

Planners helping house new Canadians:

learning intercultural
communication through practice

*The case of New Journey Housing
in Winnipeg*



Abstract

Johanna Washchyshyn,

B.A. Anth., MCP Candidate

and

Susan Radstrom,

B.E.D., MCP,

Executive Director, New

Journey Housing

Planning can be understood as practiced and applied urban anthropology. Planners are like anthropologists situated amongst diversity: diversity of place, age, gender, race, religion, profession – what can broadly be termed *culture*. Culture is problematic and difficult to define; it is context specific and can mean different things to different people. That’s the beauty of it. The term culture refers to any and all things social, the learned and shared behaviour of each human being, our institutions, relationships, and the ways in which we communicate. It is through communication that culture is learned. “The continuous new learning that takes place in the individual occurs in and through *communication*” (original emphasis; Kim, 2001, p.47). As Planners are communicators, especially Canadian Planners in our continually globalizing urban centres such as Winnipeg, intercultural communication is a key competency for practitioners.

Intercultural communication is a learned capacity that Winnipeg Planner, Susan Radstrom learned on the job at New Journey Housing. The agency is a uniquely modeled non-profit organization that helps newcomers to Winnipeg find housing through information sharing and education, which leads to informed decision-making and empowerment. The evolving relationships between New Journey Housing as an educational settlement service provider, and newcomers of various ethno-cultural groups seeking their housing-related services, intercultural communication was being learned and practiced. The work of New Journey Housing is similar to an ongoing community consultation, with continual learning between all parties.

“If I was not working closely with individuals and groups who have arrived from all over the world, and through every circumstance imaginable, it may have been easy to continue with my preconceived ideas regarding multiculturalism.”

*- Susan Radstrom, Executive Director,
New Journey Housing*

Background & Context

Interculturalism

Our cities are increasingly moving away from multiculturalism into a realm of interculturalism. The notion of interculturalism is that which is beyond multiculturalism, because diverse people are interacting with each other, working next to each other, living amongst one another everyday. An intercultural state is that in which difference is not only celebrated, intertwined, intermingled, and integrated. Interculturalism is a paradigm shift, of living and working within and amongst diversity. In thinking about an Intercultural City, a new view on difference and culture is essential seeing as the cities of the 21st century are continually globalizing. John Lorinc (2006) describes the Canadian urban condition as such:

Like the best and most cosmopolitan ideas about cities, our attitude toward multiculturalism embodies a subtle but far-sighted understanding of the nature of Canada's urban condition. Which is this: that in a nation of immigrants, we can only coexist in our complex urban settings if we respect one another's ways, listen to one another's ideas, and support our neighbours as they navigate that great distance – both geographic and emotional – between old homes and new homes (p.329).

How do we define what it means to be Canadian and expect all newcomers to integrate into ‘our culture’? Wood and Landry (2008) have written a book, *The Intercultural City: planning for diversity advantage*. They view the intercultural city as a place where diversity is celebrated, where innovation and creativity thrives because of intercultural contacts and connections, what they call “the diversity advantage.”

The notion of interculturalism is found within the Planning literature of theorist, Leonie Sandercock, who has always been at the cutting-edge of challenging the ways the profession works with(-in) culture. She re-theorizes multiculturalism into what she has preferred to call interculturalism (Sandercock, 2004), her key points are as follows:

- *The cultural embeddedness of humans is inescapable. We grow up in a culturally structured world, are deeply shaped by it, and necessarily view the world from within a specific culture. We are capable of critically evaluating our own culture’s beliefs and practices, and of understanding and appreciating as well as criticizing those of other cultures. But some form of cultural identity and belonging seems unavoidable.*
- *‘Culture’ cannot be understood as static, eternally given, essentialist. It is always evolving, dynamic and hybrid or necessary. All cultures, even allegedly conservative or traditional ones, contain multiple differences within themselves that are continually being re-negotiated.*

