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The Opportunity and Challenge of Diversity: A Role for Social Capital?

Synthesis Report

International Conference

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PRI Project
Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool

Federal Government Partners

*Policy Research Initiative
Canadian Heritage
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Human Resources Development Canada
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Conference Summary

Immigrant integration and the management of diversity is now, and will remain a vital policy concern for Canada and most other OECD countries in the 21st century. Throughout the OECD, immigrants are arriving from a wider range of countries, bringing with them a greater array of languages, cultures, and religions. Policy-makers continue to face both the opportunities and challenges inherent in ensuring the successful integration of immigrants and members of all ethno-cultural communities. While the processes of immigrant integration and the management of diversity have been of long-standing interest to researchers and policy-makers, attention has only recently turned to the possible roles social capital may play in fostering or hindering these processes. At a time when concerns have been raised about increasing difficulties with the immigrant integration process in a number of countries, including Canada, paying attention to social capital may expand the public policy options for addressing these concerns.

The central idea at issue is that our networks of social contacts may represent another form of capital resource, beyond physical and human capital, with important potential returns on investment. For individuals, who one knows matters for “getting by” or for “getting ahead.” Similarly, communities that are united by ties of relations that cut across social cleavages will work more effectively than those that are sharply divided.

The main hypothesis underlying the Montréal conference was that the integration process for immigrants and the management of diversity more broadly is an area where the generation of networks of social contacts may potentially play a key role in achieving a number of desired outcomes.

When immigrants from diverse countries of origin come to settle in Canada, they are faced with an extraordinary range of stressful challenges. These include finding housing, establishing a new career, coping with new education, health care, and legal systems, and adjusting to a new cultural environment. Moreover, new immigrants must address these challenges at the very moment when they have left most of their networks of social contacts behind. At the same time, building effective connections is a challenge not simply for newcomers, but for members of the host society as well. Canadian communities and employers frequently face a number of difficulties in reaching out to new immigrants and tapping into their potential contributions.

However, the settlement experience of immigrants is not the end of the road in terms of integration. Even after generations of continuing immigration to Canada, fostering the full social, economic, and political inclusion of all ethno-cultural groups, including many long-established communities, remains a key challenge for all levels of government.

Considerations of social capital raise a series of questions. What role do networks of social contacts play in immigrant integration and the management of diversity?

How difficult is it to establish and maintain useful networks? Are new immigrants and members of host societies able to establish helpful contacts? If not, can OECD governments play a better role in encouraging and enabling the development of such connections? As societies become culturally diverse, how can governments and stakeholders build the bridges and links that will enable all members of their society to participate fully in the social, political, and economic spheres?

The conference was structured around themes designed to uncover the role of social capital in facilitating this multi-level participation of new immigrants and members of diverse communities. To complement the session discussions, the conference welcomed two prominent keynote speakers. Donald Johnston, Secretary-General of the OECD, spoke to the participants about immigration trends across OECD countries, while Robert Putnam of Harvard University, in an address entitled, “Social Capital in a Diverse Society: Who Bridges? Who Bonds,” shared some preliminary findings of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. In addition to these themes and addresses, a one-day pre-conference workshop provided a forum to discuss advances in the measurement of social capital and new data sources in the areas of immigration, diversity, and social capital.

Designed in consultation with experts on the topic, each plenary session consisted primarily of presentations from a mix of policy-makers, academics, and practitioners in the field, followed by a question and answer period. Several background papers were commissioned for the conference and were made available to the participants to facilitate more in-depth discussion. These papers are available on the PRI Web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>.

Opening Remarks: Setting the policy context for social capital and immigrant integration

Jean-Pierre Voyer, Executive Director of the PRI, opened the conference by highlighting the Canadian experience in terms of immigrant integration and the management of diversity. Although immigration has become one of the key sources for population and labour force growth, low-income rates have been rising among new immigrants, even as this group has been increasingly skilled. Voyer noted that, to date, much of the policy debate on the determinants of successful economic integration for new immigrants has focused on the role of human capital – the importance of skills, education levels, language abilities, or the need for better credentials recognition. In view of the recent decline in the economic performance of new immigrants, perhaps it is time to broaden the analysis to explore the role played by social capital and social networks in the process of integration.

