

The Role of Nonprofit Sector Networks as Mechanisms for Immigrant Political Participation

LUISA VERONIS
University of Ottawa, Canada

ABSTRACT Issues of immigrant political incorporation and transnational politics have drawn increased interest among migration scholars. This paper contributes to debates in this field by examining the role of networks, partnerships, and collaborations of immigrant community organizations as mechanisms for immigrant political participation both locally and transnationally. These issues are addressed through an ethnographic study of the Hispanic Development Council, an umbrella advocacy organization representing settlement agencies serving Latin American immigrants in Toronto, Canada. Analysis of HDC's three sets of networks (at the community, city, and transnational levels) from a geographic and relational approach demonstrates the potentials and limits of non-profit sector partnerships as mechanisms and concrete spaces for immigrant mobilization, empowerment, and social action in a context of neoliberal governance. It is argued that a combination of partnerships with a range of both state and non-state actors and at multiple scales can be significant in enabling non-profit organizations to advance the interests of immigrant, minority and disadvantaged communities.

Introduction

Among the most exciting recent developments in immigration scholarship has been an increased interest in immigrant political incorporation (e.g., de Grauw & Andrew, 2011; Ramkrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008a; *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2011) in parallel to the growing field of transnational politics (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007; Smith & Bakker 2008). This paper builds on this work by responding to calls for more research on the role and significance of networks, partnerships and collaborations that

Correspondence Address: Luisa Veronis, Department of Geography, University of Ottawa, 60 University, Simard Hall, Room 017, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Canada, Tel.: (+1) 613 562 5800, ext. 1046 E-mail: lveronis@uottawa.ca

ISSN: 1911-4788

immigrant community organizations establish with a range of state and non-state actors both locally (de Graauw & Andrew, 2011; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008b) and transnationally (Orozco and Rouse, 2012). The aim is to investigate the potentials and limits of non-profit sector networks as mechanisms for immigrant political participation by examining the findings of ethnographic research on the Hispanic Development Council (HDC), an umbrella advocacy organization representing agencies serving Latin American immigrants in Toronto, Canada. The focus is on three sets of networks that HDC developed since the 1970s with multiple actors both in Toronto and in Latin America. This case study contributes new insights into the role of immigrant organizations and the mechanisms for immigrant mobilization, empowerment and social action by examining a Canadian umbrella organization whose primary mandate is advocacy rather than service provision. These issues are significant in light of debates regarding the non-profit sector's loss of autonomy and legitimacy as a result of welfare state restructuring since the 1980s and 90s (Wolch 1990) and limited avenues for advocacy and resistance amidst neoliberal forms of governance (Leitner, Peck, & Sheppard, 2007). The paper provides a geographical analysis combined with a relational approach that focuses on the nature and scale of HDC's networks, the circumstances of their formation, and the actors involved to shed light on the significance of non-profit sector collaborations as concrete spaces for information sharing, negotiation, mobilization and social action both locally and transnationally. The main argument is that by engaging in a variety of networks and partnerships with both state and non-state actors and at multiple scales, NGOs can augment their capacity for advocacy and political participation and even achieve a degree of recognition and policy influence. The first section provides a review of the relevant literature on immigrant political incorporation and transnational politics. This is followed by a presentation of the methodology and case study. The bulk of the paper examines HDC's three networks paying particular attention to their potentials and limits for a critical analysis of the role and significance of non-profit sector partnerships as mechanisms for advocacy and participation.

Immigrant Political Incorporation and Transnational Politics

Growing scholarship on immigrant political incorporation has sought to map out the diversity of immigrant experiences and practices with various state and non-state actors. The novelty of this literature lies in its focus on immigrants' participation not only in formal politics (voting, elections, representation), but also increasingly in informal politics (civic engagement, activism, community development) (de Graauw & Andrew, 2011; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008a; *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2011). Concomitantly, immigrant politics have drawn a great deal of attention in transnationalism studies generating studies on the new social fields of immigrant politics and activism across national borders (Levitt & Japokva, 2007; Smith & Bakker,

2008). The following discussion reviews issues in immigrant political incorporation and transnational politics relevant for the analysis of HDC's networks.

The recent focus on immigrants' participation in informal politics has been significant for theorizing the wide range of immigrant experiences and practices in relation to civil society, including grassroots initiatives, community organizing, and activities for social development typically through community-based, non-profit and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Moving beyond the traditional focus on national politics, this literature has narrowed the analytical lens to immigrants' involvement at the local, community, and urban levels. The focus is increasingly on immigrant community organizations, including their role and daily operations, in order to understand the influence of structures, actors, opportunities, and limits to immigrant community organizing. According to Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2008b), research on immigrant organizations can provide rich insights on the openings and challenges to immigrant participation. Immigrant organizations are significant channels for immigrant political incorporation because they represent an avenue toward formal political participation while also being a source of policy influence at the local level (de Graauw & Andrew, 2011, p. 193).

A growing number of empirically-based studies document the diverse landscape of immigrant organizing (e.g., Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008a; de Graauw & Andrew, 2011; Landolt, Goldring, & Bernhard, 2011). In an effort to theorize the role of immigrant community organizations, Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad (2008b) developed a conceptual and analytical framework that stresses the significance of place, ethnic groups, and types of organizations as important factors in shaping the form and practices of immigrant political participation. In particular, the significance of place, or context, has been under great scrutiny to understand the processes, opportunities, and barriers that influence the successes and failures of immigrant political mobilization; these include: structures and institutions; national policies; local political culture; and the countries of exit and of settlement (Bloemraad, 2011; Landolt, Goldring, & Bernhard, 2011; Mahler & Siemiatycki, 2011; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008b). It is important to underline that empirical studies are sensitive to the role of context and factors at different scales, from the local to the national and transnational level. The significance of context is demonstrated in a recent special issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* (2011) dedicated to cross-national comparisons of immigrant political incorporation in the USA and Canada, two seemingly similar countries in terms of histories of immigration and immigrant integration. Bloemraad (2011) stresses that even small differences in national, urban and local contexts can influence the form and nature of immigrant political practices. In particular, she underlines the role of national policies of immigration and integration, the provision of settlement services, state responsibilities and funding structures.

