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Multiculturalism, Migration, & Governance in Australia

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During the late twentieth century, ideas of cultural diversity and equality gained prominence as a response to the rising trends of international migration and globalization. Beyond migration patterns, to accommodate diversity and citizenship, the diaspora of cultures and identities have translated into the need for more sensitive policy approaches. While this has resulted in the formulation of multicultural policies in different countries to varying degrees and conceptual depth, there has also been growing discontent and disillusionment emanating from cultural conflicts and integration issues. Nevertheless, among the different experiences, Australia is considered to be one of the most successful examples in multicultural affairs.

This paper will attempt to assess the state of cultural diversity governance in Australia by looking at the status of multiculturalism as a national policy and the community engagement programs implemented to address cultural differences. This paper will argue that while the Australian case of multicultural success is the result of a pragmatic and adaptable governmental approach to migration within a top-down dimension, the current social cohesion programs within the public policy dimension present considerable flaws which hinder the overall cultural diversity governance process. These issues are identified within the engagement selection process, accountability, and the relationship between voluntarism and social capital. In order to be addressed, these require a better metagoverned relation between the state and community sectors.

The first part of this paper will consider the concepts of multicultural governance, social capital, and cohesion. It will then provide a brief account of Australian multicultural policy. The second part will proceed to analyze the particular programs implemented to address social cohesion from the Howard Government onwards. This will be focused on the 'Living in Harmony-Diverse Australia' programs and the 'The National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony, and Security', both currently under the 'Social Cohesion and Diversity Program' (SCDP). The last section will direct attention to the governance problems presented by the social cohesion programs in the second section and explain why it is necessary to fill these gaps in order to enhance the governance process.

Diversity and Governance

The term 'multiculturalism' refers to the cultural diversity that results from the existence of two or more groups that represent particular collective identities within a society in the sense of racial, ethnic and language differences. In the form of governmental response, it is translated into public policy or institutional design characterized by the recognition of the different needs of each group ensuring equal opportunity and access among them (Heywood 2007: 313). While these ideals became prominent to deal with the increasing cultural diversity resulting from the geographical mobility of the last decades, they have become increasingly contested due to their perceived failure to maintain harmony and social cohesion (Heywood 2007: 329-330).

In governance aspects, the relationship between cultural diversity, social cohesion, and social capital is important as it affects and influences public policy. On these lines, social cohesion can be defined as the sense of community belonging, resulting from inter-group relations built on shared values, stability, co-operation, and engagement (Chan, To, and Chan 2006, cited in Hooghe 2007: 711; Maxwell 1996, cited in Markus & Kirpitchenko 2007: 22). Social capital refers to the level of social organization expressed by the existence of networks, shared norms, and trust between the individuals of a given community (Putnam. 1993, in Bell and Hindmoor 2009: 109). Therefore, social

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cohesion facilitates the emergence of the trust, networks, and shared norms that compose social capital. These aspects are relevant due to the fact that they have been recognized to play a considerable role within the national governance process (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 110).

However, when considering that the mechanisms of cohesion and social capital are mostly enabled within conditions of close-knit, homogeneous or similar societies (Hooghe 2007: 713), questions over the effect of cultural diversity emerges. This is because the ethno-cultural diversification of communities in this sense poses considerable challenges to cohesion and governance. Putnam (2007: 138) notes that this is related to the fact that “immigration and ethnic diversity challenge social solidarity and inhibit social capital.” It is on this aspect that multiculturalism can become a major policy tool (Jupp 2007: 17). Notwithstanding, the success of this approach depends on each states’ social contexts and cultural diversity governance arrangements.

The Australian Case: Brief History

In the case of Australia, these mentioned aspects are better illustrated by considering the formulation and evolution of multiculturalism as a policy. Historically, Australia maintained social cohesion through strict migration policies limiting entry to only white, Christian, and British settlers. Thus facilitating social harmony, reducing inequalities, disfranchisement, and racial conflicts (Jupp 2007: 12-13). This changed after the mid-1900s.

