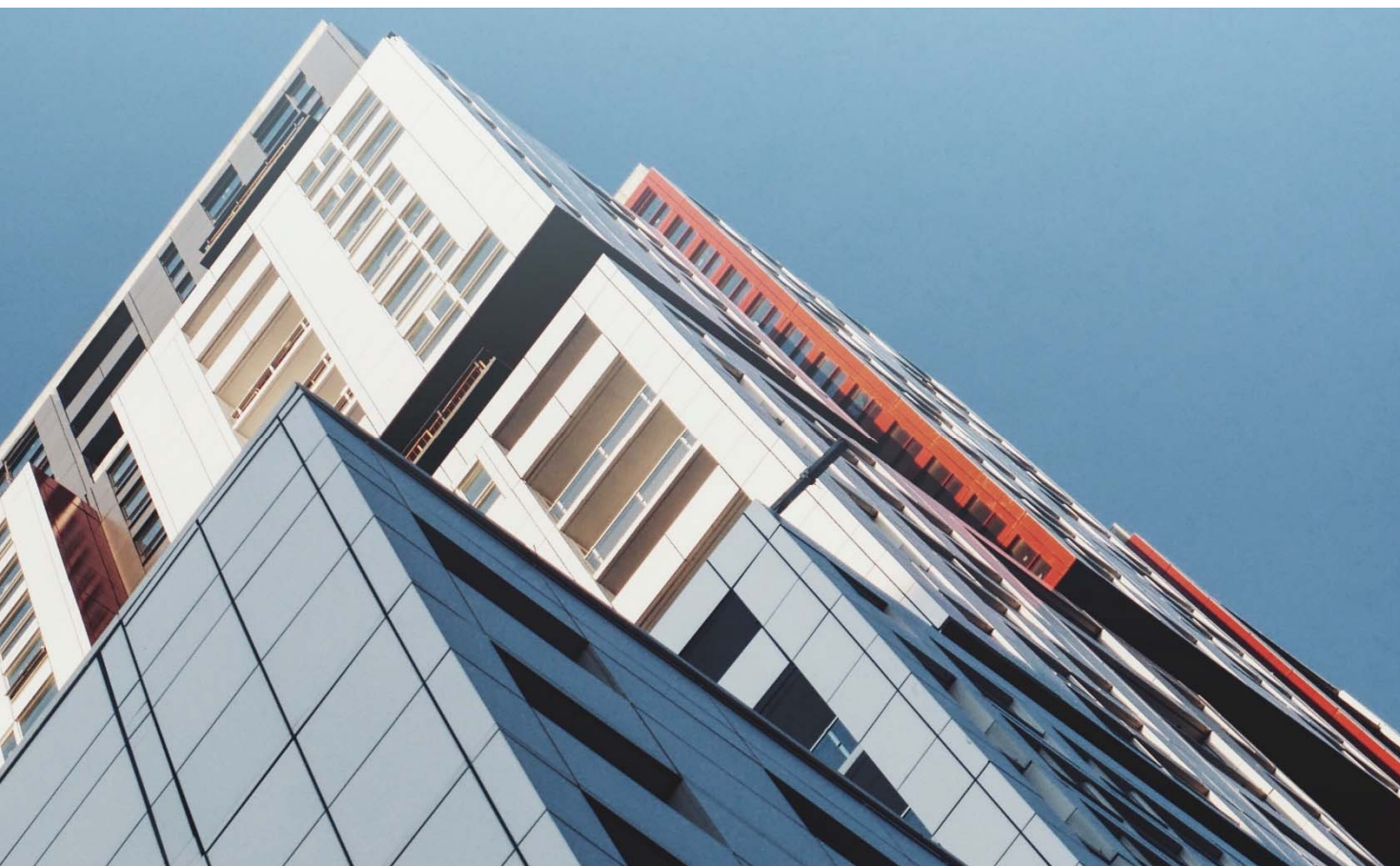


Settling on Less

Canadian Immigration Settlement in the Age of Austerity

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December, 2016



ABOUT US

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Austerity and its Alternatives is funded through the Partnership Development stream of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

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Report designed by the Centre for Communicating Knowledge at Ryerson University (excluding cover page).



