

Inclusion and Integration: A Case Study of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa's Cultural Recreation Activities

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Ethnic community organizations serving immigrants in host societies can provide cultural recreation activities that are inclusive and integrative, as well as leisure pursuits that are centered on building cultural cohesion and social closure. The Hellenic Community of Ottawa fulfills its mandate by providing cultural recreation activities that are reflective of mainstream society as well as those that are ethno-cultural specific. This paper presents a case study of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa, its cultural recreation activities (youth, seniors, sports and athletics, and festivals and arts) and the role of organizations and institutions (public, private and non-profit) outside the ethnic Community, in bringing about inclusion and integration into mainstream society. Based on the experiences of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa, this paper concludes with suggestions for ethnic community decision-makers and service providers for the provision of inclusive and integrative cultural recreation activities.

Keywords: Inclusion, ethnic community organizations, leisure, recreation, minorities

Introduction

Non-profit ethnic-based community organizations are often criticized for promoting segregation and social closure, furthering divide between ethnic minorities and mainstream groups. However, ethnic-based community organizations can play a significant role in promoting inclusiveness in the receiving society through recreation and leisure services. Drawing from a case study, this project explores the role of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa in promoting openness and cohesion to the host community through its social, cultural and spiritual programs and services.

The Hellenic Community of Ottawa was established in February 25, 1929 to help Greek immigrants in the Ottawa metropolitan area maintain their religious and cultural traditions, and to provide resources and support not offered by mainstream institutions and actors to accelerate social and economic integration. Since its establishment, this ethnic organization has played a key role in assisting in the resettlement and integration of new Greeks into the host society (Karlis, 1993; Karlis, 1987). Throughout its history, the Hellenic Community has maintained its commitment to Canada multiculturalism ideals, which recognizes ethnic

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group's rights to preserve and celebrate their culture, and to ensure social and economic equality regardless of individual's ethnic background (Black-Branch & CEA, 1995). Indeed, its organizational mandate emphasizes contribution to multiculturalism through the provision on ethno-specific recreation activities that enhance awareness of the Greek culture as well as through activities focused on creating bridges with the larger society.

As a result, The Hellenic-Canadian organization has built strong associations with government agencies at the three levels (federal, provincial and municipal), as well as with educational institutions, the private sector, and non-profit organizations in its effort to continue its mission towards integration and inclusion. Through collaborative efforts with organizations outside the Hellenic Community, cultural recreation activities are often employed as a tool to ease integration and inclusion of newcomers and isolated Greek immigrants into mainstream society. The purpose of this paper is to explore how non-profit ethnic community organizations can play a more significant role in promoting inclusion and integration into the host society by working closely with government agencies, businesses, educational institutions, service providers and community groups. To fulfill this purpose, this paper presents a case study of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa, its cultural recreation activities, and the role of organizations and institutions outside the Hellenic Community of Ottawa in bringing about inclusion and integration into the broader Canadian society.

Canada is a multicultural society consisting of over 200 ethnocultural groups and representing over 20 percent of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2011). The commitment to immigration and growth by the federal government since the millennium has led to the highest rate of immigration in Canada's history (Karlis, 2011). Census Canada (2001) reported that immigration to Canada was at the highest level that it has been in the past 80 years. Not only has this affirmed Canada's commitment to immigration, it has posed various challenges to those immigrating to Canada, — mainly the challenge of integrating into mainstream society. Ethnic community organizations today are called on more than ever in Canada's history to play a lead role in not only enhancing the quality of life of immigrants and their descendants, but also on helping immigrants become included and integrated into the broader community. Yet, not all ethnic groups have ethnic community organizations or highly structured ethnic community organizations. The older, more established groups, largely consisting of groups that immigrated to Canada from Europe between 1951 and 1971 tend to be well established ethnic community organizations that collaborate with outside organizations and institutions (Couton, 2014; Karlis, 2011). These ethnic community organizations tend to consist of ethnic groups that have been in Canada for a longer period of time and having built closer collaborative relationships with outside organizations and institutions (Couton, 2014; Ho, 2018; Karlis, 2011). One of these organizations, the Hellenic Community of Ottawa, is examined in this paper.