- *Cultural diversity as a positive and intercultural dialogue is a necessary element of culturally diverse societies. No culture is perfect or can be perfected, but all cultures have something to learn from and contribute to others. Cultures grow through the everyday practices of social interaction.*
- *The political contestation of interculturalism as a daily political practice are two rights: the right to difference and the right to the city. The right to difference means recognizing the legitimacy and specific needs of minority or subaltern cultures. The right to the city is the right to presence, to occupy public space, and to participate as an equal in public affairs.*
- *The ‘right to difference’ at the heart of interculturalism must be perpetually contested against other rights (for example, human rights) and redefined according to new formulations and considerations.*
- *The notion of the perpetual contestation of interculturalism implies an agonistic democratic politics that demands active citizenship and daily negotiations of difference in all of the banal sites of intercultural interaction.*
- *A sense of belonging in an intercultural society cannot be based on race, religion, or ethnicity but needs to be based on a shared commitment to political community. Such a commitment requires an empowered citizenry.*
- *Reducing fear and intolerance can only be achieved by addressing the material as well as cultural dimensions of ‘recognition’. This means addressing the prevailing inequalities of political and economic power as well as developing new stories about and symbols of national and local identity and belonging (original emphasis: as cited in Wood and Landry, 2008, p. 63-65).*

With this framework of learning the capacity of intercultural competence, it becomes evident that the work of New Journey Housing puts theory into practice. Wood and Landry (2008) frame the research question, the topic of this case-in-point:

People behave in the way they behave because of the culture they have assimilated. It may be an ethnic culture though it could equally be an organizational or professional culture that influences their reading of and responses to the world. Without an understanding of this, urban place-makers are lost. Our question here is not so much, how can the place-making professions do their job while taking culture into account? But instead, the real question is, how have they possibly been able to do their job for so long without taking culture into account? (p.245)

Image at right: Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), can be seen as a model for Interculturalism in Winnipeg. The intent and philosophy at IRCOM is to 'teach' newcomers about diversity by living amongst one another, sharing experiences, and becoming acquainted with diversity.

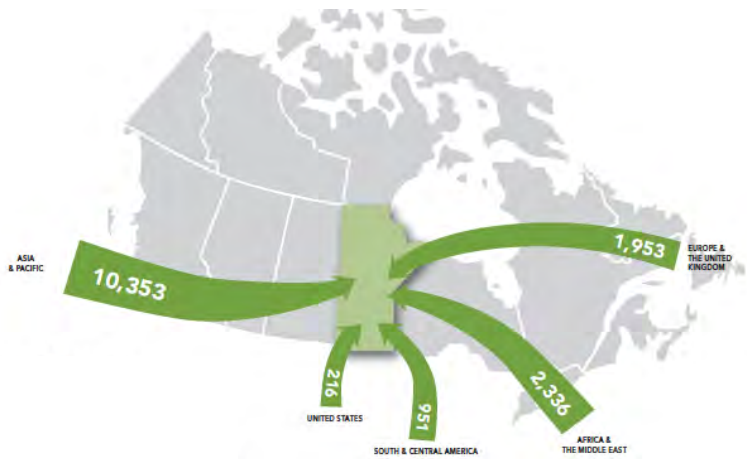
www.ircom.ca

If individuals and communities are provided with correct information in regards to settlement in Canada, the experience of settlement will be strengthened. Confidence that one is educated to make informed decisions regarding housing and communication can lead an informed pathway towards involvement and integration. By providing education, newcomers are not pressured with expectations of adaptation, but provided with information that empowers individual decision-making that leads to a stronger foundation for healthy lives in Canada. Similarly, the notion of becoming intercultural is not only for newcomers, but for each and every individual to truly know and appreciate diversity both internally and externally. It's about personal growth, new relationships, and acceptance.



Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication can be thought of as where the planning profession becomes applied anthropology, in the sharing, exchanging and creating of information. This knowledge sharing is a dynamic process. "First, the communicator is inscribing their message with meaning derived from their own cultural preconceptions (that is, they are *encoding* it). Second, the addressee is receiving the information and reading it according to their own cultural preconceptions (that is, they are *decoding* it)" (original emphasis; Wood and Landry, 2008, p.246-247). The Intercultural Planner recognizes culture within the information exchange. "To be intercultural means being able to listen to and understand other cultural perspectives, and in the process of place-making, therefore, consultation cannot simply be a one-off and standardized exercise but a continuous process of informal discussion and engagement" (Wood & Landry, 2008, p.251). This is moving beyond the notion of multiculturalism, where 'community' was defined by ethnicity. Interculturalism reflects the multiple communities and identities within each individual. The work of New Journey Housing is community planning through intercultural communication.



Manitoba Permanent Residents by Source Area, 2008-2010.
Manitoba Immigration Facts 2010 Statistical Report.