Successful immigrant integration is not only a policy priority for Canada. Immigration and diversity matters are also key issues for virtually all OECD members due to increased migration across countries resulting in an ever-widening diversity. For this reason, the OECD has undertaken a number of recent studies into the immigrant integration process. These studies have not, however,

focused on social capital. Conference Co-Chair John Martin, Director of the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Directorate at the OECD, cautioned that if social capital is to prove to be more than a rather abstract academic question, it must be clearly demonstrated in practical terms that it offers an approach that makes for better policy development than other social terms and concepts. Grounding social capital approaches in specific policy issues such as immigrant integration and the management of diversity, may help to do just this.

**Plenary Session 1:
Defining social capital in the context of policy development for
immigrant integration and the management of diversity**

The opening session of the conference sought to establish a clear framework for conceptualizing social capital for public policy applications generally, and within the context of integration and diversity more specifically.

Jeff Frank of the PRI began the session speaking to the network-based framework developed by his team. This framework offers a lean and clean definition of social capital primarily in terms of social networks, but has the flexibility to incorporate other important and closely related concepts, such as norms, values, and trust. Keeping a narrower core definition of social capital may help to avoid the conceptual muddiness that has hampered efforts to develop a social capital approach to public policy.

Michael Woolcock, Senior Social Scientist with the World Bank, offered a rich primer to social capital applications for public policy. In particular, Woolcock stressed that effective public policy interventions must go beyond policies and programs to focus on the practices of linking social capital, and in particular on the quality of the face-to-face social relationships that are an inherent part of public service delivery, as in teaching, health care, or policing. One conference participant noted the connections of this approach to Michael Lipsky's seminal work on "street level bureaucrats." Woolcock also spoke of the challenges for individuals in managing those transitions and conflicts that may involve difficult identity shifts as one leaves behind old social networks and builds new connections and identities. Services and supports from external agents may be important to the successful negotiation of these transitions.

Xavier de Souza Briggs, of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, sounded a cautionary note in adapting the concept of social capital for public policy applications. Despite recent important advances in social capital research, relatively little actionable knowledge has been identified. That said, Briggs suggested that the development of "good" social capital may be facilitated by promoting joining and organizing behaviour at the local level, where one is able to tap effectively into interest in specific problems and opportunities. Nurturing new generations of active citizens must go beyond old-style civics classes, and will require more attention to the development of those civic skills involving the ability to solve problems and negotiate conflicts collectively.

Howard Duncan of the Metropolis Project focused on social capital as a public good that resides in the relationships between members of a society and between those members and the institutions of that society. For Duncan, social capital is at the root of the possibility of co-operation, which in turn forms the basis of a society's prosperity and well-being. He suggested that greater social inclusion leads to increased social capital, and increased social capital leads to greater prosperity. The government's role in this process is to provide the background infrastructure and funding to promote social inclusion through framework legislation and grants and contributions to local organizations.

In his role as discussant, David Halpern of the UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit concluded that there was a need for the concept of social capital to be on the table with the other identified forms of capital. However, he argued that we must now be prepared to answer the "so what" challenge. The concept has now been sufficiently clarified that public policy practitioners should be able to identify specific policy prescriptions.

Plenary Session 2: Social capital in the context of immigration and diversity: economic participation

In light of the policy and academic discourse shift noted by session chair Nurjehan Mawani, Senior Advisor on Diversity to the President of the Canadian Centre for Management Development, from the "why" to the "how" of diversity, the second session considered how to overcome obstacles to economic participation of ethno-cultural groups and immigrants.

Elizabeth Ruddick of Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided an overview of concerns regarding the economic performance of recent immigrants, including a decline in entry earnings, increasing poverty rates, and a widening gap in earnings with Canadians. While a number of factors have been identified to explain these outcomes, such as a decline in returns on foreign credentials, a shift in source countries, and depressed labour markets in the 1990s, they are only able to account for a portion of the downturn in economic performance. Social capital and the role of networks, among other factors, such as language or employer awareness, are likely fundamental components of the unexplained portion. In response to this, immigrant selection criteria have since begun weighting social connections (or potential networks as a result of having spent time in Canada) more heavily in their selection process.

In the analysis of immigrant economic participation in the Nordic welfare state by Annika Forsander, University of Helsinki, and the reflections on the French approach to immigrant integration presented by Mouna Viprey, Institut de recherches économiques et sociales, the benefits of having a multicultural policy to confront the growing proportion of immigrants among the unemployed was emphasized. Maintaining a multicultural policy is advantageous as it enables the explicit recognition of, and thus the ability to work with, ethnic groups to harness the benefits of bonding social capital, while simultaneously encouraging and

facilitating bridging and linking social capital. This is considerably more difficult in countries, such as France and Norway, that hold a nationalist concept of citizenship, and encourage strong bonding social capital among the host population, potentially resulting in the unrecognized exclusion of immigrants and ethno-cultural groups.

