PROJECT: Integrative Multiplicity through Suburban Realities: Exploring Diversity through Public Spaces in Scarborough.

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Overview of the Integrative Multiplicity Project

Scarborough is an inner-city suburb of Toronto with a population of more than 57% immigrants of its 600,000 residents. It offers a unique perspective in understanding how the process of integration is practiced in multiple and creative ways. The rapidly changing population and historical landscape offers a unique perspective to explore how the built environment has been modified and transformed into diverse uses and how the process of integration moulds itself accordingly. Accessing services at places such as schools, religious institutions, settlement agencies, and even grocery stores, contribute to their experience of integration. Integration in Scarborough, and in other cities across Canada, can be better analyzed through ‘integrative multiplicity’, or in other words, how concepts of integration are imagined, understood, and practiced by newcomers through multiple public spaces within a city.

This research explores the many ways in which ‘integration’ is practiced and understood in Scarborough by looking at a group of diverse immigrant and refugee communities that live and work in this part of the city. Based on past research, this study seeks to understand the different ways that integration has evolved (or is hindered) through local institutions. These are articulated as unidirectional, reciprocal or multifarious spaces of integration (Basu, 2011) where the plurality of cross cultural exchanges take place. It aims to contribute to a theoretical understanding of how public spaces relate to integration and the potential implications for Scarborough and other diverse cities that host large numbers of newcomers.

Researchers used multiple methods along with the narratives and practical wisdom of community members. Photographs were taken for a landscape analysis to better understand the area. GIS mapping was used to look at demographics, different public spaces, and new ways of understanding integration. Researchers reviewed a series of news articles on Scarborough to get a better take on public perception through media representation. Researchers then asked 49 adults and 25 youth to respond to questionnaires. Finally, four follow-up focus groups were carried out to explore how respondents perceive and experience public space and their integration as Scarborough residents.

The research has revealed that despite negative and stereotypical perceptions of Scarborough as a drab and dangerous city in decline, it has provided a home to recent migrants and is understood in many different and complicated ways. Migrants understand Scarborough as a ‘City of Refuge and Peace’ and as a ‘City of Memory, Desire and Imagination’. It is evident after some analysis that Scarborough is a ‘City of Integrative Multiplicity’; and has solid examples as a ‘City of Civic Engagement and Fluid Resistance’.

New migrants viewed the city in this light for many reasons. They saw public space as places where diverse groups can meet, interact, and come to a broader understanding of society. These types of spaces are essentially where integration is understood and ‘negotiated’ by residents. The spaces are numerous and diverse, ranging from local grocery stores to public parks and libraries. They can also be found in religious institutions and simply on the neighbourhood streets and can serve as one-way, reciprocal, or multifarious spaces for learning or interacting and ultimately contributing to integration.

Researchers also noted that public spaces for migrants really vary in size and scale, for example, from large scale mosques to storefront temples. They can also be both solid structures or more adhoc and unplanned spaces that change over time. Abandoned postwar industrial units, for instance, are affordable to rent as temples and mosques, educational centres, bakeries, or even floral shops. Although not always obvious, such spaces can especially come to life during festivals and events. Migrants use different public spaces on a daily basis and as a continuum. However, though the high cost of transit makes travelling around the city prohibitive and their daily movements very localized they maintain strong transnational links. They are able to meet and connect with others through family, cultural, and economic ties in these spaces that build and expand relationships and ease the settlement experience. Interestingly, cultural institutions and stores are used and even managed more and more by multiple ethnic groups which contribute to new cross-cultural alliances and multifarious spaces of integration.

This research shows how different geographical contexts of inclusion and exclusion lead to correspondingly different experiences in understanding integration in public spaces. Cities can understand their development through the concept of ‘integrative multiplicity’ and should strive for social sustainability among immigrant and refugee communities residing in their municipalities.
Landuse in Scarborough is primarily residential. Since the post war period many abandoned industrial areas (grey parts on the map) have been converted in affordable and creative ways into cultural institutions, religious centres, small businesses and even educational centres. As most of our respondents did not own cars their daily activities were restrictive and very localized. Public transit according to our respondents proved a major barrier for their movement across the city and was noted to be infrequent, inaccessible and expensive.
Scarborough and five other municipalities were amalgamated into the City of Toronto in 1998. The population also grew from 2001-2006 by 2.4% compared to 0.8% for the rest of the city (City of Toronto, 2009). In 2006, 33% of dwellings were high rise apartments and 39% were single detached homes; while 66% of dwellings were owned and 34% rented. Household income in 2005 was $53,619; and 25.8% of the population was considered to be in the low income level. According to a Social Planning forum discussion, 30,000 newcomer families may be among the hidden homeless in Toronto based on newcomer and affordability statistics.