Facts of the case

Immigration to Manitoba and Winnipeg

The Provincial Government is largely responsible for the immigration process to Manitoba through the Provincial Nominee system. Upon arrival of new residents in Manitoba, 77.6 per cent settle in the City of Winnipeg (Manitoba, 2011, p.12), the sixth most popular Canadian destination for newcomers a second year in a row in 2010, with 12,263 new permanent residents adding to the city's population (Manitoba, 2011, p.8). Between 2008-2010 the following countries are the source area of Manitoba immigration: 10,353 immigrants from Asia and the Pacific; 216 from the USA; 951 from South and Central America; 2,336 from Africa and the Middle East; 1,953 from Europe and the UK (Manitoba, 2011, p.14).

Pathways of Immigration:

“Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Protection Act establishes selection criteria under three categories for people applying to immigrate permanently to Canada:

- **Family class** – Canada and Manitoba recognize the importance of family reunification and allow Canadian citizens and permanent residents living in Canada to sponsor their family members. In 2010, Manitoba received 1,390 family class immigrants. Philippines, India, United States, China and Ethiopia accounted for 59.3 per cent.

- **Economic class** – Based on the principal applicant’s ability to contribute economically, these immigrants arrive under the Provincial Nominee Program or other federal economic categories. In 2010, Manitoba received 12,178 provincial nominees and

1,099 other economic immigrants. The Philippines, India, China and Germany provided 70 per cent of our economic class immigrants in 2010.

- **Refugee class** – Manitobans have welcomed refugees into their communities and provided them with their support. In 2010, Manitoba settles 6.3 per cent of Canada’s government-assisted refugees (460) and 10.6 per cent of privately-sponsored refugees (514). About 76 per cent of government-assisted refugees came to Manitoba from Bhutan, Somalia, Iraq, Myanmar and Republic Democratic of Congo. Likewise, about 82 per cent of privately-sponsored refugees came from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and South Africa.” (Province of Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Manitoba Immigration Facts, 2010 Statistical Report, 2011, p.3)

The City of Winnipeg's new development plan, OurWinnipeg, has identified that Winnipeg is a city of celebrated cultural diversity. The City's population growth is highly reliant on new immigrants, and the new City Plans have identified this cultural diversity as a strength. However, issues still persist with supporting newcomers in housing related issues.

"Manitoba recognizes that immigration is critical to building a strong and vibrant economy and society. Immigration helps our communities grow and prosper; it introduces new skills and ideas, and it strengthens cultural diversity" (Manitoba, 2011, p.2). This ideology is aligned with Wood & Landry's (2008) view on cultural diversity in cities, especially intercultural exchange, which enhances innovation and creativity for the diversity advantage.

Upon Arrival...

Upon arrival in Winnipeg, Manitoba START is the first place for newcomers to go. "At Manitoba START newcomers receive information and employment counselling as well as referrals to orientation and language services to help them start their new life in Winnipeg" (Manitoba, 2011, p.30). Manitoba START is not an agency which educates newcomers in finding a place to live. This service delivery gap was identified by the non-profit sector working

in settlement services, and the agency, New Journey Housing, recognized the crucial piece of education service delivery gap.

New Journey Housing

Housing is regarded as a central pillar of wellbeing: settling into a good, safe and stable home is crucial for success and wellbeing in one's personal, familial and professional life. New Journey Housing is a non-profit resource centre that serves housing-related education needs for newcomers to Winnipeg. The organization was established to address the needs and challenges that newcomers were facing in regards to finding adequate and affordable housing to suit their diverse needs. The organization is uniquely structured in that it is based on empowering newcomers through information sharing regarding housing related matters in Winnipeg, including matters of where to look for housing, to rights as tenants. This philosophy hopes to encourage independence of newcomers through community-based education, so that informed decisions can be made, and dependence on social support services will wane.



The Mission Statement of the agency is as follows: “New Journey Housing provides resources to train, assist, and support newcomers to Canada, and those who support them, through the process of attaining decent affordable housing in Winnipeg.”

Basic Goals of New Journey Housing:

1. Assist newcomers seeking to find housing
2. Educate newcomers, Landlords, Caretakers and the public on issues related to newcomer housing
3. Link landlords and tenants
4. Guide newcomers and Landlords in the rental process
5. Partner with other housing initiatives and support agencies in assisting newcomers to settle well in Manitoba and work towards their housing goals
6. Advocate on behalf of newcomers

New Journey Housing is the central point of contact for newcomers to Winnipeg for any and all housing related support services. A major feature of the organization are the workshops that are held to provide advice and educate newcomers on the challenges that go along with finding housing in Winnipeg. Counselling programs for rental housing as well as home ownership are also provided by the agency.

“I have learned ‘on the job’ about interculturalism through ongoing listening and dialogue. The work here is similar to an ongoing community consultation.”

