



Prairie Centre Regional Workshop

Workshop Presentation Abstract

Aspects of the Integration of Residents of the Former Yugoslavia into Regina

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Immigrants from the former Yugoslavia have been building communities in Regina for much of this century. During the last five years the number of immigrants from this region of the world coming to Regina has increased dramatically. These immigrants come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, with a diverse range of political and personal experiences in their former places of residence. Little is known about the social structures of these new communities in medium sized cities such as Regina. The project attempted to provide some initial data regarding the emerging social structure that the new arrivals were constructing in their host communities by beginning to develop a preliminary ethnographic profile. The emphasis was on the extent to which recent arrivals in Regina were interested in becoming, or had actually become, integrated into the political processes at a variety of levels.

We hoped that the data on individual and family activities and attitudes would contribute to developing a community profile and contribute to a better understanding of how members of this group perceive and participate in political institutions. Information was collected on some micro patterns of daily life including interaction in terms of family, work, education, religious, and political life. We were interested in determining what micro and macro patterns are apparent and emerging, and what these might tell us about the process of integration into Canadian society. While this data was important, the focus was on the issue of how do immigrants perceive the structures and organization of the polity in a liberal democratic society. For example, to what extent are immigrants politically active? Do immigrants avail themselves of the opportunities for political participation available in a liberal democratic polity?

The research involved the use of structured interviews with adults from the former Yugoslavia. The Regina Open Door Society (RODS) provided an initial list of clients (approximately 90) from which we drew a simple random sample of 30. As well, the interview instrument was developed in cooperation with RODS who also assisted in the pretest, and the revisions to the final version. While our initial hope was to interview at least 30 adults, we were only able to successfully complete 21 interviews. Letters were sent out in advance, and interviews then were arranged by phone whenever possible. Rather than developing a complicated screening schedule for use at the household level we merely interviewed the individual over 18 who had most recently had a birthday. We followed the typical techniques associated with structured face-to

face interviews using a detailed interview schedule and some visual aids for Likert-scale questions. In arranging the interviews we encountered a variety of difficulties ranging from language barriers, overt suspicion reluctance to talk about anything relating to politics, and simple lack of time. The inter-views that we did conduct generally turned out to take longer than we had anticipated, in some cases lasting between three and four hours.

The results of the structured interviews were recorded on a 40 page instrument that covered a wide range of issues including: basic demographics and reasons for coming to Canada/ Regina (pp. 1-3), integration and experiences of children in and out of school (4-9), family dynamics including sex and gender role patterns (10-14), religious activities (15-16), employment and income patterns (17-19), and community activities and integration (20-24). The bulk of the inter-view dealt with a lengthy series of items relating to political attitudes and behaviour relating to the polity in both Canada and their place of former residence (25-40). In addition, the Regina Open Door Society provided some questions which were scattered throughout the instrument to assist in the on-going evaluation its programs and initiatives. No tape recordings were used.

While the size of the sample is clearly too small to make significant generalizations, some of the data collected can be brought to bear on a number of on-going sociological debates concerning personal, family and community dynamics, political participation, and political attitudes as well as the factors that are involved in the formation of attitudes toward the polity, democracy, political participation and state agencies. To date the most substantial outcome of the project has been the successful completion of Mr. La Rocque's M.A. thesis based on the data set. A great deal of analysis remains to be completed, as does a report for the Regina Open Door Society. In addition, the data will be used in subsequent scholarly publications. Finally, the data will be made available to other researchers in the Center interested in developing a comparative data set.