Relevant here is the fact that immigrant organizations in Canada belong

to the so-called “shadow state” (Wolch, 1990) of non-profit organizations that serve community needs with government funding. Critics have pointed out that such arrangements make the non-profit sector directly accountable to the state, thus reducing its autonomy, legitimacy, and ability to engage in advocacy (Wolch, 1990; 1999). Further, their dependency on state funding made Canadian immigrant organizations vulnerable to state restructuring and the adoption of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s (Creese, 2006). In addition to downloading and cutbacks to social programs, important changes to funding structures—a shift from core-funding to project-funding—reinforced the non-profit sector’s need to focus on service provision and performance rather than advocacy (Phillips, 2003). Moreover, service providers have been under tremendous stress as they compete for a smaller pool of funding (Creese, 2006). These contextual factors have meant that since the 1990s advocacy has been low on the radar of immigrant organizations in Canada with important implications for immigrants’ political participation. It is in light of this context that the case of HDC is particularly compelling.

While the significance of context is indisputable, Landolt et al. (2011) are critical of efforts to theorize immigrant political participation solely from this perspective because, they argue, so far it has not been possible to discern any real patterns or predictable outcomes between different groups or types of organizations. They propose a relational approach that focuses on the dialogical interactions and negotiations between a diversity of actors and agendas that need to be understood in addition to the existing political opportunity structures. They advance the notion of “agenda setting” to capture the complex dialogue processes that take place both in-group and out-group for community organizing. They argue that such an approach can help to understand the emergence and development of immigrant community organizations and how they evolve over time, while also shedding light on immigrant politics in practice. While considering the impact of changing opportunity structures, the ethnographic study of HDC takes a relational approach to understand how the changing needs and interests of various actors, both in-group and out-group, shaped the Council’s three networks over time.

In spite of significant efforts to outline the diverse landscape of immigrant NGOs, less attention has been paid to the relationships, partnerships and collaborations that they develop, the reasons for doing so, and the role of these networks. This is surprising given debates on the “shadow state” and potential options for a weakened non-profit sector to respond to community needs, increase its influence, and initiate progressive social change within a framework of neoliberal governance. On the one hand, Salamon (1999) argues for “holding the centre” by developing stronger collaborations with government; on the other, Wolch (1999) believes that NGOs should “decentre” and join the margins to become a site of resistance—in her eyes, the only route to regaining autonomy and legitimacy. Brock (2003; see also Mayer, 1995, 2007) provides a middle ground alternative by suggesting that non-profit sector coalitions and partnerships can provide a viable and legitimate

strategy to respond to government initiatives while advancing community interests. Creese's (2006) study of a coalition of settlement agencies in Vancouver illustrates this middle ground approach. Her case demonstrates that the impacts of state restructuring can serve as an impetus for building non-profit coalitions and increased advocacy amidst neoliberal governance. Creese provides valuable insights into the role of NGO partnerships for mobilization, action and social change around immigrant issues at the municipal level. Similarly, Viswanathan's (2010) study of the Alternative Planning Group (APG) discusses the formation of a coalition of umbrella organizations to represent immigrant and visible minority groups in local politics and its attempts to transform dominant social planning in the context of Toronto's neoliberal governance. While Creese (2006) and Viswanathan (2010) each focus on one kind of coalition, which in both cases addresses immigrant issues at the urban level, the study of HDC builds on their work to show that NGOs can develop a range of networks with both state and non-state actors and at multiple scales, thus simultaneously "holding the centre", joining the margin, and opting for the middle ground.

The field of transnational politics can offer some insights for the study of networks while also being sensitive to scale given its focus on immigrant politics and activism across national borders. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007, p. 136) distinguish three main research foci: (1) *homeland politics* comprises immigrant political activism in the country of settlement around issues in the country of origin and sometimes also involvement in formal politics; (2) *immigrant politics* refers to political activities to improve the status of an immigrant group in the country of settlement—it can be transnational when involving resources from the country of origin; and (3) *translocal politics* includes activities undertaken mostly by Latin American and Caribbean hometown associations (HTAs) to improve infrastructure in the communities of origin often by working with the local state. Much effort has focused on dispelling the myth that migrants' involvement in home country politics impedes their incorporation in the country of settlement (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). On the contrary, research has shown that transnational politics complement and even strengthen immigrant incorporation (Smith & Bakker, 2008). Even more, it is argued that often the same actors tend to become involved in "homeland, new land, and international politics" (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007: 137), which suggests that immigrant social and political action may involve practices at multiple scales simultaneously—an issue that will be illustrated with the case of HDC.

Most research in transnational politics examines how individual migrants, particular migrant groups or hometown associations engage in political practices and development projects primarily in the country or community of origin (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Smith & Bakker, 2008; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Less attention has been paid to transnational social action that involves multiple actors at multiple scales and that is multi-local or multi-sited. One such example is Law's (2003) study of a network of migrant labour organizations advocating for migrants' labour rights

across Asia. Her work examines the role of electronic communications in fostering transnational political communities—which she calls “transnational cyberpublics”—that occasionally also meet in real spaces during conferences or workshops. The case of HDC will further advance understanding of the role and nature of transnational networks that represent real spaces for immigrant social and political action both locally and transnationally. Finally, Orozco and Rouse (2012) found that most immigrant organizations that engage in development work—generally HTAs—tend to be small and have limited human and financial resources as well as expertise and therefore their ability to effectively implement projects in the countries of origin is greatly diminished. They argue that HTAs could improve their role as development players by working in partnership with other organizations, foundations and governments. This paper builds on these insights from the literature on immigrant political incorporation and transnational politics to investigate the potentials of non-profit sector networks and partnerships as mechanisms for immigrant participation and activism both locally and transnationally.

