THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY AND IMMIGRANT RETENTION IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBEC

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ABSTRACT

Because English-speaking Quebec is a minority within a French-speaking majority that is national minority facing demographic decline, the Official Language Minority Community in Quebec faces unique challenges when it comes to community renewal. Historically, Quebec's English-speaking community has played a fundamental role in the process of integrating immigrants from diverse backgrounds into Quebec society. While renewal is still of critical importance to the development and vitality of the English speaking communities of Quebec, talk of integration into our community at this juncture is politically sensitive. Immigration policy in Quebec is exclusively aimed at renewal and retention for the French-speaking majority. In that context community leaders have to find creative ways to ensure that immigrants whose first official language spoken is English can identify with and attach to the English-speaking community while successfully integrating into Quebec through school and work. This article discusses the situation of Quebec's English-speaking community and the challenges it faces when it comes to demographic vitality and the importance of population renewal in official language minority communities.

Attracting and retaining immigrants is important to all Quebecers as collective demographic challenges require that the province identify means to better integrate newcomers to Quebec. The Quebec Community Groups Network understands this important challenge and shares with fellow Quebecers the desire for Quebec society to be culturally and economically dynamic. But the path to integrating English-speaking immigrants into Quebec is filled with potential roadblocks.

Historically, the arrival of new immigrants has played a fundamental role in shaping English-speaking Quebec, particularly in Metropolitan Montreal where the diversity of the population is a defining characteristic of the English-speaking community. The English-speaking community values the diversity arising from immigration and generally views newcomers as making significant cultural and economic contributions to the community and in turn to Quebec society.

In a brief to the National Assembly committee on Immigration in 2007, the QCGN noted the English-speaking community has developed considerable experience in the process of integrating individuals from diverse backgrounds into Quebec society. And it argued that immigrants whose first official language spoken is English can identify with the English-speaking community while successfully integrating into Quebec society.

"Quebec's English-speaking communities well understand the importance of speaking the French language as reflected in the considerable increase in the percentage of Anglophones that report an ability to speak the French language. By extension, we see too the need

for new arrivals to speak the French language is a necessary step towards successful integration. Furthermore, this reality is well understood by those immigrants coming to Quebec whose first or second language is English. That said, we believe the adoption of the French language on the part of immigrants whose principal language is English can be achieved while they maintain identification with the English-speaking community. Indeed, we believe that the sense of community belonging represents an important dimension of successful integration. It is on this basis that the English-speaking community wishes to work with partners across Quebec in ensuring that immigrants can successfully meet the conditions of integration. To do otherwise and potentially work at cross purposes risks encouraging immigrants to contemplate a move elsewhere-also known as secondary migration-which would represent a loss for both Quebec society and its English-speaking communities."[i]

There is ongoing concern in some quarters that new immigrants will integrate into the English-speaking community putting further demographic pressure on French-speaking Quebec. That fear, when added to concerns about the future of the French language, makes the integration of immigrants who speak English an even more sensitive issue. That was made clear in April 2010 when Parti Québécois MNA Pierre Curzi worried over Allophones choosing English over French and causing a dramatic increase in the number of English-speakers in Quebec. Using 2006 Census figures and methodology that has been questioned by some statisticians, Mr. Curzi argued that English is becoming more appealing than French in Montreal and he calculated that Montreal will only be 43 per cent francophone within six years. The report, prepared by researchers in his office, predicted not only that English could become the dominant language in Quebec's largest city by 2016, but that would have dire consequences on the rest of the province because of Montreal's role as the province's economic and cultural engine.[ii]

A plethora of political pundits in Quebec, including Alain Dubuc and André Pratte of La Presse, note that other important factors are at play. Both opinion writers remarked that the large number of Francophone families moving to the suburbs in recent years has reduced the number of French-speaking Montrealers. Mr. Dubuc also commented that the progress of French cannot and should not be measured simply by counting the number of immigrants who abandon their own language in favour of French at home and that it must include the number of immigrants who speak French at work, at school, in businesses and in the streets.[iii] André Pratte is even more unequivocal calling Mr. Curzi's report apocalyptic and noting that it is absurd to say English is more predominant when the number of English-speakers in Quebec is dropping.[iv]

While a significant portion of Quebec`s intelligentsia does not support the alarmist view of some sovereigntists as it relates to immigrants and the English-speaking community, it is clear that mainstream Quebecers are concerned about the future of the French language and ensuring that new immigrants adopt the French language. Ideally the English-speaking community could be seen as a bridge for newcomers who speak English to learn the French language.

