ATTRACTING, RETAINING AND INTEGRATING NEWCOMERS IN SMALLER CENTRES

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Attracting, retaining and integrating newcomers in smaller centres has been an issue in Canada for more than a century. This paper briefly describes efforts that have been made in past, the factors that contribute to "welcoming communities" that may increase the numbers of immigrants choosing to go to and stay in those communities, and the actions that smaller (but perhaps not small) communities can take today to successfully attract and retain newcomers.

Attracting, retaining and integrating newcomers in smaller centres is not a new issue. With apologies to any historians reading this, I am going to give a simplified overview of how Canada has dealt with this issue over the past century and a half in just a few pages.

Once upon a time, there was a new nation coming into existence that had dreams of confederation from coast to coast. It was a huge land mass with strong neighbours to the South and a very small population concentrated in a few major centres. There were huge gaps in the middle of this country with few ways to connect the east and the west, and no easy way to get the goods Europe wanted to market.

"Build a railroad!" was the answer, but that required workers and populated stops along the way to service it and to cultivate the products that were in ever- increasing demand at home and abroad.

"Bring in people!" was the answer, but only those who would stay where they were needed… not go into the cities, because "they were not like us" and "could not be integrated".

That worked for a while with Mennonites and Ukrainians and Jews populating the West, happy to escape the conditions in their home countries, and to accept the incentives given to them by government to settle the land, develop the communities and provide the services needed there.

But then industrialization took hold and cities became the focal point for development. Construction workers were needed, factory workers were in demand, and the children

of the large western farmers were having difficulty finding new land to cultivate when their older siblings inherited their father's and grandfather's tracts. So they moved to the cities where the jobs were, and new immigrants went where the jobs were too.

Over time, word got back to the home countries…

> "Come to the cities. We're here and can help you. We have jobs and there are some for you too; we can worship in our own faith communities; we have our own stores where we can get everything we had back home and more; we get together and speak in our native language; we've developed our own *landsmannschaften* to help each other out; and our kids go to good schools and are having opportunities they would never have had back home. Come!"

And come they did to the cities where they had family and friends and others from their home countries who spoke their language, ate the same food, and practiced the same culture. And yet, they became Canadian, working and living and playing with people from other countries, who spoke English or French and a multitude of other languages, adopting each other's foods and eventually cheering the same hockey teams.

As urbanization continued to grow in Canada, the children of those in smaller communities left for the big cities where they saw the economic, cultural and social opportunities, and immigrants in large part chose to settle in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver (MTV) too. Both they and the cities thrived.

Meanwhile smaller communities began to worry about their economic futures as their population declined. There were labour and skill shortages in certain areas and certain sectors of the country, and employers started relying on temporary foreign workers to fill the gaps.

Provinces decided that they wanted to re-assert their role in immigration, to address their population and labour needs, and began to push for a role in the selection of immigrants. The first Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Agreement was signed with the federal government in 1996 and implemented in Manitoba three years later in 1999, followed over time by the other provinces and territories allowing them to nominate people for immigration to their regions.

These programs varied significantly across the country and experimented with many different approaches: some focused on retaining temporary workers already employed in their jurisdiction, others focused on the retention of international students studying in their jurisdiction, and others recruited people from abroad who had family or community connections in the province which made them good candidates for retention.

The programs were very successful in many respects and grew dramatically, resulting in a rebalancing of where immigrants initially settled, away from MTV and towards other communities. But there were also problems with the programs, and the federal government decided to rein in the PNP by imposing caps on the numbers to be nominated, and standard criteria for selection, much to the chagrin of the provinces.

In 2002 the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into effect which identified as one of its objectives "to support the development of a strong and prosperous Canadian economy, in which the benefits of immigration are shared across all regions of Canada."

The Minister of the day, Denis Coderre, tried to introduce a 'regionalization' strategy which would require new immigrants to remain in their initial communities of destination for three years before being allowed to move elsewhere. The assumption was that after being in a community for three years and establishing roots and networks there, people would choose to stay. Since this proposal would be unconstitutional given the mobility rights for all Canadian citizens and permanent residents enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, he proposed that they enter Canada with temporary status and only be eligible for permanent residence status if they had in fact remained in their first communities of destination for the full three years.

This proposal was hotly contested and never came into effect, but it did result in much discussion about what in fact could be done to incentivize immigrants to settle and remain in smaller communities across the country voluntarily. Much thinking and writing was done on regionalization strategies, small community strategies, and welcoming community strategies. It was a topic discussed at Metropolis conferences, meetings of Federal/Provincial Territorial Ministers, meetings of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Prime Minster Paul Martin's Task Force on Cities, and in the academic and settlement sectors. And I know this because I participated in many of those meetings.

