'intégration des populations d'origine étrangère." *Migrations Études - Synthèse de travaux sur l'immigration et la présence étrangère en France* 86, pp. 1–12.
- Germain, Annick, et al. 2003. *Les pratiques municipales de gestion de la diversité à Montréal*. Montréal: INRS-UCS.
- Germain, Annick, and Martin Alain. 2009. "On the Virtues of Adhocracy: Managing Diversity in Metropolitan Montreal," in Alain-G. Gagnon and Bernard Jouve (eds.), *Facing Cultural Diversity. Cities Under Stress*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon/ UNESCO, Coll. Citurb, pp. 105–122.
- Graham, Katherine A.H., and Susan D. Phillips. 2006. "Another Fine Balance: Managing Diversity in Canadian Cities." In Keith G. Banting, Thomas J. Courchene and F. Leslie Seidle (eds.), *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*. Montréal: IRPP, pp. 155–194.
- Jouve, Bernard, and Alain G. Gagnon (eds.). 2006. *Les métropoles au défi de la diversité culturelle*. Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble.
- Labelle Micheline, et al. 1996. *Stratégies et discours sur les relations ethniques, le racisme et la gestion de la diversité au sein de municipalités de la région métropolitaine de Montréal*. Problématique générale de la recherche. Université du Québec à Montréal, Département de sociologie, Les Cahiers du CRIEC 21.

- Lapeyronnie, Didier (ed.). 1992. *Immigrés en Europe: Politiques locales d'intégration*. Paris: La Documentation Française.
- Musterd, Sako, et al. 1998. *Multi-Ethnic Metropolis: Patterns and Policies*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Paré, Sylvie, et al. 2002. "Diversification des populations dans la région de Montréal: de nouveaux défis de la gestion urbaine." *Canadian Public Administration / Administration publique du Canada* 45, 2, pp. 195–216.
- Pestieau, Katherine, and Marcia Wallace. 2003. "Challenges and Opportunities for Planning in the Ethno-Culturally Diverse City: A Collection of Papers – Introduction." *Planning Theory & Practice* 4, 3, pp. 253–258.
- Poirier, Cécile. 2005. *La gestion municipale de la diversité ou l'émergence d'un champ de recherche: genèse et perspectives*. Montréal: INRS-UCS.
- Poirier, Christian. 2006a. "Ethnocultural Diversity, Democracy, and Intergovernmental Relations in Canadian Cities." In Robert Young and Christian Leuprecht (eds.), *Canada: The State of the Federation 2004. Municipal-Federal-Provincial Relations in Canada*. Montréal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 201–220.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006b. "Les villes et la gestion de la diversité ethnique: enjeux politiques et discursifs du multiculturalisme." In Jacques Palard, Alain G. Gagnon and Bernard Gagnon (eds.), *Diversité et identités au Québec et dans les régions d'Europe*. Québec City / Brussels: Presses de l'Université Laval / Presses Interuniversitaires Européennes–Peter Lang, pp. 193–212.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. "The Management of Ethnic Diversity and Democratic Governance in Ottawa and Vancouver." In Alain-G. Gagnon and Bernard Jouve (eds.), *Facing Cultural Diversity. Cities Under Stress*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon/ UNESCO, Coll. Citurb, pp. 85–104.
- Oadeer, Mohammad A. 1997. "Pluralistic Planning for Multicultural Cities: The Canadian Practice." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 63, 4, pp. 481–494.
- Sandercock, Leonie. 2003. *Integrating Immigrants: The Challenge for Cities, City Governments and the City-Building Professions*. Vancouver: Metropolis – Vancouver Centre of Excellence.
- Siemiatycki, Myer. 2006. *The Municipal Franchise and Social Inclusion in Toronto: Policy and Practice*. Community Social Planning Council of Toronto/Inclusive Cities.
- Siemiatycki, Myer, et al. 2001. *Integrating Community Diversity in Toronto: On Whose Terms?* Toronto: CERIS.
- Simard, Carole. 2001. "Les élus issus des groupes ethniques minoritaires à Montréal : perceptions et représentation politiques, une étude exploratoire." *Politique et Sociétés* 22, 1, pp. 53–78.
- Wallace, Marcia, and Frances Frisken. 2004. "Meeting the Challenges of Immigrant Settlement: Is Your Municipality Ready?" *Our Diverse Cities/Nos diverses cites* 1, Spring, pp. 148–152.