The Hispanic Development Council and Latin American Immigration to Toronto

The findings presented here are part of a broader project on Latin American social participation, collective organizing, and transnationalism in Toronto conducted from 2001 to 2003. Data were collected using an ethnographic approach involving a variety of qualitative methods, including: 65 personal interviews and one focus group interview with community leaders, representatives of community organizations, social workers, clients and volunteers; participant observation at community events, meetings, and immigrant organizations; and consultation of secondary sources such as community and government documents, NGO reports and newsletters, archives, and local Spanish-speaking media. The Hispanic Development Council played the important role of gatekeeper and thus was instrumental in providing access to information, key informants, and community events. In particular, this paper draws on the findings from personal interviews with all members of HDC’s staff and Board of Directors, one focus group interview with the executive directors of the Alternative Planning Group, and participant observation at HDC’s meetings, events, and activities during the research period.

Founded in 1978, HDC is a grassroots, community-based non-profit organization representing over seventy settlement agencies serving Spanish-speaking immigrants in Toronto. The Council is an umbrella organization with an advocacy mandate to improve the quality of life of Latin American immigrants, and to some extent that of other immigrant, visible minority, and disadvantaged groups in Toronto. HDC’s activities involve primarily research and policy analysis on issues of concern to Latin Americans to document their needs and legitimize their demands. The Council is also responsible for

improving service provision through its network of agency members and by lobbying the government and funders. While not a direct service provider, HDC offers a number of programs in key areas of interest to Latin Americans. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, these included a counselling program for at-risk Latin American youth, the Young International Professionals Program (discussed below), and a Social Ecology Program to raise environmental awareness while addressing social needs in Toronto. Moreover, HDC is involved in various collaborations such as the Alternative Planning Group that contribute to its advocacy mandate. Most of HDC's funding comes from various federal and provincial ministries, the City of Toronto, and mainstream organizations such as the United Way. This funding supports mostly the delivery of its direct services.

HDC's history is linked to Latin American settlement in Canada. While relatively recent, Latin American immigration to Canada is diverse with the arrival of a number of different waves (Veronis & Smith, 2011), including two significant waves of refugees: the Coup wave fleeing military dictatorships in South America (mostly from Chile) in the mid-1970s, and the Central American wave (especially Guatemala and El Salvador) in the 1980s. The 1990s and 2000s saw a diversification of migration with the arrival of skilled migrants from throughout Latin America, refugees from Colombia and Mexico, temporary migrants, and to a lesser extent undocumented migrants. Latin American immigrants tend to be relatively disadvantaged when considering socioeconomic indicators such as income, homeownership, and incidence of low-income families (Ornstein, 2000; Veronis & Smith, 2011). This situation can be explained by the significant share of refugees combined with discrimination and systemic barriers; Latin American professionals face challenges such as the accreditation of foreign credentials and the lack of "Canadian work experience" in spite of higher levels of education (Bauder, 2003; Veronis & Smith, 2011).

HDC's activities have evolved in response to Latin Americans' changing interests over time (see Veronis, 2010). In the late-1970s the main concern was with meeting the needs of South American refugees because there were no culturally- and linguistically-sensitive services; they had to organize to provide to their specific demands—including legal and settlement counselling, and services for survivors of violence and torture. The emerging Latin American community needed an organization to represent and advocate for its needs, lobby the government for funds, and coordinate service provision. These issues defined and shaped HDC's original purpose and activities, including the formation of its network of agency members. The arrival of Central American refugees in the 1980s coincided with a period of consolidation of service provision and diversification to address the needs of interest groups such as Latin American women and youth. Since the mid-1990s, HDC's work has responded to two simultaneous processes: the diversification of Latin Americans' needs with the arrival of more socially diverse migrants; and the impacts of state restructuring both on the non-profit sector itself and on disadvantaged communities such as immigrants (Creese, 2006; Viswanathan,

2010). In this context, HDC diversified its activities, including the provision of a few direct programs and the development of partnerships with various organizations in Toronto and in Latin America.

HDC's Networks as Mechanisms for Immigrant Political Participation

HDC's Network of Settlement Agencies

Central to HDC's early work was the organization of "network meetings" among Spanish-speaking social workers to discuss issues regarding Latin American immigrants' needs, exchange information, and organize services. At the beginning, the meetings were unstructured and service workers attended as individuals interested in improving service provision. Gradually, the meetings became more structured—generally organized around common issues of interest—and service workers attended as representatives of their respective organizations. Topics have varied depending on the issues affecting Latin American immigrants and conditions of service provision at a given time (e.g., legal aid, housing, mental health, families and children, seniors, etc.). As HDC's membership grew in the 2000s, the network meetings were opened to service workers regardless of whether their organization is a member of the Council.

Since the beginning, HDC's network of agencies has been instrumental in providing a space for networking, mobilization, and social action. One board member explained that HDC's mission is "to provide a space to share and to exchange," and described the meetings as "a forum for networking and to talk about a particular issue that is important to everybody" (personal interview, 31 March 2003). The idea of "space" here is not just metaphorical; two examples will illustrate the material role of HDC's network of agencies as a space and mechanism for immigrant participation and action in practice.

First, HDC's network was significant for the development of a web of services for Spanish-speaking immigrants in the 1970s and 80s. Through the network meetings, service workers were able to discuss the group's needs, become informed about existing programs, and coordinate the design of new services. Given the absence of services in Spanish and of specialized programs for refugees, the network made a significant contribution to meeting the specific needs of the growing Latin American community at the time. Once service provision was consolidated, HDC and its members were then able to focus on social policy, community development, and capacity building to advance the group's interests. For example, in the 1980s, HDC's network played a key role in mobilizing the Latin American community and in lobbying the Canadian government to create a special immigration program to sponsor Central American refugees (HDC, 2003a). Similarly, in the early 1990s, HDC organized a series of conferences to address issues facing Latin American women.