Peter Li of the University of Saskatchewan cautioned seeing social capital as a panacea in the integration of immigrants, and spoke to the possible downside of social capital and the aspects of it that are exclusive in nature. In his talk, Li explored various theses found in the literature as to the possible costs and benefits of social capital in terms of the economic well-being of immigrant and minority communities. Most approaches agree that the presence of ethno-cultural communities characterized by extensive bonding social capital typically play a significant role in the initial employment prospects of new immigrants. Views differ, however, as to whether these ethno-cultural communities are a springboard to economic success or constitute a trap from which few immigrants can readily escape. Depending on which thesis is a more accurate reflection of the social capital dynamics involved, governments and stakeholders may wish to pursue very different policy directions.

Derek Hum, University of Manitoba, echoed this dual nature in his comments as discussant when he likened social capital to cholesterol – some forms are harmful but others can be good.

Plenary Session 3: Social capital in the context of immigration and diversity: education

According to Yvonne Hébert, University of Calgary, the educational social networks of immigrant youth – including parents and families, communities, teachers, school administrators, and friends – provide the social interaction framework that shapes the integration of youth and establishes the future patterns of social capital accumulation and uses, in addition to influencing their educational outcomes.

Barriers, such as language and a lack of familiarity with the school system, can inhibit parental involvement in their children's education, and the responses by educators to parental efforts to build these networks have important implications for the educational outcomes of youth. A community's support, expectations, and involvement, as well as a group's high value placed on academic success and commitment to work ethic, have strong positive influences on the educational achievements of immigrant youth.

The importance of youth in the social capital discussion cannot be understated for the reasons referred to above. That being said, youth have been under-represented in social capital research. Understanding how social relations in school, with friends, in the community, and with the family facilitate possession and activation

of specific forms of social capital among Canadian youth should be a research priority.

**Plenary Session 4:
Social capital in the context of immigration and diversity:
community and neighbourhood dynamics**

Throughout the conference, various participants noted the importance of community level considerations in any policy or program design seeking to use or influence social capital.

Brian Ray of the Migration Policy Institute stressed that while sustained resources, support, and financial capital are essential to the integration and full participation of a marginalized ethno-cultural community, a strong social capital foundation may also be key to sustainable progress. Annick Germain, Université du Québec, and Debbie Douglas, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, also acknowledged the important potential of building social capital connections, while at the same time stressing that an abundant stock of social capital is not necessarily sufficient on its own to guarantee the success of a community. Even those groups that already have strong social networks may find themselves unable to exploit their potential due to other systemic barriers.

Several presenters suggested that governments, through enabling flexibility, providing stable funding support to NGOs, and developing partnerships with community groups and the private sector, could generate significant social investment returns while at the same time building “linking” social capital between the citizen and the state. Session participants pointed to the importance of harvesting insights from the community economic development literature in this regard.

**Plenary Session 5:
Social capital in the context of immigration and diversity:
civic and political participation**

The presentation of Jean Tillie from the University of Amsterdam emphasized the importance of seeing the complementarities of bonding and bridging social capital. In contrast to the idea that bonding social capital is largely an obstacle to the more beneficial bridging social capital, his research indicates that the presence of both strong intra-group social bonds and inter-group social bridges may be a necessary condition for successful civic and political integration.

The complex relationship of bridging and bonding social capital highlighted by Tillie and several other participants throughout the conference is clearly an area that is in need of further research. Although the literature acknowledges that bonding social capital has positive consequences, excessive bonding has been found to inhibit “getting ahead.” Bridging social capital has been seen as almost exclusively beneficial if somewhat more difficult to build and sustain. The connection between the two is often thought of as a trade-off. However, in light

of these discussions, it is clear that a more refined understanding of the two forms and their interaction is in order.

Carolle Simard, Université du Québec à Montréal, noted that social capital researchers have largely neglected the important question of political integration. Future research agendas should include considerations of the dynamics of political participation and why some non-majority ethnic groups have made inroads into electoral institutions while many others have not. The disparity between different groups' abilities to harness their social networks for political gain and the relation of this ability to broader issues of racism, discrimination, and structural barriers would also benefit from further research attention, a point also voiced by Raymond Breton, University of Toronto, and Gurchand Singh, Home Office, United Kingdom.