Review of Literature

Members of an ethnic group often depend on their ethnocultural organization for vital services to advance their economic and social wellbeing. Couton (2014) defines ethnocultural organizations as “complex social structures that involve various types of networks, the formation of both physical and virtual communities, and a broad range of organizations (p.3)”. Ethnocultural organizations can be formal or informal (Bucklaschuk, Sormova, & Moss, 2008). Formal ethnocultural organizations are legally constituted entities and fulfill various functions including preserving cultural traditions and providing resources, information and support to recent and more established immigrants including employment, recreation, spiritual, and charitable. Informal ones, on the other hand, are loosely and unofficially organized for the purpose of social networking among members of the same cultural traditions. The literature shows that the term “ethnocultural organization” is often used interchangeably with “ethnic organization”, “ethnic-specific organization”, “ethnic-based organization” and “immigrant organization” (Babis, 2016; Hein, 1997; Fennema, 2004; Vu, Nguyen, Tanh, & Chun, 2017). Moreover, the term “organization” in relation to an ethnic group is often substituted for “community” and vice-versa (Hein, 1997).

Ethnocultural organizations can shape the policies of both the host and homeland societies. Leaders of formal ethnic organizations can play a critical role in raising public awareness of important issues affecting its ethnic members in the host society and outside of it, — in the ancestral homeland. For instance, Harrington, Prest, and Unheim (2008) and Smith’s (2000) findings on ethnic community organizations shows that members of ethnic groups can influence policy by lobbying both the host and homeland governments to reshape domestic and foreign policies with respect to immigration matters, economic prosperity, trade, and civil and human rights. That said, while ethnocultural organizations can exert pressure on domestic and homeland governments and bring about a change, Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2008) study shows that ethnic communities might not be as influential socially, politically, or economically as Harrington, Prest, and Unheim (2008) and Smith (2000) contend. Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2008) maintain that ethnocultural organizations are often overlooked by host policymakers claiming that “elected officials remain largely ignorant of the activities and characteristics of ethnic organizations in their cities, despite substantial immigrant and ethnic minority population” (p. 45). Nevertheless, ethnic organizations are increasing in number to respond to the growing needs and challenges of their co-ethnic members. As a result, these organizations have become the subject of interest of many scholars seeking to study the role of ethnic organizations in building connections between newcomers, established co-ethnic members, and the larger host society (Carment and Bercuson 2008; Couton, 2014; Ho, 2018; Zhou and Lee 2012).

Furthermore, research has been conducted to explore the impact that cultural recreation activities have on ethnic closure and cohesion, yet limited research exists on the role that cultural recreation plays on inclusion and integration, particularly when it comes to inclusion and integration into the host society

(Galabuzi & Teelucksingh, 2010; Fangen, 2010). For instance, Karlis (1998) identified how cultural recreation activities offered by ethnic community organizations can slow down the cultural integration process and increase attachment to the ethnic cultural identity. What was overlooked in this research however, was the potential for cultural recreation to enhance inclusion and integration into mainstream society. Inclusion simply means the process of improving the conditions or opportunities for individuals or groups to fully participate in society (Arellano, 2011). Cultural recreation, in the form of ethno-specific cultural recreation activities, or those activities representative of mainstream society's cultural values can help one "feel part of" the host country.

In the case of ethnic groups, cultural recreation activities that are not ethno-specific in nature may lead to greater inclusion into the broader society, yet ethno-cultural recreation activities may also lead to inclusion, particularly if the activities provided by the ethnic community are not socially exclusionary and include participants from mainstream society. Thus cultural recreation, whether ethno-specific or not, can play a vital role in not only bringing people together from the ethnic community, but also in helping one be introduced to mainstream cultural recreation activities that can be integrative (Bolla, Dawson, and Karlis, 1991; Karlis, 1999). Cultural recreation is a social experience that brings people together. Its potential for inclusion and integration is endless as it brings people together to engage and participate in the cultural recreation pursuits of the ethnic group and/or mainstream society.

