

Cultural Retention Versus Cultural Integration: Multiculturalism and Immigrant Settlement Policies in Saskatchewan

Dr. David McGrane, Assistant Professor of Political Studies, St. Thomas More College
Presentation to Managing Immigration: The Canada/Saskatchewan/Ukraine Experience,
Chernistvi National University, Chernistvi, Ukraine, May 11th, 2010

Introduction: The Saskatchewan Challenge

Two trends have recently emerged to make multiculturalism and immigrant settlement policies an important topic on the agenda of the Saskatchewan provincial government. First, there has been a gradual ‘provincialization’ of immigration policy in Canada as provincial governments have gained much greater control over immigration through ‘nominee programs’ whereby they recruit and select immigrants and then nominate them for the federal government’s final approval. The second trend is that Saskatchewan needs more workers due to labour shortages caused by an aging society and a growing economy. As such, the Saskatchewan provincial government has recently become very aggressive in expanding the number of immigrants to the province using its nominee program. In 2010, the Saskatchewan provincial government is predicting that 10,000 newcomers, five times the normal number of immigrants, will be entering Saskatchewan.¹ As such, an important public policy challenge is how the Saskatchewan provincial government welcomes these immigrants through settlement services and how provincial multiculturalism policies work to create an inclusive atmosphere and societal cohesion in the face of this influx of new immigrants.

Cultural Retention versus Cultural Integration: The Unresolved Tension

With the creation of the federal government’s multiculturalism policy in 1971, English Canadian provincial governments and the Canadian federal government began to encourage immigrants to retain their homeland culture as opposed to assimilating into the dominant Canadian culture. The state provided financial support for the retention of homeland culture and, upon receipt of that support, cultural minorities had the responsibility to share their culture with all members of Canadian society. However, by the early 1990s, this model of cultural retention was heavily criticized because it cost too much, harmed Canadian national unity, and led to the ghettoization of ethnic minority communities and their exclusion from the opportunities present in the mainstream of Canada.² A new model of managing ethnic diversity emerged which can be termed ‘cultural integration.’ Under the cultural integration model, the individual’s right to retain their culture does not necessarily disappear but it becomes a secondary consideration. The primary consideration is for the state to encourage cultural minorities to participate and integrate into the host society and share its values. The individual may retain their homeland culture only to the extent it does not interfere with their participation in the host society. English Canadian provincial governments, like the federal government, changed their rhetoric and the language in

¹ Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, “Immigration Helps Spark Population Jump in 2008”, Regina, March 27, 2009.

² Yasmeen Abu-Laden and Daiva Stasiulis, “Ethnic Pluralism under Siege: Popular and Partisan Opposition to Multiculturalism” *Canadian Public Policy* 18, no. 4, (December, 1992), 365-386 and Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1994).

their *Multiculturalism Acts* but never really changed their policies to reflect this new emphasis on integration. The result has been an unresolved tension in English Canadian multiculturalism between a vague rhetorical commitment to cultural integration and continuing policy legacies of cultural retention. Quebec, which had always implemented its own unique approach to managing ethnic diversity called interculturalism that stresses integration over retention, has been able to be clearer with immigrants as to the host society's expectations and has developed Canada's most comprehensive set of settlement services.

Saskatchewan's Multiculturalism and Immigrant Settlement Policies (1970-2010)