From a different perspective, the network meetings were beneficial to service workers as individuals and professionals. Research participants

stressed that thanks to the information gained through the meetings, they are better able to serve their clients. Service workers can also address community issues and the role they and their organizations can play. One participant explained:

I believe that the network meetings are vital . . . because . . . all the themes that are addressed are of interest to all the community workers. . . . This is also an incentive for community workers to converse about the *problematique*, and for them to feel that there is this kind of support and that they are not on their own. . . . Thus, it is very important to know that there are other people in the same situations, that there are initiatives, that contacts are being established, that there is this network process that is very important. (Personal interview, March 20, 2003)

These findings illustrate the significance of HDC's network of agencies for improving service provision, and for coordinating and facilitating the work of service workers and their organizations. Further, they underline the role of the network as a space not only for information sharing, but also for mobilization and concrete social action.

Second, HDC's network became even more significant in the 1990s. The focus of the network meetings shifted to address the impacts of state restructuring on the non-profit sector itself and on disadvantaged immigrant communities. Service workers met to discuss the challenges of new funding structures and changing work conditions, and to provide anecdotal evidence of the impacts on their organizations and clients. One board member described HDC's new role in this context:

Since they [the governments] have introduced all these changes . . . the Council has seen itself becoming this entity . . . towards which all [the agencies] were running as to a saviour. . . . [The] Council, from one day to the other had to play the role of a *protector*, of looking for more information than what is stated in our mandate; . . . of being a *mediator*, including for the organizations in terms of funding sources and establishing the dialogue with different government bodies, something that we did not do before. Each organization used to write its proposals, send them off and that was the end of it. Now they are calling for the Council to add its voice within this process. (Personal interview, March 20, 2003; emphasis original)

By the early 2000s, HDC and the network played an important role in supporting service agencies as organizations to access funds, write grant proposals, find new funding opportunities, and get in touch with funders. The Council's support and contacts became vital to the survival of service agencies that were struggling to remain afloat in a rapidly changing environment. In a context of increased competition for reduced funding, HDC encouraged collaborations among agencies. These collaborations had several advantages: they helped NGOs to work together instead of competing for reduced funds, to make the most of their limited resources by sharing their areas of expertise, and in turn, to coordinate their programs in response to community

needs (see Trudeau & Veronis, 2009). The existence of HDC's network was essential in the development of these collaborations. The network meetings also continued to support service workers as individuals. State restructuring altered work conditions in the non-profit sector—including casualization through part-time and contract work (Ilcan & Basok, 2004; Creese, 2006)—causing much stress among community workers already overworked due to decreasing resources. One participant described the network meetings as “a kind of vitamin bomb” (personal interview, 31 March 2003) to suggest that they provided the psychological and practical support they needed to carry out their daily work.

In addition to these important material contributions for the survival of service agencies, the changes brought by state restructuring reinforced the mobilization role of HDC's network. An Outreach Committee was formed in 2002 with the aim to foster an environment that could lead to action:

In the meetings . . . , the message that we were trying to give is a call for social action to workers in order for them to become aware of the role that we can play and this role can be from the micro- to the macro-level: educating the clients that come to see us about their rights, their obligations, and the barriers that they face; discussions with our managers or the board of directors of our respective agencies, making them see that it is necessary to be involved in the process. (Personal interview, December 6, 2002; translated from Spanish)

Notwithstanding, HDC's ability to initiate concrete change has been limited due to a lack of resources within both the Council and its agency members. Aware of these limitations, in the early 2000s HDC worked to reach out to the broader Latin American community in order to develop more concrete strategies. For example, it tried to improve its visibility by inviting the community to its meetings and to increase participation by opening its membership to independent professionals such as lawyers and paralegals working with immigrants. HDC also developed contacts with a variety of Latin American interest groups, such as associations of professionals and seniors' associations (the latter led to the organization of a one day forum on Latin American seniors). Finally, HDC established collaborations with non-Latin American organizations representing immigrants in Toronto and partners in Latin America, which will be the focus below.

HDC's network of agencies corresponds to a grassroots network at the margins as advocated by Wolch (1999). In this case, the main limitations include a lack of resources and little ability to initiate significant structural change. Nevertheless, one of HDC's strengths is that through its network of agencies, it can play a strategic role in the process of mobilizing service agencies and the community on a given issue, it can get help from other organizations, and therefore might be more likely to have success and visibility. So far, there have been no such spaces where Latin Americans can come together as a community in Toronto, discuss the issues they face, and mobilize to address them. To this extent HDC's network of agencies represents a social and political space for immigrant empowerment and participation

with some potential for concrete action to improve Latin Americans' well-being in Toronto.

The Alternative Planning Group¹

HDC has not been acting alone and its focus has not been solely on the Latin American community. In 1998, it established a partnership with the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNC-TO) and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)—two umbrella organizations that like HDC represent agencies serving immigrants and visible minorities in Toronto. In 2003, the African Canadian Social Development Council (ACSDC) joined the partnership and together the four councils formed the Alternative Planning Group (APG). The four organizations and their communities share several important similarities. First, the four councils represent agencies serving their respective groups. Next, each community has a complex history of immigration to Canada and is internally diverse (Teixeira, Li, & Kobayashi, 2011). Notwithstanding differences between and within the four groups, they also face similar challenges in the processes of settlement and incorporation, including systemic barriers and discrimination. All four communities are relatively disadvantaged and tend to concentrate in Toronto's poorest neighbourhoods (Ornstein, 2000; Viswanathan, 2010). One APG member summarized:

All of our communities are immigrant communities, . . . racialized communities. . . . By racialized I mean social, economic, and political marginalization. . . . Our communities are also facing the same challenges of settlement in terms of service delivery, . . . the same issues of empowerment, of participation, of equity, of access. . . . [There] is a lot more in common amongst us than that is not common. (Focus group interview, May 29, 2003)

