ATTRACTING FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRANTS: WHAT IF WE SEARCHED DIFFERENTLY?

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Before turning to the francization of immigrants, let us return to Francophone immigration, an idea that is constantly recurring in public and political discourse and is not specific to Quebec. In order to support its linguistic minorities, Canada is concerned to maintain the demographic weight of Francophones in its provinces and territories where residents of the other official language are in the majority. Since the early 2000s, the federal government has put in place various measures to encourage the influx of Francophone immigrants. Meeting in Whitehorse in July 2016 as part of the Council of the Federation, the Canadian provincial and territorial premiers went even further and endorsed a target for Francophone immigration outside Quebec that has never been reached to date, one of 5% (Orfali, 2016). For 2010, this target corresponds to approximately 6,500 people with a command of French who would settle annually outside Quebec among immigrants in the economic category. However, the most recent statistics indicate that the annual number of permanent resident and Francophone immigrants in this category living in Canada outside Quebec has fluctuated between 1,200 and 1,600 annually. So, we seem very far off the mark!

As noted in the previous chapter, in recent years, Quebec has seen a decrease in the proportion of immigrants who have a knowledge of French upon arrival. Yet the number of Francophones on the planet is constantly increasing and is currently estimated at 300 million. Could it be possible that Canadian and Quebec recruitment strategies are not in step with the profound transformations taking place in the international Francophone space?

Since the early 2000s, we have constantly reminded ourselves that the demographic future of the Francophonie is in Africa. For example, in a group of about forty states, we were able to estimate that the number of Francophones increased by 36 million between 2010 and 2018, pointing out that 90% of this increase comes from the African continent. However, in their recruitment efforts, Canada and Quebec seem to be carrying a Eurocentric bias and have difficulty imagining that Francophone immigration could come from outside France and Europe, traditional basins of Francophone settlement immigration since … 1608!

For example, "Destination Canada" is a federal program for Francophone candidates seeking opportunities in Canada outside Quebec. As part of this program, the Mobility Forum brings together prospective immigrants and potential employers from Canada on an annual basis in Paris and Brussels. Having had the opportunity to participate as an observer, there is no doubt that excellent candidates are to be found at these gatherings, but is this the way of the future to limit these activities to these two cities alone when more and more Francophones are to be found and will continue to be found south of the European continent?

Another example is the International Experience Canada

(IEC) programme, which provides young people with the opportunity to travel and/or work in Canada. It consists of three subprogrammes:

- Working holidays;
- Young professionals; and
- International cooperation internship. There is a list of 33 countries participating in this vast program, but there are only three French-speaking countries (France, Belgium, Switzerland) and no countries at all on the African continent.

Since the 1960s, in accordance with the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine, Québec has ensured its presence on the international scene, notably by setting up official delegations in a dozen cities — including Brussels, London, Mexico City, Munich, Rome, Tokyo and the United States in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles — as well as "Québec Offices" that offer services in a limited number of sectors in some fifteen other cities around the world. While the Délégation générale du Québec à Paris, inaugurated in 1961, is the oldest, it is only 55 years later that such a delegation was inaugurated in Africa, that is in Dakar. It was high time! With Quebec Offices opened in Abidjan and Rabat over the past two years, Africa only very recently seems to be a continent of interest to Quebec authorities. Better late than never!

In short, while the tectonic plates of the Francophonie are in motion and completely reconfiguring the international space, Canada and Quebec must review their approach to migration policies in order to adapt them to these new realities. The very strong growth of Francophones in West and Central Africa is most certainly driven by demographics, but even more so by significant investments in the education and training sector. In addition, these same investments are ensuring that more and more young Francophones in Africa have qualities that meet the criteria for immigrating to Quebec and Canada. In fact, these young people did not wait for policies to be put in place because the 2016 census data reveal that "Africa is now the second most important continent in terms of recent immigration to Canada, having surpassed Europe in this regard, which ranks third" (Statistics Canada, 2017: 4). The targets set by Quebec and Canada for migrants who speak French are very modest given the half a billion Francophones that could be counted on the planet by 2050 … and the fact that 90% of young Francophones under 35 years of age will be found on the African continent.