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Introduction

From before the founding of Canada, immigration and settlement has been a focal point of national policy. Overtime immigration policy has moved through various phases. The arrival of neoliberal policy agendas in Canada by the 1980s and the period of government imposed austerity following the 2008 financial crisis worked to restructure immigration and settlement policy and programming along a number of dimensions to bring it in greater harmony with neoliberal objectives in the larger context of globalization. This process was greatly accelerated during the Harper administration (2006-2015). For its part the immigrant settlement system in Canada, while generally well developed in comparison many other countries, has for the past number of decades been subject to neoliberal restructuring, marketization of settlement service delivery, and the restraining of government funding support for it. The fact is that austerity has long been a lived reality for the Canadian immigrant settlement sector.

The Centrality of Canadian Immigration and Settlement Services

Immigration remains a driving policy force behind economic, demographic and social development in Canada. Each year between 260,000 and 300,000 permanent newcomers are invited to Canada – this constitutes more than .7% of the total Canadian population each and every year. By far this constitutes the highest rate of immigration in the G8 and among the very top in the OECD. Today Canada has one of the most diverse populations and among the highest proportions of foreign born individuals. Canadian policymakers continued interest in immigration policy rests on the desire to address challenges to labour market and population growth in the face of a rapidly aging domestic population and more generally to enhance the skill base of the workforce through the global competition for labour.

Given the high levels of immigration the centrality of their contributions to Canadian well-being, a long established program of immigrant settlement services was established in the 1970s to assist newcomers in the long and difficult process of settlement and integration. State supported social programming in this period was still in a state of expansion guided by a Keynesian policy paradigm (Evans, Richmond and Shields, 2005). Settlement services cover a broad range of services required by immigrants including orientation to Canadian society, language training, labour market access, housing assistance and other specialized programs centered on immigrant needs. These services are important for "supporting immigrants to make the smooth transitions necessary to be able to more fully



participate in the economy and society” (Shields, et.al, 2016: 4). The settlement system that developed became widely regarded as a ‘best practice model’ (Richmond and Shields, 2005) and has been examined by many governments for lessons in successful immigrant integration (viewed as particularly valuable in light of many examples of failed immigrant integration cases and the economic and social costs associate with this situation).

Immigration is an area of shared jurisdiction between the federal and provincial governments, although the feds have dominated in this policy sphere and have provided the most developed settlement programing. They spend around \$1 billion a year (Levitz, 2015) in support of these services and close to 1 million newcomers are eligible for these supports. Increasingly provinces are also delivering their own immigrant settlement services as part of a strategy to promote their own regionally-based development strategies. Given the size of the immigrant population and the importance of services offered, in the Canadian context settlement services must be viewed as a part of the larger Canadian social welfare state structure. However, it is that part of the structure that constitutes the ‘residual welfare state’, services that were conceived of as being limited to a particular part of the population, programing easily expanded, contracted and adjusted by government, and of course delivered by cheap and publically less visible non-profit providers.

There are a number of key elements of this Canadian model of settlement. These include:

- 1) Services are provided mainly by non-profit agencies located in the communities were newcomers are located;
- 2) These services are funded primarily by government;
- 3) Many of the service providers are drawn from the newcomer communities themselves fostering strong connections with cultural and linguistic competencies that builds communications linkages and shared understandings between provider and client;
- 4) The Canadian approach to settlement is characterized as two-way-street between immigrants and Canadian society (Tolley, 2011), where each adjusts and changes in a dialectal process of integration and accommodation. This stands in contrast to assimilationist models of immigration.
- 5) The Canadian model of immigrant settlement does require a more engaged state, financially and legislatively, supporting settlement programming and providing public policies like multiculturalism to promote diversity and ‘inclusion’. This enhances the warmth of the welcome (Reitz, 1999) for newcomers facilitating faster integration into the labour market and society and hence a more efficient utilization of immigrant human capital skills and facilitation of greater societal harmony (accumulation and legitimation).



