



Enhancing occupational opportunities to support immigrants and refugees' social participation

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INTRODUCTION

- Service providers play a pivotal role in offering occupational opportunities that enable the social participation of newcomers to Canada
- 6 million immigrants and refugees (migrants) have been admitted to Canada since 1990, representing 80% of population growth¹
- Government of Canada admits majority of immigrants under categories aimed to promote economic growth²
 - Government funding primarily allocated to economic integration
 - BUT Canadian Multicultural Act calls for full & equitable participation of people of all origins in all aspects of society: **social** & economic³
- **Occupational justice framework**⁴
 - **Loss:** Newcomers often experience occupational disruption & loss of socio-economic capital⁵
 - **Justice:** Equitable participation in meaningful occupations compatible with one's culture & beliefs is a human right⁶
 - **Systemic factors:** Enable or constrain migrants' engagement in occupations that reinforce desired social identities & enhance social capital⁷
- Few studies have focused on service providers' perspectives or used an occupational perspective to explore migrants' social participation in Canada

OBJECTIVE

To capture service providers' perspectives on enabling migrants' social participation including:

- Provision of occupational opportunities to enable social participation
- Perceived benefits of & barriers to occupational engagement

METHODS

- Constructivist paradigm; qualitative research adopting interpretive description
- Participants:
 - 20 stakeholders from service providing agencies/organizations (e.g., executive directors, program managers, employees) that serve migrants and/or the general population in the Lower Mainland, British Columbia
- Data Collection
 - Key informant interviews, semi-structured, lasting 45-60 minutes
- Thematic Data Analysis
 - Familiarization, generating codes and constructing themes

RESULTS

Cultivating Social Occupations

Preparatory occupational opportunities

- *"Conversation circles are a great way, because you bring people together... on an informal basis to be able to practice language. And it's using settlement concepts, but it's a lot about just connecting, about talking to others."*

Occupational opportunities for social engagement

- *"People love food and all of the cultures that we work with, that's how they bond, you know? And so we, we do a lot of like group community kitchens."*

Cultivating Social Spaces

Physical spaces

- Access to social hubs
 - *"We do field trips ...from museums to cultural events to movies in the park. Anything that gets people out, gets them connecting."*
- Providing space for autonomous organizing
 - *"Our organization, we do offer a community room here. Free of charge. ... and, you'd be amazed to see people organize language classes there, to teach their own languages to their community members."*

Ideological spaces

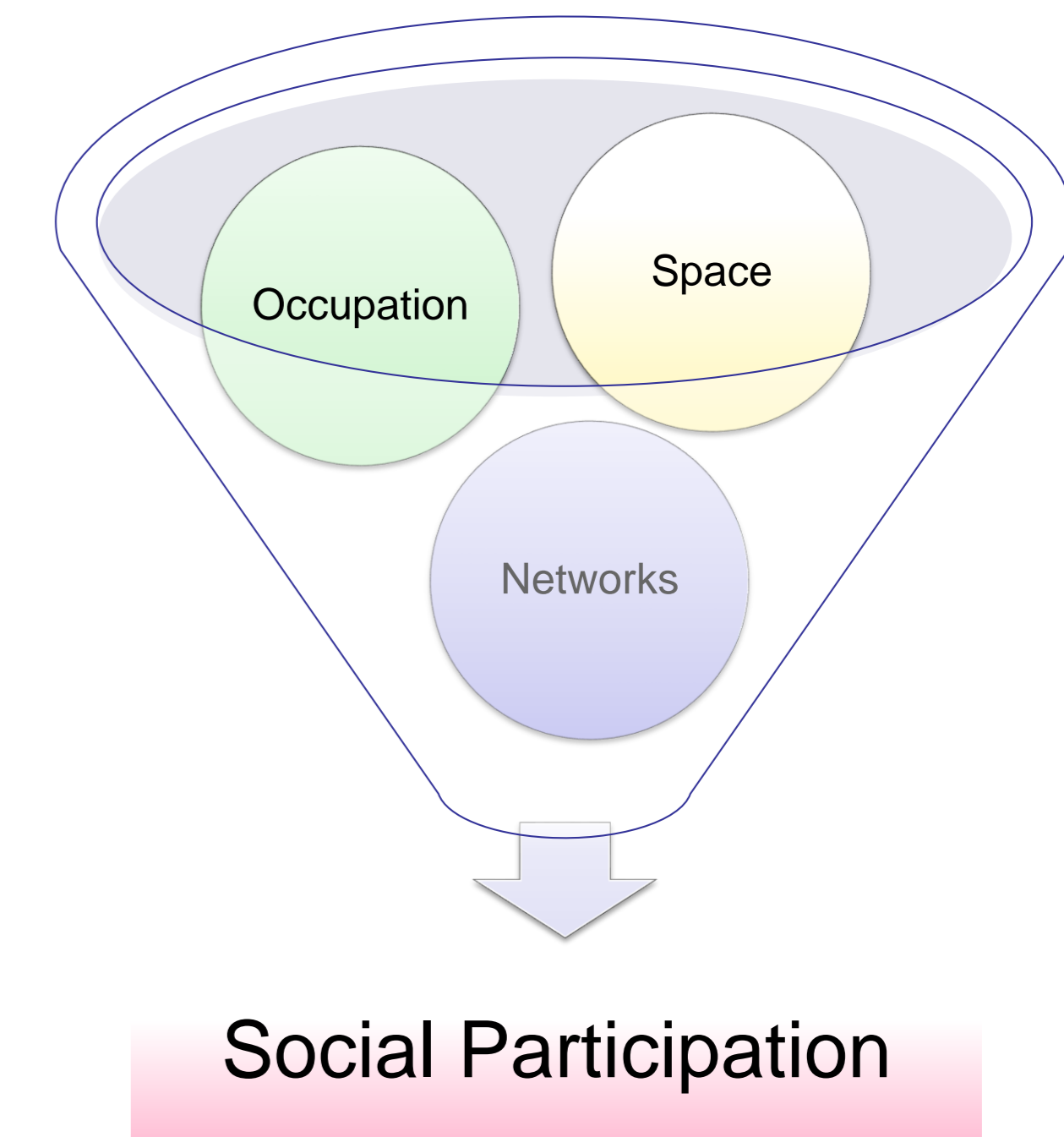
- *"Human beings with each other, trying... to decrease as much as possible this power imbalance of we are the ones who are helping you, you are the ones who are receiving help."*

Cultivating Social Networks

- Increasing access to social networks including other newcomers, neighbours and gatekeepers to enhance social participation.
 - *"It's a friendship program that tries to match two people, to meet informally. A lot of settlement information gets passed on, but I think, more importantly, it begins to form a network and to increase people's networks."*

Enabling Immigrants & Refugees' Social Participation

- *"Very quickly people transition from needing help to wanting to help... And when there are opportunities for them to help, then that really accelerates their own personal healing journey."*



DISCUSSION

Occupational Justice: Service providers recognized importance of migrants' social participation, but felt constrained by systemic barriers

- *"I feel like I'm always having the same conversation with funders, saying that socialization piece is just as an important part of settlement as say, getting a job or you know, or learning the language."*

Collaboration: Service providers can collaborate with occupational therapists & occupational scientists to raise consciousness about systemic factors impacting migrants' social participation

Collaboration could improve occupational justice for migrants in the Lower Mainland by enabling increased opportunities social participation, integration, health & well-being

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