It is important to note that language and community are distinct issues. The French language faces a continual threat from the English language, but not from the English-speaking Communities, some of which are in danger of disappearing. As André Pratte aptly points out "…since Bill 101, more and more immigrants have taken French as their second language. But French speakers still feel their language, their culture is threatened. Why? Because English is everywhere! Look at the signs: Future Shop, Krispy Creme, Home Depot. Look at the movies, listen to the songs: Anglo-American culture dominates the world, for better or for worse. And in Quebec, that means it is still difficult to buy a computer with a French-language keyboard, or a French-language computer game. Of course, Quebec Anglophones are not responsible for this situation. But the dominant position of English in the world makes it difficult for francophone Quebecers to believe Quebec Anglophones are a threatened minority. Most Francophones ask: How can you say you're a threatened minority, when your language is spoken and sung everywhere around you? You have English schools, English universities, soon a major new English hospital, English TV stations and the Internet? Personally, I see the concerns Anglophones express for the future of your community in a different light. I see it as a proof of love for Quebec. Sure, you might have all the TV programs you need in your own language. But you want more, need more than programs coming from New York or Toronto. You want programs that reflect who you are. And you are Québécois."[v]

Since 1978, when the federal government devolved powers to the province, immigration policy in Quebec is about renewal and retention for the French-speaking majority which is in demographic decline. Using the terms renewal and retention in reference to the English-speaking community is considered political anathema. The Quebec-Canada Accord, known as the Cullen-Couture Agreement[1], came on the heels of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord which attempted to bring Quebec into the Constitutional fold.

For political reasons, the federal government has preferred to keep clear of immigration issues in Quebec.

That has made it next to impossible for Citizenship and Immigration Canada to fulfill its responsibilities under Part VII of the Official Languages Act.[2] The dichotomy between the Official Language Minority Communities in English-speaking Quebec and Francophone communities in the rest of Canada is clear when you take a look at recent efforts by federal politicians, departments and officials to fulfill those obligations.

In 2002, the Standing Committee on Official Languages of the House of Commons explored the subject of immigration in a study based on section 41 of the Official Languages Act. In May 2003, the Committee tabled its report, *Immigration as a Tool for the Development of Official Language Minority Communities*. The report contains 14 recommendations dealing with a question that the Committee considers to be a high priority for Official Language minority communities. The focus was on Francophone communities outside Quebec. "Clearly, Francophone minority communities are not receiving a large enough proportion of Francophone immigrants to ensure their demographic renewal," commented Mauril Bélanger, Chair of the Committee which asked a number of departments and agencies to intervene in the various phases of the immigration process in order to advance the vitality and development of official minority language communities. The Committee remarked that it expected that all new federal-provincial-territorial agreements on immigration to mention the commitment of the signatories to promote linguistic duality and enhance the vitality of official minority language communities. That did not apply to the earlier Accord signed with Quebec which contains no obligation to promote the vitality of English-speaking Quebec.

In March 2002, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) established the Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee with a mandate to come up with strategies to increase the number of French-speaking immigrants in Francophone minority communities and to facilitate their integration. That led to the *Strategic Framework to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities*.[3] Later, in March 2005, the Steering Committee completed another document entitled *Towards Building a Canadian Francophonie of Tomorrow, Summary of Initiatives 2002-2006 to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities.*

Under the assumption that English-speaking Quebec has already largely benefitted from immigration, little attention was paid to the needs of the English-speaking official minority language community in Quebec. Yet renewal is of critical importance to the development and vitality of English-speaking community of Quebec. The goal of the QCGN is to encourage politicians and policy makers to consider this fundamental issue as the Standing Committee on Official Languages undertakes a new study on Immigration in Official Language Minority Communities this spring.

While other provinces are growing, the population of Quebec is stagnating and its failure to attract and retain immigrants is a major factor in that losing equation. A recent study by Groupe Cirano showed that while Quebec today welcomes immigrants who are more educated, more proficient in French, and younger than was formerly the case, it struggles to integrate them into the workforce. The Cirano study, co-authored by Brahim Boudarbat and Maude Boulet, reports that Quebec receives fewer immigrants and that it has a hard time retaining those who settle in this province upon arriving in Canada and note the provincial government will have to favour the integration of immigrants into the workplace if it wants them to stay here.[vi]

Immigrants, particularly entrepreneurs, tend to move west once they have obtained their landed immigrant status, report Boudarat and Boulet who explain this is largely because immigrants who come to Quebec are half as likely to find a job as those who move to western provinces that are expanding. In 2006, the unemployment rate for new immigrants was 11.2 per cent —twice the rate of Quebecers and twice the rate of immigrants who chose to establish themselves in provinces like Ontario and British Columbia. Recent immigrants, that is those who arrived within the last five years, were hardest hit by unemployment with 19.3 per cent unable to find work compared to 11.7 per cent in the rest of Canada. Yet immigrants that are selected by Quebec are more educated and more qualified and many come from French-speaking countries and are fluent in French.[vii]

In the Annual Report of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages entitled *Two Official Languages, One Common Space: 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act,* Commissioner Graham Fraser dared to tackle the issue of renewal of the English-speaking communities in Quebec head on.