During the 1970s, the Saskatchewan government implemented various policies aimed at the retention of the culture of ethnic minorities like grants to ethnic groups for operations and special projects and the teaching of immigrant languages in schools. In terms of sharing immigrant homeland culture with the general public, the provincial government funded various public festivals and created museums dedicated to sharing the history of their province's ethnic minorities. The provincial government focused on maintaining the "multicultural heritage" of Saskatchewan and lent very little financial support to immigrant settlement or integration. During the 1980s and 1990s, the critique of an over-emphasis on cultural retention began to emerge and there was a lack of direction and policy drift in the provincial government's policies. The Saskatchewan government passed a new *Multiculturalism Act* in 1997 containing language that stressed the integration of immigrants and promotion of their full participation in Saskatchewan society. However, the government ignored the recommendation of a consultative committee to create a Multiculturalism Secretariat within the provincial bureaucracy to enforce this new model. Instead, the distribution of money to encourage multiculturalism in Saskatchewan was outsourced to an organization called Saskculture which is an arms-length agency controlled by artists and representatives of ethnic groups. Saskculture proceeded to maintain the emphasis on cultural retention and not move towards integration.

During the 2000s, the Saskatchewan government began to increase immigration which it saw as part of its economic agenda to fill looming labour shortages caused by the retirement of the older workers of the baby-boom generation. However, the aggressiveness on recruiting new immigrants has not been coupled with robust programs to settle these new immigrants. Instead, the federal and provincial governments outsource settlement services to local non-governmental organizations. These non-governmental organizations structure their settlement programs how they please with no direction from the government.

Confusion, Ad hockery, and Laissez-faire

Saskatchewan is currently admitting thousands of immigrants but there is no cohesive, structured strategy on how to deal with the resulting ethnic diversity. The small cultural retention programs ran out of Saskculture are mostly aimed at established ethnic groups as opposed to new immigrants. When new immigrants arrive in Saskatchewan, the settlement services that they receive vary greatly by which non-governmental organization they decide to go to and where they are in the province. In my experience, the settlement services that they do receive are more about survival skills than either cultural retention or cultural integration. **It is my argument the confusion and ad hockery in the Saskatchewan government's multiculturalism and immigration policies comes from English Canada's inability to decide**

if we will manage ethnic diversity through cultural retention or cultural integration. Instead of facing this difficult debate on how to manage diversity, the Saskatchewan government has adopted a very laissez-faire approach to immigrant settlement. For the most part, new immigrants to Saskatchewan are left to their own devices and they receive no signals from the state as to what the host society expects of them and the state is generally unwilling to provide to them with any programming beyond the basic public services offered to every Saskatchewan citizen.

Conclusion: Integration or Retention?

The current Saskatchewan government follows a discourse which affirms that Saskatchewan's cultural diversity contributes to our high quality life and our unique multicultural identity. It sees immigration and multiculturalism as being part of Saskatchewan's collective psyche and societal fabric but it is not sure on how to manage the ethnic diversity that is resulting from recent increases to international immigration in our province. It is my fear that Saskatchewan will let in thousands of immigrants over the next five years but retain very few of them. Since immigrants have absolute mobility rights under the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, new immigrants to Saskatchewan may re-locate to larger Canadian cities which offer them a greater variety of cultural opportunities both in terms of their own culture (a larger number of immigrants from their homeland) and in terms of Canadian culture (a NHL team).

Ultimately, I think that we need a structured and cohesive strategy for settling and retaining immigrants in Saskatchewan. However, in order to develop such a strategy we have to try to resolve the tension between cultural integration and cultural retention which is at the heart of English Canadian multiculturalism. This leaves us with a number intriguing questions for discussion. Which is better method of retaining immigrants in Saskatchewan: allow them to preserve their homeland culture or encourage them to integrate into their host society? In terms of the Canada/Saskatchewan/Ukraine experience, to what extent do Ukrainian immigrants to Saskatchewan want to be subsumed into mainstream culture of our province and to what extent do they want to retain their homeland culture? Is it best to retain Ukrainian immigrants to Saskatchewan through programs which financially support Ukrainian dance troops and Ukrainian language classes? Or should the Saskatchewan government be aiming at setting up settlement services that teach new Ukrainian immigrants about Saskatchewan history, teach them English, and takes them to local hockey and football games? Is there a way to encourage Ukrainian immigrants to both retain their homeland culture while at the same time integrating into a larger 'Saskatchewan' culture?