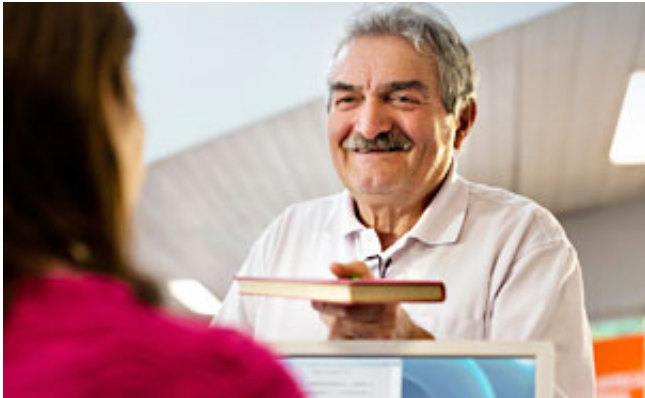


Municipalities should promote interculturalism

April 28 2015, by Martin Lasalle



Accompanied by her husband, a woman goes to the library to borrow a book. When the librarian asks her for ID, her husband intervenes and takes out the woman's card from his pocket. Surprised, the city employee does not know how to react: should she tell the man she was talking to the woman or should she not say anything and forget about it?

"It may seem trivial, but now imagine the same situation happening at the university while a woman is choosing her courses, or in a [hospital emergency room](#) ... The responsibilities of frontline employees are unclear because there are no policies to guide them in these sensitive situations related to [cultural differences](#)."

Convinced that Quebec should adopt an inclusive approach based on interculturalism rather than multiculturalism to facilitate the [integration](#) of people born in other countries, Professor Bob W. White of the University of Montreal's Department of Anthropology and his colleagues have developed an ethnographic research project entitled "Vers une ville interculturelle : problématiques, pratiques, expertises."

The purpose of this project, conceived in collaboration with the City of Montreal and a number of local researchers and community organizations, is to document and analyze situations that arise from this type of intercultural co-habitation.

This is because issues of inclusion, according to White, are easier to identify at the municipal level than at the provincial or federal level, "especially since interactions in a multiethnic context often take place in a municipal setting."

"Cities are taking on more and more responsibilities for the integration of immigrants, well beyond their traditional roles," said the researcher. And we believe that it is through a network of intercultural cities that effective local public policy can be defined," with some boroughs and municipalities being more advanced in this area than others.

For a policy that reflects the reality "on the ground"

White observes that there is sometimes tension between the French-speaking majority and recent immigrants, hindering integration and emphasizing discrimination, which can lead to further exclusion.

"Systematically studying these relationships will enable us to uncover problematic recurring situations faced by various sectors or regions," he said. "We can then provide an overall picture to better understand the factors and dynamics that lead to exclusion."

The team at the university's Laboratoire de recherche en relations interculturelles (LABRRI) – headed by White – is putting the final touches on the data collection method it will use with municipal employees and community workers regularly confronted with situations that can be tenuous because of cultural differences and differences in communicational codes.

"With this data, we will be able to identify the practices and problems that can then guide [public policy](#), particularly with respect to the acquisition of intercultural skills, for both individuals and organizations," said White.

In the next phase of the project, White and his team plans to create a database and information portal to inform the public about the most common difficult situations in an intercultural setting and the most likely solutions to foster harmonious relations.

He hopes that, over time, local practices and policies will influence each other and facilitate a spirit of cohabitation based on a shared model that will promote real inclusion.

Caught between two models of inclusion – Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism – many stakeholders and organizations are calling for Québec to clarify its guidelines on integration and inclusion, according to White.

"To establish Quebec interculturalism, we must find tools to ensure its deployment and measure its impact on the ground, and it is in this regard that an ethnographic approach can contribute to the emergence of a dialogue that can alleviate social tensions," he said.

Because, according to this anthropologist from Chicago who adopted Quebec in 1991, "it is easier to identify with a city than a country."

Provided by University of Montreal

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