The Hellenic Community of Ottawa

The Hellenic Community of Ottawa has existed for over 90 years. This ethnic organization consists of a Greek Orthodox Church and a Community Centre that houses a banquet facility. This ethnic organization is also home to most of the cultural recreation activities offered by the Hellenic Community of Ottawa, such as the community hall used for dances, shows, art exhibits, cultural presentations, and, a in-house seniors recreation centre. This ethnic community organization is a non-profit, charitable organization that relies on membership fees and donations to maintain its operations. The banquet facility also provides an added source of revenue as it is used for wedding receptions, conferences and conventions, etc. Cultural recreation— such as the annual Greek Festival —is also an added source of revenue for this ethnic community. The governance of the Hellenic ethnocultural organization consists of a board of directors, 15 individuals elected for two-year terms. The directors are dedicated volunteers responsible for the ethnic community's day-to-day operations in accordance with the articles and conditions set out in the by-laws. The executive of the Board of Directors consists of a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, and a Secretary. In addition, a member of the Board of Directors serves as a liaison overseeing the cultural recreation activities that consist of the programs of the Seniors Centre, the Ottawa Hellenic Athletic Association (OHAA), the youth programs (known as the Greek Orthodox Youth Association (GOYA)) and The Junior Orthodox Youth (JOY),

as well as the Ottawa Greek Festival.

Methodology

This paper presents a case study of the cultural recreation activities of the Hellenic ethnic organization.

A case study can be described as “an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units” (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 2). A case study has also been defined as “an intensive, systematic investigation of a single individual, group, community or some other unit in which the researcher examines in-depth data relating to several variables” (Healy & Twycross, 2018, p. 7) This method is helpful for this study as it enables the collection of different types of data including a review of the literature, media, reports, and websites, to name a few, to generate greater understanding of a rarely explored topic, such the one examined in this paper on the role of ethnic organizations in promoting inclusion and integration into the host community.

Information presented in this case study has been gathered from secondary sources, literature and archive material, as well as documents and flyers. Most of the information gathered has come from written materials, either published or unpublished, including articles that depict the cultural recreation services of the Hellenic ethnic organization. From the information gathered, four categories of cultural recreation activities have been identified: (1) senior activities, (2) youth activities, (3) sports and athletics, and festivals and arts. Literature available for each of these identifies if a relationship exists with outside organizations and/or institutions thus making it possible to draw inferences on the relationship between these organizations and institutions and inclusion and integration.

Results

Results from the analysis found that both sedentary and non-sedentary culturally-specific leisure activities as well as mainstream activities were engaged in by participants of both Greek and non-Greek descent. Participation in leisure pursuits varied by age groups.

Sports Participation

Participants of both Greek and non-Greek descent reported to be playing in organized sports' teams such as hockey and soccer offered through the Greek community's Athletic Association. Our data show that nearly 25% of the hockey players are of non-Greek descent. Similarly, soccer teams consisted of culturally diverse players. Participants in both sports activities, hockey and soccer, interact and compete consistently with players from various cultural backgrounds, which facilitates both inclusion and integration in Canadian society.

Cultural Festival Participation

Our data showed that a large proportion of attendees and volunteers at the annual cultural festival event, The GreekFest, are of non-Greek descent. This summer ten-day cultural event includes live music, Greek and multicultural dance performances, cultural food, and an art exhibition in which Greek and multi-ethnic artisans participate. In addition, various private organizations, Greek and non-Greek owned, act as sponsors for this mega, and volunteer-operated festival. This cultural event provides an avenue for intercultural exchange among Canada's diverse population.

Youth Participation

A number of youth programs exist in the GOYA and JOY recreation and spiritual groups such as field and cultural trips, bowling nights, and bake sales. These activities tend to be engaged in mostly by youth of Greek descent, but the nature of some of the excursions for example, such as field trips to Toronto, were shown to be inclusive and integrative in nature since part of the trip will focus on participating in mainstream activities such as a Blue Jays or Maple Leafs Game.

Seniors Participation

In contrast to the athletic and festival-related activities that involve both Greek and culturally diverse participants, senior activities offered by the ethnocultural community were found to be mainly attended by participants of Greek descent. Seniors engaged mainly in sedentary leisure activities that are social in nature such as playing board games and watching TV in the Greek language, and attending Greek folk music events (e.g., Kantada Night).