Moreover, these communities are underrepresented at all levels of the Canadian government and structures of decision-making regardless of their size and time of settlement in Canada (Siemiatycki, 2011). This point is significant and APG's formation needs to be examined in relation to the broader context of provincial and municipal politics. HDC's partnership with CCNC-TO and CASSA began in 1998, just one year after the amalgamation of the City of Toronto, when the non-profit sector and disadvantaged groups were increasingly feeling the effects of neoliberal state restructuring (Viswanathan, 2010). The political climate of the time was significant in motivating the formation of APG. In addition to being treated as a single group within the structures of local government, immigrants and visible minorities were left out of the dominant debates regarding the province's decision to amalgamate Toronto (Siemiatycki & Isin, 1998). This situation was compounded by the fact that downloading and cutbacks hit immigrant and visible minority communities particularly hard. APG's formation was thus based on a common concern with the conditions of vulnerable groups, and a desire to advocate, collaborate and coordinate actions on issues of

common interest in order to achieve a stronger voice in local politics. One of HDC's board members explained:

We, as the Spanish-speaking community, we are not going to win on a lot of things because we belong to what is called the "immigrant community." But there are also other immigrant communities that are suffering [from] the same problems . . . in terms of discrimination, lack of participation, racism, lack of . . . economic opportunities. . . . [One] of the ways that we could achieve something is to unite with those communities and to present a united voice before the government sources and before different forums to make our voice . . . stronger. And we have done that . . . [to] a great degree of success. (Personal interview, April 1, 2003)

Together, the four groups represent a significant portion of Toronto's population—a "majority of minorities" (focus group interview, May 29, 2003)—that the government cannot ignore. They can have more influence not only because of their sheer size, but also because their ideas and actions can have more legitimacy in the face of dominant discourses and practices given that they are the outcome of negotiations amongst four diverse immigrant groups.

APG was formed to initiate change. The executive directors emphasized that APG's "job is to change the system" (focus group interview, May 29, 2003), including dominant structures, policies, and discourses. In particular, APG is concerned with the exclusion of immigrants and visible minorities from dominant practices of social planning in large metropolitan areas where most of these groups reside. Its aim is to identify and eliminate systemic barriers preventing immigrants and minority groups from participating in local processes of decision-making, and to develop more inclusionary approaches—referred to as "alternative social planning"—that take into account the diversity of Canada's population. APG's executive directors elaborated:

The other change is that anything that we do . . . by definition will become something different [from the dominant practices]. . . . We are also changing the whole discourse of social planning. We are not [just] doing planning for people. We are looking at planning in a very holistic way . . . for the fact that we work together . . . To us, that is planning for equity because . . . we have to negotiate our differences. (Focus group interview, May 29, 2003)

As the quotes suggest, the experience of working together has been empowering for APG's members since minority groups tend traditionally to be isolated and struggle on their own within dominant structures of decision-making. Through this partnership, the four councils managed to strengthen their individual organizations, build capacity within their communities, and promote community development for all four groups. Their aim is to change social planning for Canadian society at large and they believe that APG can serve as a model of governance given that negotiation of difference is core to the organization's functioning.

APG's work has focused mostly on lobbying the municipal government and it managed a number of achievements. Since the beginning, the councils presented joint deputations at City Hall. The most significant of these were against proposed cuts in the 2002-2003 budget to social and community grants allocated to local NGOs, which they successfully prevented. More significantly, APG managed to gain legitimacy and consolidate its position in local politics by writing reports outlining its views on social planning and inclusion starting in 2003 (APG, 2003a, 2003b). The academic quality of its work helped APG to achieve a degree of recognition and to reach a new level of dialogue with the municipal government. The City became interested and contracted APG to write a report assessing the state of Toronto's social planning and to make recommendations for future directions (APG with OCASI and PIN, 2004). These collaborative projects represent significant achievements showing that government institutions, funders, and NGOs increasingly recognize APG as an actor in local governance.

While APG has played an important role as an alternative think tank drawing attention to the concerns and viewpoints of marginalized groups in Toronto, questions remain regarding its power to bring about real change. APG managed to disrupt dominant practices of token representation. Moreover, the group's reports and its recognition suggest that non-profit coalitions have the potential to become significant actors in local politics and policy development. Notwithstanding, APG needs to put into practice the alternative social planning model for which it advocates. APG's goal to transform the local structures of governance seems rather unlikely given that Canadian municipal governments lack constitutional status and are "creatures of the legislature" (Sancton, 2000, p. 426): they have little independent autonomy because their authority derives from provincial governments. Nevertheless, in 2005 the Canadian Federation of Municipalities was advocating for a "New Deal for Cities" to give large municipalities more autonomy and power within their jurisdictions (Siemiatycki, 2011). A small step in this direction was achieved in 2005 with the signing of the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, which featured a special provision to include municipalities as partners in the coordination of settlement programs. As Canada's largest and most diverse city, Toronto gained some leverage, but more change has yet to come. Since the completion of this research, APG has been collaborating on a number of internal projects (especially for youth and seniors) and external projects for advocacy with national networks, including the Coalition for Just Immigration and Refugee Policy and the National Anti-Racism Council (NARC), while occasionally writing sponsored reports (e.g., APG, 2009).

APG corresponds to the middle ground approach and responds to Brock's (2003) call for non-profit coalitions that can mobilize and coordinate to represent the interests of marginalized groups in the face of government initiatives. It also corroborates Mayer's (1995, 2007) description of new actors in neoliberal urban governance whose significance stems from their power to mobilize, negotiate and create pressure on local authorities. To this extent, the partnership between the four councils represents a mechanism and

concrete space for immigrant advocacy, empowerment, and incorporation in urban politics. Finally, important to the argument here is that HDC's partnership with APG is entwined with its network of agency members. The two networks are mutually constitutive and interdependent insofar as APG feeds on each council's intra-group work, while in turn allowing each organization to voice its community's interests at the table of urban politics.