Settlement Services, Neoliberal Restructuring, and Austerity

While settlement services have been developed in Canada to help smooth immigrant transitions thus enhancing economic and social benefits of the large numbers of newcomers entering Canada since the latter 1980s these services have been subject to neoliberal restructuring and market rationalization. The 2008 crisis has imposed further pressures on the state to reduce expenditures. The austerity agenda has specifically targeted social programming for cuts. Senior levels of government have made use of the local, as made evident in the case of the UK's Big Society initiative (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012), to carry forth their downsizing pro-market neoliberal program. Non-profit service delivery organizations are the quintessential community-based human service bodies. Significantly, austerity bent governments see cuts and restructuring of supports to these organizations as less publicly visible and as being easily absorbed through the use of more voluntary sources of labour and internal efficiencies – 'doing more with less' – to make up for lost government revenues (Baines et.al 2015). The retreat from government sources of support, according to neoliberal logic, will free up the space and energies of local philanthropic interests and volunteers which have been displaced by 'excessive' government involvement in social provision.

The reality is that austerity, although undertaken under different labels, is nothing new to the settlement sector; it has faced, in large measure, a state of 'permanent austerity'. The restructuring of social provision has occurred under the direction of New Public Management (NPM). NPM has served as a transmission belt used to impose neoliberal governance and practice models into the non-profit service sector (Evans and Shields 1998; Evans, Richmond and Shields 2005).

The neoliberal/austerity driven change within settlement services can be summarized in the following way:

- Services and care previously provided by the state has been increasingly downloaded onto local government, non-profit providers, communities and families. This process is referred to as "responsibilization" as the state relinquishes many of its duties shifting the responsibility increasingly onto individuals and other bodies (Kelly and Caputo 2011: 11).
- Increased use of Alternate Service Delivery (ASD) involving reduced services, restricted access and non-profit delivery agents as key elements in the implementation of neoliberalism. Even where the state still provides funding for services this is now to be largely delivered by third party actors, and in particular 'cheap' non-profit service providers. Costs are more easily



controlled in such provision, especially with reduced labour expenses and with the ability of the state to rather invisibly cut supports given the distance between and 'invisibility' of the funding for and delivery of services in such arrangements (Baines et.al 2014).

- NPM commands the adoption of 'business models', 'lean production' and a narrow focus on 'efficiency' by delivery agencies to receive state funding for services. This promotes one size fits all approaches to delivery that favours measurable quantity over quality, and rigidity over flexibility in the way services are provided (Cunningham and James 2011). Larger multi-service agencies are better positioned to compete in such an environment over smaller and ethno-specific agencies.
- Funding of ASD, moreover, moves away from longer term more flexible block grants to short-term, competitively-based program financing tied to narrow and strict audit-oriented accountability mechanisms. This works to tie the hands of organizations who must adhere to controlling funding rules that only narrowly support programs and not the organizations who deliver them, and results in time consuming and costly reporting procedures (Eakin 2007).
- The end result is a marketized model of thinned out and leaned out services and a system that does not constitute a true partnership between the state and non-profit service providers but a relationship that is dominated by the funder. In this model the state is able to control non-profit delivers at a distance through their funding and accountability arrangements, a process Shields and Evans have termed 'centralized decentralization' (1998: 13).
- There is a greatly diminished place for advocacy by non-profit providers. In the past community-based non-profit agencies were seen, and even encouraged, to be the voices of more marginalized groups they served. Often non-profits were even provided with funding by the state to engage in an inclusionary advocacy role (Evans, Richmond and Shields 2005). However, under NPM advocacy has come to be viewed very negatively and non-profits are reduced to purely client service role. In fact, the funding model has come to produce a strong 'advocacy chill' in the non-profit sector, one particularly felt by immigrant settlement agencies under Harper (Evans and Shields 2014).