*- Susan Radstrom, Executive Director,
New Journey Housing*

Lessons Learned

Through education, work experience, personal interests and relationships, Susan has experienced the capacity for intercultural growth as a community-building Planner. There are challenges as a Planner wanting to become involved in the settlement-services and advocacy line of work because it is less ‘conventional’ for urban planning professionals by training. The worlds of immigration and City Planning are very separate, even though there is so much potential if they can work more closely together. Independent networks and connections have to be made to get involved and participate.

There is an important connection between understanding housing, community development and the people who use and need these spaces. While many newcomers face housing challenges, the reasons behind these challenges vary. These variations are connected to inter-cultural spectrums of difference,

and planners need to learn the capacity to understand the diverse social realm of community building.

Skills and belief in leadership, as learned through the City Planning education, were essential in order to play a principal role in advocacy on many levels, as well as involvement in various committees, communities and organizations.

While working at New Journey Housing, it was realized that each person and each situation is so different. Furthermore, each person interprets his or her own cultural identity differently, particularly as it relates to living in a new place. It was quickly learned that every individual, including Susan, has a personal identity within a cultural framework. Each person, then, identifies differently in regards to culture and adaptation in a new country. Furthermore, this is an ever-evolving process of personal growth. The longer a person

is in a new place – be that a city, a job, a school – the more one’s cultural identity will evolve. It is not always or necessarily a shift towards greater intercultural adaptation, although if one is open to diversity, it is a common occurrence, one in which has been realized through this line of community work.

It is important to be reminded that a planner cannot remain static when working with individuals or groups. For truly sustainable and successful planning outcomes, the individuals, groups and planners must be understood in relation to their own interculturalism and not based upon preconceived notions of how an individual or ethno-cultural group may or may not react in a new place and among this new notion of diversity.

Ultimately, planners learning intercultural communication will only be enabled through personal growth and the capacity for appreciation and openness while situated within, and celebrating, diversity.

Conclusion

Community education, information sharing and empowerment decrease the risks of newcomers being taken advantage of (i.e. by landlords, etc.). People can be confident that they know their rights, responsibilities and expectations here in Canada, and can then make appropriate decisions based on this. Groups that have expectations of complete cultural integration, which may lead to a high dependency on social services and supports, take personal choices away from newcomers. New Journey Housing is not making this choice for them, but providing information and help so that their choice is informed.

We are in a “state of constant reflection about Canada’s dominant conventions and beliefs” (Lorinc, 2006, p.21).

As Planners and community-building professionals in constantly fluctuation global urban centres, inner growth and capacity building is necessary. We must find ways to operationalize intercultural communication through community education, public policy, and planning. Beginning with settlement service providers and newcomers, the capacity for interculturalism in our cities can begin.

“As a nation of immigrants lacking any bellicose sense of manifest destiny, we must come to recognize ourselves as a profoundly cosmopolitan country whose citizenry is forever combining and recombining into something unfinished, unknowable, and perhaps even indescribable” (Lorinc, 2006, p.21).

“I did not realize the true strength of a close working relationship until I was able to reflect on these positive changes which were enabled by these same relationships.”

*- Susan Radstrom, Executive Director,
New Journey Housing*

“In many ways, our intensely diverse cities have come to resemble grand orchestras, with countless performers playing a breathtaking array of instruments. We may all have a sense of the harmony, the notes we’d like to play, and the solos we intend to perform. But unless we all find a way to agree on a score and then develop a vision of how to collaborate down there in the pit, there can be only noise” (Lorinc, 2006, p.329)

Special Thanks...

To Susan Radstrom and New Journey Housing for being so open to my research interest, and willing to collaborate with me on this publication. Your time and efforts have not gone unnoticed. Sincere thanks and appreciation.

References

Title Image, mural from Winnipeg's diverse West End, personal photo

IRCOM website: www.ircom.ca

*Kim, Young Yun. (2001). *Becoming Intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Sage Publications, Inc.*

*Lorinc, John. (2006). *The new city: How the crisis in Canada's urban centres is reshaping the nation*. Penguin Canada: Toronto.*

*Manitoba Labour and Immigration. 2011. *Manitoba Immigration Facts 2010 Statistical Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.mb.ca/immigration/pdf/manitoba-immigration-facts-report-2010.pdf>, March 13, 2012.*

New Journey Housing website: www.newjourneyhousing.com

*Wood, Phil & Landry, Charles. (2008). *The Intercultural City: planning for diversity advantage*. Earthscan: London.*