The Young Professionals International Program

HDC's third network—the Young Professionals International (YPI) Program—involves transnational collaborations with partners (NGOs, universities, research institutes) throughout Latin America on a variety of projects depending on local interests, including: international development, policy, youth programs, information technology, and environmental education (HDC, 2003b). The Council began to work in international cooperation after an initiative (launched by its network of agencies) to provide aid to communities affected by Hurricane Mitch in Guatemala and Honduras in 1998 (HDC, 2003a). Based on this experience, in 1999 HDC started the YPI, an internship program to send post-graduates (mostly but not exclusively Latin American) to work in Latin America. It is important to note that this program consists of one of HDC's direct services and also that it depends on the financial support of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT).² As such, the nature of this network differs from the other two in that it consists of direct integration with government—Salamon's (1999) call for “holding the centre.” At the time of research, the YIP was of tremendous significance to HDC because it represented its most significant source of funding and helped to cover core expenses such as staff salaries and infrastructure. While examination of the YIP's material contributions in Latin America is beyond the scope of this paper, the goal is to analyze its potential as a mechanism for immigrant participation and activism across borders.

According to its executive director, the fact of doing international work is integral to HDC's holistic approach to community development (personal interview, 9 May 2003), which is based on a broad notion of “community” with Latin Americans in Toronto being one community among others. HDC's aim is to improve the well-being of communities both in Canada and elsewhere, and thus by extension benefit the global community. One board member explained:

The idea of being connected with our Latin American countries is very beneficial because [many within] the Latin American community . . . are still very connected to back home. . . . And this is [how] we can say that we [HDC] not just care about people here. It's more of a global vision—that we are connected over there—and we care for the things that happen in Latin America and we want to make sure that we use our resources to benefit not just the people [in] Latin America, but also. . . the people here. . . part of [the Canadian] system. . . . [It's] a mutual benefit. (Personal interview, February 12, 2003)

This account provides valuable insight into the Council's approach to immigrant advocacy and activism by mobilizing, coordinating, and developing activities to improve the lives of communities in multiple locales and at multiple scales simultaneously. In contrast to most studies that examine transnational involvement to improve conditions in specific communities of origin (Levitt & Japatova, 2007; Smith & Bakker, 2008), HDC's transnational partnerships connect to partners across Latin America with the aim to promote community well-being and empowerment at both ends of the migration continuum. Communities in Latin America benefit from the program's direct human and financial support, expertise in various areas of development, and its potential for advocacy and activism. By assisting post-graduates with their careers, the program also contributes to the economic welfare of the Latin American community in Canada, its capacity building and community development, and even its ability to mobilize. Some members of HDC's board believe the internships are valuable because they make the youth more aware of the issues that Latin American people face across the Americas. In turn, the interns will be more likely to become involved in activities to help advance Latin Americans' interests, whether in the home countries or in Canada.

In her article on "transnational cyberpublics," Law (2003) explores the potentials of transnational social and political spaces that involve multiple actors in multiple places for labour migrants and advocacy groups across Asia by focusing on the use of advanced communication technologies. While Law's case involves a "cyber" space, HDC's transnational network arguably provides a more concrete space to the extent that post-graduates spend six months in Latin America working with local partners and communities. Moreover, the interns spend several months at HDC to undergo training before going abroad, and again upon their return to write an internship report. Furthermore, many YIP participants stay in touch and volunteer with HDC after the completion of their internship; a few were even hired by the Council for specific projects. In this sense, HDC's partnerships across Latin America form a transnational social and political space with the potential for mobilization and action in multiple locales simultaneously.

But reliance on state funding has its drawbacks. In this case, the YIP put significant strain on HDC's staff for its everyday administration and offered limited financial stability because it required applying for funding on an annual basis. In 2005, HDC opted to stop the YIP program in order to consolidate its local youth programs, which had the advantage of streamlining HDC's services while receiving provincial and municipal funding for two- to three-year projects. Nevertheless, HDC remains committed to playing a role in building and consolidating sustainable transnational linkages between Canada and Latin America.³

Non-profit Sector Networks as Mechanisms for Political Participation

While the findings presented here were collected in the early 2000s, they are still significant for understanding mechanisms for information exchange, mobilization, community organization, political participation, and even action for progressive social change that can be relevant to NGOs beyond those working with immigrants. The analysis of HDC networks demonstrates not only that advocacy is possible in a context of neoliberal governance and that non-profit sector partnerships and coalitions can be instrumental in the process, but also that NGOs do not necessarily have to choose between “holding the centre” (Salamon, 1999), moving to the margin (Wolch, 1999), or opting for a middle ground (Creese, 2006). Each type of network comes with its own set of potentials and limitations, and thus multiple paths are available for NGOs and communities to advance their interests. Further, this case suggests that a combination of partnerships with a range of state and non-state actors can help to overcome, at least partially, the limitations of each kind of network. Similarly, a combination of networks at multiple scales can contribute to the process. Indeed, a combination of different types of networks may offer more than the sum of their parts, and thus provide a potential strategy for the non-profit sector to sidestep some of the “structural dilemmas” of neoliberal governance (Mayer, 2007, p.109).

While HDC’s network of agencies, an example of Wolch’s (1999) decentering approach, provides significant autonomy and legitimacy at a community level, it is limited in terms of resources and suffers from a number of disadvantages, including: reliance on volunteer work, dependency on the individuals involved, and *ad hoc* action. It has little power to initiate structural change—i.e., it suffers from a “mismatch between the scales of life-world experience and the scales of political and economic decision-making” (Mayer, 2007, p.109). It can only develop tactics within existing structures—like collaborations between agencies, which are important in meeting a community’s material needs, but do not address sources of inequity, discrimination and injustice. Moreover, this kind of grassroots network carries the risk of legitimizing neoliberal discourses on community responsabilization (Ilcan & Basok, 2004). Where this network falls short, APG—the middle ground approach—fills in by voicing immigrants’ interests in municipal politics and influencing local policy. Yet it also suffers from a scalar mismatch in that it is unable to transform more macro-scale structures. In addition, it is vulnerable to cooptation and the trap of mobilizing community work for neoliberal agendas (Visvanathan, 2010).