- A system where non-profit provider accountability to the funder comes to trump all other forms of accountability. One of the unique features of the non-profit sector is that its organizations have multiple accountabilities – to the communities they serve, their governance boards; to members, staff and volunteers; to the general public; and to funders. But under NPM accountability is overwhelmingly directed one way, upward to funders (Richmond and Shields 2004a).
- The delivery of settlement services through non-profit bodies, of course, pre-dates NPM. What changed with NPM for immigrant settlement agencies is reduced autonomy for providers, the tight control of programming by the state, a narrowed role in society, and funding instability (Evans, Richmond and Shields 2005).

Discussion

Settlement services in Canada is marked by permanent austerity, pushed to do ever more with less. In general, the non-profit social service sector has been labeled the 'precarious sector' and this precarity has deepened overtime (Baines et.al, 2014). Lack of any long-term commitment on the part of government (its short-term competitive funding regime) and thus an inability of the immigrant settlement agencies to plan into the futures leaving them on a temporariness footing. There is a pattern of continuing funding restraint but with occasional influxes of money, but the occasional increases are almost always onetime funding, again making planning challenging and reinforcing the 'temporariness' of provision.

Immigrant service providers have also had a strict regime of accountability to government funders and auditing imposed. The use of strict financial and programming surveillance has greatly restricted the autonomy of these organizations often 'subverting' the mission of immigrant serving agencies. This has also pushed these agencies away from their role in advocacy for vulnerable immigrants (pushed away by the threat of 'advocacy chill' and lack of resources in over stretched organizations) into purely service roles implementing government programming.

The marketization of the immigrant settlement sector has also increased with business models of operation dominating. Agencies in the sector have also been caste as competitors with one another for limited one year contracts always under pressure for cost reductions. But at the same time government funders have demanded simultaneously that agencies cooperate and partner in funding and other initiatives. The mixed messages sent by government funders has resulted in tensions within the sector and less than smooth relations between many agencies.



Part of the marketization that has taken on prominence since the 2008 crisis has been the push for non-profit agencies to make use of social enterprises as a way of solidifying their financial base in the context of diminishing government support. There is also the call for the sector to make greater use of philanthropy and citizen volunteers as a way of reducing state expenses in line with the UK Big Society logic.

The new Federal Liberal Government opened the door wider for Syrian refugees and has provided more money for their support through immigrant settlement agencies and other means. This is one example of selective enhancement of settlement support. Interestingly the government reduces its cost by its two track system of refugee support. One is government supported refugees where the state picks up the full cost of settlement over the first year. The second is privately sponsored refugees supported by churches and groups of individuals with the cost of settlement born by the private sponsors. This private sponsorship model has been promoted as a 'best practice' for the international community. While other factors have gone into the makeup of this private sponsorship model it is one that fits well into the austerity logic of the need to spread the cost of social expenditure beyond the state.

In the Canadian context where immigrant policy has been central settlement services have been viewed as valuable by government. It is important to help more quickly integrate immigrant newcomers into the Canadian labour market (filling an accumulation role) and into society more broadly (a legitimization role). Significantly, the only migrants eligible for these supports are permanent resident migrants. Temporary and other types of migrants, of which there are very large numbers, are not entitled to federal settlement supports. Hence these services are strictly limited. Settlement services are also relatively cheap as they are delivered through the low labour cost and ever flexible non-profit sector. In fact, one of the marked aspects of the non-profit sector for service delivery is its flexibility. Its flexibility and the inherently temporariness of its operations is ideally structured to be utilized in both role back and roll out phases of neoliberalism.

Note: Parts of this paper are drawn from Sophia Lowe, Ted Richmond and John Shields, "Settling on Austerity: ISAs, Immigrant Communities and Neoliberal Restructuring", *Alternative Routes*, 2017, forthcoming.



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