Mr. Fraser notes that Quebec's English-speaking communities have had many years of experience in immigration and integration and in managing diversity. "Although the situation varies greatly from one region to another, some members of the English-speaking communities have many years of experience in integrating newcomers and managing cultural diversity."[viii]

The Commissioner remarked that our community assists English-speaking newcomers in learning French, in finding jobs, and in ensuring they integrate into Quebec society while maintaining their attachment to the English-speaking community. He also notes the English-speaking community would benefit from being able to

share our experience in immigration and taking into account diversity, and would benefit from participating in public debates on the issue. "Moreover, it would be important for English-speaking community organizations to obtain the resources they need to continue working on integrating newcomers and helping them realize their full potential in Quebec,"[viii] Mr. Fraser added.

"We want to renew our community not by soliciting new immigrants but by retaining diverse newcomers who speak English," says QCGN Director General Sylvia Martin-Laforge, noting that, from a policy perspective, it is easier to view the issue through the lens of respectful integration and cultural diversity, than focusing on immigration in the English-speaking community. That, she argues, opens the door for Citizenship and Immigration Canada to support the vitality of the English-speaking official language minority community in Quebec while respecting provincial jurisdiction.

In his opening remarks for the "Exploring Diversity in English-Speaking Quebec" symposium that began in Montreal on May 22, 2009, QCGN President Robert Donnelly noted that cultural diversity is a demographic fact in Quebec society, and this trend will only increase in the future.

Mr. Donnelly recalled that during the Bouchard-Taylor Commission hearings last year the QCGN stated that the debate on the cohabitation of different communities was essential and that it should focus on the equilibrium between the rights of the majority and the rights of the minority. "We believe it is vital that we understand who makes up our minority communities, and that we understand what their values and their needs are."[ix] During the commission, the QCGN also highlighted the ways in which immigration positively affects society and reminded the commission that English-speaking community is recognized by many as being progressive in the way it has dealt with our changing community.

"Quebec needs immigrants," said Mr. Donnelly. "The continued vitality of our province, and—within that—of the English-speaking community, greatly depends on immigration. In 2006, immigrants to Quebec for whom English was the only official language they knew upon arrival represented nearly 20 per cent of the total provincial immigration. This was up from just under 16 per cent in 2002. This proportion exceeds the share of Quebec's English mother-tongue population, which stands at just under 10 per cent. Considering the important percentage of immigrants that are English-speakers, we see that it is inevitable that English-language institutions will be involved in the process of managing diversity."[x]

"English-speaking Quebec is only as strong as the sum of its many parts and we recognize that mutual support is needed. It's all about connectivity between communities to ensure that English-speaking Quebec and its diverse components parts have a strong, cohesive voice to advocate for its needs and concerns,"[xi] Robert Donnelly concluded.

REFERENCES

[1] This milestone agreement, which gave Quebec exclusive responsibility of choosing immigrants, declared that immigration to Quebec must contribute to the province's cultural and social development and provided the province with a say in the selection of independent—class immigrants (skilled workers and businessmen with their dependents) and refugees abroad. In addition, the agreement allowed the province to determine financial and other criteria for family-class and assisted—relative sponsorship. Selected applicants are issued a "certificat de sélection du Québec" before Citizenship and Immigration Canada issues the actual visa.

[2] Under that section of the Act, the federal government has responsibility to promote linguistic duality and enhance the vitality of official language minority communities.

[3] Released in November 2003, the Framework outlines the issues related to Francophone immigration, as well as the long-term objectives, medium-term results and short-term measures.

[i] Immigration: A perspective from Quebec's English-speaking communities, a brief prepared by the Quebec Community Groups Network in collaboration with Jack Jedwab for the special National Assembly Committee on Immigration, 2007.

[ii] As quoted in the French press Le grand Montreal s'anglicise, Pierre Curzi http://pierrecurzi.org/sites/pierrecurzi.org/files/Le_grand_Montreal_sanglicise_-_avril_2010.pdf.

[iii] Les angoissés de la langue, Column by Alain Dubuc published on April 9, 2010.

[iv] Un peu de recul, Editorial by André Pratte published on April 10, 2010.

[v] Bridging the Two Solitudes, excerpts from a speech by André Pratte delivered at the first research conference on the English-speaking communities of Quebec held at the Université du Québec à Montréal on Feb. 25, 2005 and published in R.Y. Bourhis (Ed.) The Vitality of the English-Speaking Communities of Quebec: From Community Decline to Revival. Montreal, Quebec: CEETUM, Université de Montréal.

[vi] Immigration au Québec : Politiques et intégration au marché du travail, co-authored by Brahim Boudarbat and Maude Boulet © Groupe Cirano.

[vii] Annual Report 2008–2009: Two Official Languages, One Common Space: 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, © Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada 2009, Cat. No.: SF1-2009, ISBN: 978-0-662-06825-9.

[viii] *Ibid*

[ix] Understanding Diversity in Montreal. Montreal, May 22, 2009, Opening remarks by Robert Donnelly, President, Quebec Community Groups Network.

[x] *Ibid*

[xi] *Ibid*