Finally, the role of the YIP program—Salamon’s (1999) “holding the centre”—and its interdependency with HDC’s other networks is somewhat more complex. As a funded project, it was critical in supporting HDC’s daily operations and thus indirectly other activities such as advocacy for which it receives little to no direct funding. Significant here is that HDC responded tactically to funding restructuring by tapping into funds available at the federal level. This adaptability and flexibility to work with new actors and at

different scales enabled HDC to survive the worst years of state restructuring it faced as an organization. In this case, engaging with government was useful as a short-term strategy, but made HDC subject to government requirements and vulnerable to unpredictable shifts in funding structures.

Further, the YIP program serves to shed light on the role of scale. HDC's transnational partnerships in Latin America complemented its local community work by connecting both ends of the migration continuum. Arguably, the source of Latin Americans' inequality in Canada begins in their countries of origin, which themselves face the challenges of postcolonial and global processes of uneven development. One of HDC's board members reflected on this issue:

I am not really sure if the link with Latin America will . . . grow further. . . . [Now] with . . . globalization, . . . there will be more links because there are more immigrants coming here. . . . [With the Free Trade Agreements] . . . Our links to Latin America are very important. Especially because we [HDC] want to make sure . . . that this whole process of globalization that's . . . affecting Latin American people in so many ways, . . . making them go into more poverty, the multinationals taking over, and all... So I'd like to see the Council take a part in eradicating all that. I'm not sure how, . . . but it's my vision. (Personal interview, February 12, 2003)

This quote helps to contextualize HDC's transnational approach to advocacy and underlines the significance of networks that are multi-scalar for enhancing political participation and social change. While it is difficult to assess the material implications of HDC's transnational collaborations, they seem to also suffer from a scalar mismatch between meeting local community needs and addressing the structural sources of inequality.

Finally, it is important to recall that the drawback of partnerships is that they are time-consuming and require significant human resources (Creese, 2006; Trudeau & Veronis, 2009; Viswanathan, 2010). Thus, engaging in multiple networks can bring additional challenges as NGOs have to simultaneously navigate between the agendas of multiple partners and the limitations of each set of collaborations.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this paper was to contribute to emerging scholarship on immigrant political incorporation and transnational politics by examining the nature and role of non-profit sector partnerships and collaborations as mechanisms for immigrant political participation both locally and transnationally. The case of HDC demonstrates that such networks can be instrumental for advocacy and have the potential to influence policy, mobilize for concrete social action, and generally improve the well-being of communities in multiple locales. Analysis of HDC's three networks illustrates the diverse nature of partnerships that a single organization can

establish with different sets of actors, for different purposes, and at different scales. Although the power of each network to instil structural change at the macro-level is limited, the Council's experiences show that partnerships can provide real spaces for networking, mobilization, negotiation, empowerment, and capacity building that contribute to the social and political participation of disadvantaged communities such as immigrants.

Further, this study shows that attention to context combined with a relational approach can provide useful analytical insights on the processes that shape the nature of non-profit sector partnerships. The diverse and multi-scalar nature of HDC's networks was significant in enabling its survival to state restructuring while reinforcing its advocacy role amidst neoliberal forms of governance. It was demonstrated that the three networks are interdependent and co-constitutive, each reinforcing, complementing and supporting the others. Efforts were also made to critically highlight the limitations of HDC's networks, especially their tactical nature which may leave NGOs vulnerable to structural changes, administrative hurdles, and the agendas of multiple actors. More systematic research is needed to further evaluate and theorize the potentials and limits of non-profit sector partnerships and their significance not only for the political participation of marginalized groups, but also for concrete social transformation at multiple scales.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank HDC and all the research participants for their interest and contributions to the project. Without them, this research would not have been possible. I also acknowledge the financial support of the University of Toronto and of the Ethnic and Pluralism Studies Program during my doctorate. I thank Brian Ray for his feedback on an early draft of the paper and the Centre for Academic Leadership at the University of Ottawa for providing wonderful writing retreats. I am also grateful to Suzan Ilcan and Anita Lacey for their invitation to contribute to this special issue. Finally, I am deeply indebted to the anonymous reviewers for providing invaluable constructive comments.

Notes

- ¹ For a detailed discussion of the Alternative Planning Group and its significance for immigrant participation in the context of Toronto's neoliberal governance, see Viswanathan (2010).
- ² The federal government launched the YIP as part of a broader initiative to facilitate the school-to-work transition of post-secondary graduates under 30 years of age by providing them with international experience. Another objective of the YIP is to promote Canadian international relations and Canadian culture abroad.
- ³ See HDC's website for a description of its vision with this regard (<http://www.hispaniccouncil.net/the-americas-spain.html>).