Multiculturalism in Australia first took off as a policy under the Whitlam Government in 1973 ending the White Australia policy era (Babacan & Babacan 2007: 27; Koleth 2010: 4). It embodied policy responses to preserve harmony within the growing migration in the post-war decades, which translated into greater ethno-cultural diversity deriving from the opening to refugee programs and labour migration (Colic-Peisker 2011: 563; Koleth 2010: 1). Following this, the Fraser Administration provided the landmark for multicultural policy development with the 1978 Galbally Report advocating the principles of: (1) equal opportunities and access to services; (2) the right to preserve one’s own culture and embrace other’s; (3) the establishment of special services to meet cultural and language needs; and, (4) self-help and voluntarism to facilitate migrants’ accommodation (Babacan & Babacan 2007: 27; Koleth 2010: 6-7). The Hawke and Keating Governments have led important changes reframing multiculturalism under national economic goals characterized by the reassertion of Australian values, the balance of socio-cultural identity under such values, and skilled migration (Babacan 2006, cited in Fleras 2009: 119; Borowski 2000: 468; Roberts 2009:64).

The Howard government represented a definitive policy shift from multiculturalism towards a “civic and conservative model of ethnic governance” (Shen 2008: 17). His administration eliminated the Office of Multicultural Affairs and renamed the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. It implemented a considerable reform to reduce welfare benefits, services such as English programs for new migrants, funding, and consultation of ethnic organizations (Babacan & Babacan 2007: 30; Koleth 2010: 12; Tate 2009: 112). Shen (2008: 17) notes that although economic rationales were already present during the Labour governments, during the Howard era “the economic preoccupation of “capitalizing on the linguistic and cultural skills, business networks and market knowledge of a diverse workforce” takes precedence and virtually becomes the fundamental *raison d’être* of diversity.”

Nevertheless, the early 2000s terrorist attacks created new concerns over the dangers of mismanaged cultural diversity. This lead to an increased focus on policies guided by the notions of civil duties, cohesion, equity, and above all, to attain ‘productive diversity’ under an Australian multicultural model (Koleth 2010: 15-16). Similarly, the Rudd and Gillard administrations have followed the emphasis on issues of integration and citizenship, in addition to the creation of an Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) aimed to provide advice on social cohesion promotion and tackle recurrent issues (Colic-Peisker 2011: 564; Koleth 2010: 18).

This account demonstrates that the Australian engagement with multicultural policy has mostly been a top-down, goal-oriented approach designed to enhance cultural governance, and adaptable to requirement circumstances (Jupp 2007:17). This is illustrated by the evolution on the direction of multiculturalism policies, from necessity under Whitlam, economic incentives through Hawke, and productive cohesive diversity from Howard onwards. These

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features have rendered Australia as an example of effective multicultural policy (Borowski 2000: 460-461; Fleras 2009: 115; Hartwich 2011:1; Smolicz & Secombe 2009: 83; Roberts 2009: 64). As Fleras (2009: 115) argues, the Australian case proves the “theoretical possibility and practice of a multicultural governance without multiculturalism.”

Current Affairs

While the general picture shows the success of cultural governance in Australia, integration and cohesion over the last ten years direct attention to the effectiveness of multiculturalism within public policy. As a result, it is pertinent to consider the programs that the Australian governments have sought to implement in these areas.

During the last decade, the Australian government has formulated three main initiatives to ensure and foster social cohesion and integration. These are: The ‘Living in Harmony-Diverse Australia’ program, the ‘National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony, and Security’ formulated in the wake of international terrorism, both later integrated under the ‘Diversity and Social Cohesion Program’ in 2010 (DIAC 2011a).

Firstly, the Living in Harmony program began on August 1998 under the aims to foster Australian values, citizenship and cohesion, and to encourage migrants and refugees to engage in an equitable society (DIAC 2009a: 3). After a 2009 DIAC review, it was renamed as the ‘Diverse Australia’ program with an increased focus on issues of intolerance and racism. However, the two main components of the programs have remained unchanged. These are: the celebration of a ‘Harmony Day’, and government grants and partnerships to different organizations. (Andrews 2007: 52-53; DIAC 2009a: 3).