Many of our participants noted that in difficult economic times they faced the additional challenge of finding employment primarily due to: their credentials not being recognized, finding affordable child care arrangements, language ‘accents’ deemed different, and indirect racism.
Recent Immigrants in Toronto

In 2006, 57% of the total population was immigrants, and 12% of the population was recent immigrants arriving in Canada in the past five years. Most of the immigrants arrived from Southern Asia (36.6%), Eastern Asia (31.7%), and South East Asia (10.9%). Two thirds of the population was classified as visible minorities, compared to 40% for the rest of the City. The top three languages aside from English were listed in the census as Chinese (6.4%), Cantonese (6.3%) and Tamil (5.9%).

Our respondents included migrants from over twenty countries primarily from the Global South. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, China, Guyana, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Katoomba (Australia), Namibia Windhoek, Ukraine, (Kiyev), Israel, (Afula), USSR, Baku, Yemen, Belarus, Vietnam, and Irish/Italian, Scottish, German heritage.
Neighbourhoods across the City of Toronto are increasingly diverse at the local level. However, some neighbourhoods are dominated by specific ethnic groups compared to others. The above map illustrates that there is a particular geography to this diversity. In Scarborough these group include South Asian, East and South East Asian, Caribbean, with a British origin predominantly residing on the waterfront. Yet, most neighbourhoods contain residents from over seven countries (indicated in the opposite map by dark blue).
Childcare is a crucial public service for all families with children. It provides early learning opportunities for children, regulated care when equitably subsidized for all families, and allows caregivers the freedom to pursue their work or studies when available in an affordable and accessible way. Childcare also provides important venues for public space when groups of families are able to interact and form associational linkages on an everyday basis.

In Toronto, there are 876 formal, regulated child care centres. Of these, 176 (20%) are located in Scarborough, although 27% of children under the age of 14 live in Scarborough (2006 Census). As the maps indicate, in Scarborough, most of these are located in elementary schools (39%), high rise apartment buildings (17%), and places of worship (13%). The trend is similar when compared to the rest of the city.

Though most of our respondents with children (70%) would benefit from childcare, only a few (11%) had access to some form of formal care. Responsibilities were shared within family and among friends and relatives.
Public Libraries, Settlement Services and Community Recreation Services are all important public spaces in the city and were highly valued by our respondents (adults and youth). These were spaces where they could access a variety of resources and meet other people. There are 93 public libraries in Toronto of which 19 (20%) are in Scarborough; 117 settlement centres with 26 (22%) in Scarborough; and 146 Recreation Centres with 29 (20%) in Scarborough. The spatial distribution of these services by immigrants is illustrated in the map above.

The second map calculates a service index for each neighbourhood by immigrant in the city. The black dots indicate neighbourhoods with no services (either library, community centre or settlement centre); red dots indicate neighbourhoods with more immigrants but less services (underserved); while the green dots indicate more services provided by immigrants compared to the rest of the city (better served). More services need to be provided in high immigrant areas. The map on the following page calculating a similar index for religious institutions by recent immigrants shows the opposite. There are a higher number of religious institutions serving more recent immigrants.
Places of Worship

Places of Worship by Different Faiths

Index of Religious Multifariousness

Number of religions by census tract, 2001 over 5% of population

Service Index
Places of Worship
- No service (110)
- Above average (more immigrants per religious institution) (234)
- Below average (less immigrants per religious institution) (127)

Total number of Recent Immigrants
by Census Tract, 2008
- 0 to 50 (37)
- 50 to 250 (162)
- 250 to 500 (130)
- 500 to 1,000 (140)
- 1,000 to 3,480 (62)
Schools are spaces where recent immigrants children and their families become familiar with the education system, meet other friends and families and ‘integrate’ into the life of their neighbourhood and beyond. Aside from providing English language classes for new learners; they often provide heritage/international language classes in some schools. This provision depends on the school community and initiative of parents and staff. The above map illustrates that some schools offer many languages. These are often in neighbourhoods with many recent immigrants. The map on the opposite page however notes that these are usually requested when there are fewer English language learners - thus the process of integration takes place at different comfort levels. The multifarious aspect in schools where multiple languages are taught to groups with multiple backgrounds is a process where integration is understood in a much more complex way by immigrants.
In libraries, libraries are public spaces where recent immigrants from our survey and focus groups spent a lot of time and valued deeply. They were spaces where they borrowed books, learnt about the city and the programs offered, met other community members, used the computer and internet, and spent some quiet time. Libraries also provided book collections and magazines in other languages that made them feel connected to other places left behind. The map above illustrates that in 32 neighbourhoods some libraries offered these resources in over six languages. These were unevenly distributed across the city.

Local 'pan shops' offering video transfers and transnational linkages for all oversea communities.

TEMPORARY PUBLIC SPACES: Outward (white tent) and inward (display of sweets) looking spaces.