Plenary Session 6: The role of government and stakeholders

Ratna Omidvar of the Maytree Foundation pointed to the importance of the government's role in supporting bottom-up initiatives at the local level, particularly to support the development of bridging and linking social capital. She also suggested that removing systemic barriers to immigrants' social, economic, and political involvement would likely prove to be among the most valuable forms of intervention.

Jean Séguin of Citizenship and Immigration Canada described several programs that aim to build bridging social capital at the individual and local levels, such as the Host Program, wherein new Canadians are matched with volunteer host families in an effort to ease the settlement process. Other programs supported by the Department were also discussed including language training and multicultural liaison officers working in schools to build awareness among different ethnic groups.

A key concern in this session pertained to the question of whose responsibility social capital issues are, both internationally and federally. John Helliwell, University of British Columbia, noted that with the wide range of areas in which a social capital approach can play a role, the concept ought to be incorporated into files, such as immigration, diversity, urban, health, learning, and productivity issues. To complement this, he remarked that benchmarking social capital indicators are important to measure the success of interventions.

Plenary Session 7: Reflections on policy directions and research: roundtable of senior policy officials

A panel of senior policy officials were asked to identify priorities in the immigration field and any role for social capital therein, as well as their research needs in the area of social capital and immigration.

Their answers indicated a need to surpass current program and capacity limitations for integration, and that social capital would likely serve as an important tool in this task. A particular area where social capital is considered to have potential usefulness is in service delivery practices of federal departments. Developing a specific focus on youth and education in terms of social capital research, as well as looking at the dynamics of networks, including the interaction of bonding and bridging social capital, were noted as areas of increasing importance that should be part of an actionable research agenda.

Successful integration of immigrants, and the management of diversity, will remain key issues for the foreseeable future, as Canada remains committed to welcoming large numbers of immigrants. This is particularly the case given the increasing concerns that immigrant integration processes are less successful than they once were. At the same time, recent data confirm that social networks are an important resource for immigrants. This seems to indicate that immigrant integration and diversity issues provide rich terrain for practical policy applications of a social capital approach. Sustaining and improving current efforts to gather data on social capital, as well as developing a community-level dimension to the data collection, will likely prove useful.

Pre-conference Workshop

In Canada as elsewhere, new specialized surveys on immigration and ethnic diversity include data that quantify certain facets of social capital. Other surveys focus directly on social capital and delve more deeply into its main dimensions. In all cases, measuring such a multi-dimensional concept is an undertaking that is difficult, relatively new, and is further complicated by varying operational principles. Internationally, a consensus is building on the most productive indicators from a comparative standpoint. This series of workshops offered an overview of these data and indicators that form the empirical basis of our understanding of social capital in terms of immigration and diversity.

Setting the immigration context for the day, Canadian and Australian government representatives showcased their respective Longitudinal Surveys of Immigrants and preliminary findings that include data on the social support networks used by newcomers in the settlement and integration process. Providing an international comparative survey, Neil Nevitte presented the work being done with the World Values Survey.

Examining sources of data on ethnic diversity, Department of Canadian Heritage and Statistics Canada representatives described the Ethnic Diversity Survey, Canada's first post-census survey focusing on diversity. It asked respondents a variety of questions including those on social networks and civic participation. Along similar lines, Chris Atwood from the United Kingdom's Home Office gave the audience a picture of progress in terms of data collection on social capital and ethnic diversity in the United Kingdom with the Home Office Citizenship Survey.

To gain an awareness of the variety of social capital data sources available, a wide range of presentations were made, including the General Social Survey on Social

Engagement by Statistics Canada, and the Equality, Security, Community Survey being conducted out of the University of British Columbia. The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, the largest scientific investigation of civic engagement ever conducted in America, was presented by Tom Sander of Harvard University's Civic Engagement in America team. Complementing the North American cases, Alan Mackay from the Australian Bureau of Statistics spoke to different Australian data sources and initiatives and finally Tom Healy of Ireland's Department of Education and Science considered European data sources, their issues of concern, and the connections with social capital.

In the concluding session, Simon Field of the OECD discussed international initiatives on social capital statistics and Maryanne Kelly spoke to the notion of social capital from the perspective of the UK Office for National Statistics perspectives. She also reported on key meetings held on developing guidelines for internationally comparable indicators of social capital.