Harmony Day takes place every year on 21 March. It constitutes governance through a persuasion approach via the participation, celebration, and promotion of cultural diversity within communities and schools (Bell & Hindmoor 2009:97; DIAC 2009a: 5). The grants and partnerships components consist of governmental funding and support of the community sector’s projects. These should be designed to address the problems posed by cultural differences and intolerance, and to improve social cohesion and inclusion. An example of this is NSW Auburn Community Development Network’s efforts that addressed the tensions between its culturally diverse residents through workshop and interaction (Andrews 2007: 53-55; DIAC 2009a: 5; DIAC 2009b). This component represents governance through a community engagement approach as it entails the devolution of organizational power that the community sector is interested in implementing cohesion enhancement activities (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 139-142).

In this sense, the provision of funding is aimed to support and increase engagement where it is needed, so communities develop their own projects and methods to improve community relations (Andrews 2007: 139). Furthermore, this component draws from two important aspects. One is the use of coal-face knowledge to address the issues affecting diverse communities. As Andrews (2007: 53) notes: “Local communities are often in the best position to recognize local problems and identify locally relevant solutions”. The other one is the fact that such approach enhances government capacity and policy legitimacy (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 138). This is a particular point to consider given the difficult and controversial nature of cultural identity governance.

Secondly, the ‘National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony, and Security’ (NAP) formulated in 2006 presented a stronger form of government direction. In addition to the approach of funding community engagement embodied by the Living in Harmony program, the NAP entailed a “co-ordinated government and community approach” (DIAC 2006). The plan was a response to the rising concerns over social cohesion and Islamic religious fundamentalism after the terrorist attacks in the United States, London, and Bali (Andrews 2007: 55; DIAC 2006; DIMA 2006: 14). These concerns were particularly related to the perception of a linkage between multiculturalism and terrorism, and the resulting increasing debate on aspects such as banning the hijab (Stone 2006, cited in Hocking 2007: 189; Roberts 2009: 70). Following the 2005 London bombings, the Howard government appointed the Muslim Community Reference Group (MCRG) in order to produce recommendations to tackle these concerns based on ways to improve Muslim inclusion and address any possible source of religious extremism.

Consequently, the NAP was intended to “reinforce social cohesion, harmony and support the national security

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imperative in Australia by addressing extremism, the promotion of violence and intolerance, in response to the increased threat of global religious and political terrorism" (DIAC 2006). This initiative added a new focus connecting social cohesion with national security under the terms of threat and homegrown terrorism prevention and response preparedness (DIAC 2006). This plan represented major governance through a community engagement approach in the form of consultation and collaboration. In this sense, the government's appointment of the MCRG constituted by Muslim community leaders was intended to provide recommendations and facilitate government relations with the Muslim population (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 140-14; DIAC 2006; MCRG 2006: 9-10).

The main areas of the plan touched upon community engagement through: education on civil values, religious diversity, tolerance, and clergy training. In conjunction to social inclusion mechanisms based on employment, community integration, and empowerment through leadership training, a commission of further research on Muslims in Australia was established (DIAC 2006; MCRG 2006: 11-27).

Consequently, the format of these two programs shows that they are designed to improve social cohesion and inclusion via community engagement to facilitate the creation of social capital. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in 2010 both 'Living in Harmony-Diverse Australia' program and the 'National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony, and Security' were integrated under a single program, the 'Diversity and Social Cohesion Program' (DSCP) without altering the overall partnerships and grants format of the program (DIAC 2011a). The logic behind governance through community engagement is explained by understanding the mechanisms at play in this approach, which represent a more recent public policy focus on the resources that communities can offer (Adam & Hess 2001).

In this sense, community engagement is meant as a way to build "institutional bridges between governmental leaders and citizenry" (Vigoda 2002, cited in Head 2007: 442). On one side, this approach is linked to the understanding of the complexity and inter-connectedness of many problems, and the need to share responsibility to address these (Head 2007: 443). In case of cultural diversity, problems arising from marginalization and intolerance are connected to problems such as terrorism and hate crimes, which require greater community engagement and education to be addressed. On the other side, there is the assumption that involving citizens in problem identification and solution formulation can enhance the effectiveness of governance. Hence, communities and voluntarism are seen as capable to perform services and policy implementation in cheaper and more effective ways to their needs.

Areas to Address

As noted above, this mode of governance has gained government preference as a way to deal with issues such as community diversity tensions. Notwithstanding the relative success of such programs, these also present some governance problems in some areas which require further consideration. Taking an encompassing examination of the diversity and social cohesion programs, from their origin as the Living in Harmony program to the current DSCP, these issues are identified within: the grant selection process, accountability, and the voluntarism nature of the program. Addressing these gaps will enhance the overall effectiveness of the cultural governance process.