References

- American Behavioral Scientist*. (2011). Special issue: Diverse pathways to immigrant political incorporation: Comparative Canadian and U.S. perspectives, 55(9).
- Alternative Planning Group. (2003a). *Social inclusion and the city: Considerations for social planning*. Toronto, ON: Report produced by the Alternative Planning Group.
- Alternative Planning Group. (2003b). *Re-defining the urban planning agenda: A joint alternative community perspective*. Toronto, ON: Report produced by the Alternative Planning Group.
- Alternative Planning Group, with OCASI and PIN. (2004). *Alternative social planning: A paradigm shift developing an inclusive, healthy Toronto*. Toronto, ON: Report produced by the Alternative Planning Group.
- Alternative Planning Group. (2009). *Citizenship matters: re-examining income (in)security of immigrant seniors*. Toronto, ON: The Wellesley Institute.
- Bauder, H. (2003). "Brain abuse," or the devaluation of immigrant labour in Canada. *Antipode* 35(4), 699–717.
- Bloemraad, I. (2011). "Two peas in a pod," "apples and oranges," and other food metaphors: Comparing Canada and the United States. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(9), 1131-1159.
- Brock, K. L. (2003). The non-profit sector in interesting times: An introduction plus. In K.L. Brock, & K.G. Banting (Eds.), *The non-profit sector in interesting times. Case studies in a changing sector* (pp 1-16). Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Creese, G. (2006). Government restructuring and settlement agencies in Vancouver: bringing advocacy back in. In Milligan, C., & Conradson, D. (Eds.), *Landscapes of voluntarism. New spaces of health, welfare and governance*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- de Graauw, E., & Andrew, C. (2011). Immigrant political incorporation in American and Canadian cities. In C. Teixeira, W. Li, W., & A.L. Kobayashi (Eds.), *Immigrant geographies of North American cities* (pp. 179-206). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (Eds.). (1992). *Towards a transnational perspective on migration. Race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism reconsidered*. New York, NY: The New York Academy of Sciences.
- Hispanic Development Council. (2003a). *25 Aniversario, 1978-2003. Construyendo juntos/ Building together*. Toronto, ON: 25th Anniversary report produced by the Hispanic Development Council.
- Hispanic Development Council. (2003b). *Young Professionals International Programme. 2003-2004*. Toronto, ON: Document produced by the Hispanic Development Council.
- Ilean, S., & Basok, T. (2004). Community government: Voluntary agencies, social justice, and the responsabilization of citizens. *Citizenship Studies*, 8(2), 129-144.
- Landolt, P., Goldring, L. & Bernhard, J. K. (2011). Agenda setting and immigrant politics: The case of Latin Americans in Toronto. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(9), 1235-1266.
- Law, L. (2003). Transnational cyberpublics: New political spaces for labour migrants in Asia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26(2), 234-252.
- Leitner, H., Peck, J., & Sheppard, E.S. (Eds.). (2007). *Contesting neoliberalism. Urban frontiers*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Levitt, P., & Japokva, B. N. (2007). Transnational migration studies: Past developments and future trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33(1), 129-156.
- Mahler, S. J., & Siemiatycki, M. (2011). Diverse pathways to immigrant political incorporation: Comparative Canadian and U.S. perspectives. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(9), 1123-1130.
- Mayer, M. (1995). Urban governance in the post-Fordist city. In Healey, P., Cameron, S., Davoudi, S., Graham, S., & Madani-Pour, A. (Eds.), *Managing cities: The new urban context*. (pp. 231-250). Chichester, NY: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Mayer, M. (2007). Contesting the neoliberalization of urban governance. In H. Leitner, J. Peck, & E.S. Sheppard (Eds.), *Contesting neoliberalism. Urban frontiers* (pp. 90-115). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Ornstein, M. (2000). *Ethno-racial inequality in the City of Toronto: Analysis of the 1996 Census*. Toronto, ON: Access and Equity Unit, City of Toronto.
- Orozco, M., & Rouse, R. (2012). Migrant hometown associations and opportunities for development: A global perspective. In J. DeFilippis, & S. Saegert (Eds.), *The community development reader* (pp. 280-285). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Phillips, S. D. (2003). Voluntary sector-government relationships in transition: Learning from international experience for the Canadian context. In K. L. Brock, & K. G. Banting, (Eds.), *The non-profit sector in interesting times. Case studies in a changing sector* (pp. 17-70). Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Ramakrishnan, S. K., & Bloemraad, I. (Eds.). (2008a). *Civic hopes and political realities: Immigrants, community organizations, and political engagement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Ramakrishnan, S. K., & Bloemraad, I. (2008b). Introduction: Civic and political inequalities. In S.K. Ramakrishnan, & I. Bloemraad (Eds.), *Civic hopes and political realities: Immigrants, community organizations, and political engagement* (pp1-42). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Salamon, L. (1999). The non-profit sector at a crossroads: the case of America. *Voluntas*, 10(1), 5-23.
- Sancton, A. (2000). The municipal role in the governance of Canadian cities. In T. Bunting, & P. Filion (Eds.), *Canadian Cities in Transition. The Twenty-First Century* (pp. 425-442). Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press (second edition).
- Siemiatycki, M. (2011). Governing immigrant city: Immigrant political representation in Toronto. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(9), 1214-1234.
- Siemiatycki, M., & Engin, I. (1998). Immigration, diversity and urban citizenship in Toronto. *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*, 20(1-2), 73-102.
- Smith, M. P., & Bakker, M. (2008). *Citizenship across borders: The political transnationalism of el migrante*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Smith, M. P., & Guarnizo, L. E. (Eds.). (1998). *Transnationalism from below*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Teixeira, C., Li, W., & Kobayashi, A. L. (Eds.). (2011). *Immigrant geographies of North American cities*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Trudeau, D., & Veronis, L. (2009). Enacting state restructuring: NGOs as "translation mechanisms." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27(6), 1117-1134.
- Veronis, L., & Smith, H. A. (2011). Latin American immigrants: Parallel and diverging geographies. In C. Teixeira, W. Li, W., & A.L. Kobayashi (Eds.), *Immigrant geographies of North American cities* (pp. 256-287). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Veronis, L. (2010). Immigrant participation in the transnational era: Latin Americans' experiences with collective organizing in Toronto. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 11(2), 173-192.
- Viswanathan, L. (2010). Contesting racialization in a neoliberal city: cross-cultural collective formation as a strategy among alternative social planning organizations in Toronto. *GeoJournal* 75(3), 261-272.
- Wolch, J. (1990). *The shadow state: government and voluntary sector in transition*. New York, NY: The Foundation Center.
- Wolch, J. (1999). Decentering America's non-profit sector: reflections on Salamon's crisis analysis. *Voluntas*, 10(1), 25-35.