Suggestions for Ethnic Community Organizations for Inclusion and Integration

Results from this study have shown that both cultural and sports recreation activities can have a significant impact on inclusion and integration. Ethnic communities concerned with assisting in the inclusion and integration process into mainstream society need to recognize the role and place of cultural recreation activities. Cultural recreation activities offered either by the ethnic community organization or outside of it can have a significant impact on inclusion and integration. Cultural recreation activities that take place within the ethnic community, as in the case of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa, can be inclusive and integrative consisting of a balance of ethno cultural specific activities as well as cultural recreation activities reflective of mainstream society (e.g. hockey and integrative soccer leagues).

Ethnic community organizations would benefit by recognizing the potential impact that cultural recreation has on inclusion and integration. Decision-makers

as well as service providers of ethnic community organizations must understand that cultural recreation activities offered by the ethnic community organization not only enhance quality of life but also assist in inclusion and integration. Below is a list of suggestions for decision makers and service providers of ethnic community organizations to help them better recognize the potential of cultural recreation activities for inclusion and integration.

Suggestion 1: Establish and Provide Opportunities in the Ethnic Community Organization for the Provision of Cultural Recreation Activities that are Inclusive and Integrative.

The Hellenic Community of Ottawa has an ice hockey league of eight teams and a number of soccer teams integrated into the city of Ottawa soccer league. Ice hockey is one of the two national sports of Canada. The Hellenic Community of Ottawa not only offers a mainstream sport league it also permits players of non-Greek descent to play in this league. Although soccer is not a Canadian national sport, Hellenic teams participate in the City of Ottawa league, thus integration as well as inclusion results for participants simply through social interaction with other participants.

Suggestion 2: Build Partnerships and Collaboration for Cultural Recreation with all Service Sectors (public, private and non-profit).

Decision-makers and service providers of ethnocultural organizations can build collaborative relationships with diverse service sectors to improve their position for implementing cultural and recreational activities that can be inclusive and integrative. For instance, the Greek ethnocultural organization collaborates with the municipal and provincial governments, as well as various private and charitable organizations to promote large entertainment events (e.g., The GreekFest). In addition, The Greek ethnic organization in Ottawa collaborates with other ethnocultural organizations such as the Serbian Community as well as the Lebanese Community to promote multicultural festive events.

Suggestion 3: Establish working Relationships with the Private Sector for the Enhancement of Cultural Recreation Activities that can Enhance Inclusiveness and Integration.

Recently, the Ottawa Senators had a home match against the Boston Bruins. Match day was dedicated and themed “Greek Night.” Tickets bought by members of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa were discounted, and during breaks in the game, Greek music was played by the organist and the entertainment systems, live performances were held at the Arena by Bouzouki players, and Greek Embassy dignitaries as well as a Greek-Canadian comedian were in attendance to help celebrate the evening. The Ottawa Senators, a private sector organization, worked closely with the Hellenic Community of Ottawa to help plan “Greek Night” as well to help promote the game of hockey in an inclusive and integrative way to

members of the Hellenic Community.

Conclusion

The case of the Hellenic Community of Ottawa examined in this paper provides a rare view of how cultural recreation services when offered through an ethno-cultural organization can serve as an effective tool to enhance inclusiveness and integration of immigrants into mainstream society.

Ethnocultural organizations can play a more significant role in immigrants' integration and participation in a host society by placing greater focus on building bridges with the broader mainstream community (Couton, 2014). The major emphasis rests on the decision-makers within ethnocultural organizations to reach out to the public, private, and non-profit service sectors and establish partnerships as well other types of formal and informal networks with mainstream institutions and organizations (Ho, 2018).

The suggestions put forth in this paper are to enhance awareness of decision-makers and service providers of ethnic community organizations as well as other institutions or agencies working with immigrants to improve inclusion and integration by incorporating mainstream activities into their regular programming to promote intercultural exchange.

Decision-makers and service providers are invited to recognize the potential for inclusive and integrative cultural recreation activities to exist through collaborative efforts with all areas of the service sector – public, private and non-profit.

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