The issues within the grant selection process draw from particular aspects of the eligibility of applicants. According to the key findings of the 2009 Living in Harmony DIAC program review, smaller and inexperienced organizations required greater attention based on the need to find ways to support and encourage them to participate. This was related to the organizations' widespread perception on the difficulty to obtain the grants (DIAC 2009a: 8-9). However, under the DSCP application guidelines from 2010 to 2012, these aspects have remained unaddressed with a recurring emphasis on experience, community standing, and organizational merits (DIAC 2010a: 8-9; DIAC 2011b: 6-7).

While these selection mechanisms ensure the success of capable and knowledgeable organizations in obtaining government funding, which is a main area of concern when undertaking a community engagement approach (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 148), this also creates power gap between organizations. Therefore, the current selection mechanism becomes problematic because by favoring the experienced and bigger organizations, the government is neglecting its meta-governance role in community capacity building (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 148-149; Head

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2007:450). In turn, as reported in the 2009 DIAC review, this discourages the smaller organizations to apply and participate in the program (DIAC 2009a). In addition, this hinders the possibility of greater community engagement and governance enhancement.

From the accountability dimension, although organizations are expected to submit reports of their activities to the DIAC on an internal basis, there is a lack of overall qualitative performance reports to the public. An analysis of the SCDP and DIAC websites reveal that the current departmental and program reports are limited to the provision of general accounts of aims and objectives of activities, in conjunction with performance assessment based on the amount of projects funded (DIAC 2009c; DIAC 2010b; DIAC 2011c). While these reports indeed account for the destination and purpose of the funding, they do not provide insights into the reach and effectiveness of the programs. This constitutes a main problem in the evaluation of community engagement processes (Provan & Milward 2001, cited in Head 2007: 450). Drawing from Head's (2007:450) work, these reports lack indicators on either the quality of participation and cooperation, or the programs' outcomes in general.

Another problem with this community engagement approach is that it is mostly reliant on voluntarism. In this case, the government mainly limits its role as vocal supporter and/or funding provider. The actual occurrence of community participation depends on the willingness and interest of community organizations to organize activities.

Nevertheless, the DIAC's 2009 review found that greater interest in engagement and participation occurred in areas of higher cultural diversity, and lower interest and skepticism was showed in less culturally diverse communities (DIAC 2009a: 13). The issues arising from this are linked to the dynamics of social capital within cultural groups, as community engagement is more effective where there are higher levels of social capital (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 146). On these terms, while bonding social capital refers to the reciprocity between similar groups, bridging social capital is the crosscutting of ties among different groups (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 110; Coffe & Geys 2007: 124). The lack of incentives for bridging social capital in the less diverse communities poses potential future problems that require urgent attention. Carrington & Marshall's (2008: 118) work in regional Australia demonstrates that in communities that have tended to be more culturally diverse, bridging social capital have been a main factor in successful integration of newcomer resulting in harmonious inter-group relations. In contrast, more homogeneous communities with little ways of bridging social capital have tended to experience greater issues of alienation and discrimination with newcomers. As a result, as the DSCP needs to increase its reach to the less diverse areas in order to reduce future tensions.

Consequently, although the programs represent an important community engagement initiative, they require stronger government engagement beyond the provision of funds. That is, they require government meta-governance in steering, assessing effectiveness, and the accountability of the DSDP (Bell & Hindmoor 2009: 47). In addition, there is the need for stronger emphasis on persuading and fomenting the bridging social capital in the less diverse communities to avoid future problems.

Conclusion

The evolution of multiculturalism as a national policy in Australia shows that the country's success draws from the implementation of adaptable and goal oriented approaches to migration. Nevertheless, the cultural diversification of communities under multicultural policies still brings important concerns with social cohesion and social capital, which occupy an important role in the national governance process. These concerns have gained special prominence in the face of religious extremism. In response, the Australian government developed a series of programs to foster social cohesion and capital through community engagement in the form of consultation, voluntarism, and participation. Although these programs represent a positive cultural diversity governance initiatives, they have considerable gaps that should be addressed through a better meta-governed government-community sector partnership.

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