What became clear was that different strategies are required for different immigrant classes and different source countries… At least initially:

- Family Class members will naturally go to where their family sponsors are

- Privately Sponsored Refugees will go where their sponsors are

- Government assisted refugees will go where the federal government sends them and this has become a hot issue during the Syrian refugee resettlement program with small communities and mayors across the country clamoring to be a refugee resettlement centre

- Provincial nominees will go to the Province that selected them

- Economic immigrants selected on the basis of a job offer will go where their employer is

- Other economic immigrants will choose to go anywhere in Canada that they think will be best for them and their children, and that tends to be the larger centres

However, all can choose to assert their mobility rights and leave those communities of first destination, or never go there at all, as soon as they receive their permanent residence status at the port of entry, and many do exercise that right. Secondary migration is alive and well in this country.

So what is necessary to attract and retain immigrants in communities? Not surprisingly, the factors are almost identical to what is necessary to retain Canadians in those communities. Victoria Esses and her colleagues at Pathways to Prosperity based at the University of Western Ontario identified 17 characteristics of a welcoming community that will generally be more successful in this objective. They are in ranked order for all immigrant classes:

- Employment opportunities: diverse opportunities for all members of the family, ideally allowing them to use the skills, education and experience that they have

- The social capital of families, friends, co-ethnics, and co-religionists: clusters of at least 10-50 families to create a sense of community

- Affordable and suitable housing

- Positive attitudes toward immigrants, cultural diversity, and the presence of other newcomers in the community

- The presence of newcomer serving agencies and services like language training, settlement counselling and orientation

- Collaborative efforts between the main stakeholders to create welcoming communities

- Municipal services sensitive to the needs of newcomers

- Educational and training opportunities for all members of the family

- Accessible health care

- Accessible public transit

- The presence of diverse religious organizations

- Opportunities for social and cultural engagement

- Opportunities for political participation

- Positive relationships with the police and justice system

- A safe environment

- Opportunities for the use of public space and recreation facilities

- Favourable media coverage

ome of these characteristics weigh more heavily than others depending on the immigrant class, country of origin, and the individual needs of immigrant and refugee families. For example access to education, training and health care is critically important for refugees.

But generally only metropolitan and second tier cities with their population size and diversity would meet all 17 factors identified for welcoming communities to be able to attract and retain newcomers.

A lack of some may be compensated for by the existence of others but not always for the long term, and would require the significant involvement of many stakeholders in the local communities such as:

- Employers

- Educational institutions

- Community-based service providers

- Settlement organizations

- Ethnic networks

working together in place-based collaboration with all three orders of government to make it work.

Immigration policy continues to evolve and the new federal comprehensive ranking system of Express Entry for economic immigrants is having its own impact. 78% of those invited to apply for permanent residence in its first year of operation were already residing in Canada as either highly skilled Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) or International Students (IRCC Express Entry Year End Report). This is a result of the point bias towards those with job offers and those nominated by provinces, as well as those who get additional points for Canadian work experience. This increasing tilt towards two-step immigration, (in some ways harking back to Denis

Coderre's proposal) has implications for communities wanting to recruit and attract newcomers to their communities. It means that communities may want to place more emphasis on welcoming international students and temporary foreign workers already in their communities so that they will want to stay.

Since temporary entrants are not eligible for federally funded services, this places more of an onus on other levels of government and civil society to fill the gap so that these groups have the supports necessary to settle well.

In conclusion, if smaller communities have at least most of the 17 characteristics of a welcoming community, how can they strategically focus their efforts to successfully recruit and retain newcomers to their communities? They can:

- Work with all orders of government to use the Provincial Nominee Program in their jurisdiction to maximum effect

- Work with employers in their region to identify how to best use immigration programs to respond to ongoing local labour market needs.

  For example:

- Can refugees be hired to fill jobs currently being filled by lower skilled Temporary Foreign Workers? In consultations held with representatives from the food processing, agricultural, hospitality and tourism sectors, they expressed real interest in this.

- Can necessary supports be provided to help Temporary Foreign Workers in their communities' transition to permanent residence status?

- Work with universities and colleges in their community to welcome and support international students and help them transition to permanent residence

- Work with IRCC to have clusters of government assisted refugees from the same source country settle in their community (minimum of 10 families) with the necessary service supports

- Recruit and support private sponsors of refugees to sponsor a cluster of refugees to add to the refugee complement in their community and create economies of scale for services

- Provide supports to family class immigrants and their anchor families to make their integration as successful as possible

None of this is rocket science but it is not easy either. The need for local solutions is well recognized; the challenge is to find the policy and funding instruments to bring local coordination and collaboration to life in the recruitment and retention of newcomers to smaller communities. We need to continue to experiment with local collaborative approaches to solve both old and new challenges, share our successes and our not-so- successful attempts, so that we all learn from each other's experiences in settling, integrating and retaining newcomers in welcoming communities across the country.