SMALL PLACES, BIG CHANGES: TEMPORARY MIGRATION, IMMIGRATION AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION

ABSTRACT

This article explores the impact of migration, immigration and the process of family reunification in Brandon, Manitoba. The community has recently experienced an influx of temporary migrants to fill labour shortages at an expanding pork processing plant. The case is unique because "temporary" does not necessarily mean temporary; many temporary migrants transition into immigrants and reunite with their families.

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The impact of transnational migration is far-reaching and transformative in ways often unimaginable, varying amongst perspective and location. The experiences of Brandon, Manitoba, the province's second largest urban centre and a destination for hundreds of temporary foreign workers (TFWs), could not have been anticipated. The city is in the midst of rapid and unprecedented change, owing to temporary migration initiated by an industrial strategy designed to meet immediate labour needs. In a province that aggressively promotes immigration through its strong Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), the current circumstances in Brandon are considered to be unique. Despite the fact that the majority of newcomers are TFWs, "temporary" does not always mean temporary, and in many cases it means permanent. Though Brandon has already experienced a large influx of "temporary" foreign workers, greater, more visible changes will become increasingly evident in the near future as migrants evolve into immigrants and families reunite.

This article explores the local experience as well as anticipated challenges and opportunities that accompany continued growth. As the number of newcomers increases and diversifies, service provision challenges are likely to intensify. Most notably, there will be increasing demands on the school division, health services and housing. Currently and into the future, the need for family-appropriate dwellings will increase, compounding housing shortages and further challenging the housing sector in the community. It is anticipated that the community will continue to see local business developments arising as new markets emerge. A key concern is the need for increased language supports, since newcomers' proficiency in English is often initially limited. Currently, a number of local businesses and service providers wish to hire individuals who are fluent in languages other than English, particularly Spanish and Mandarin; this is unprecedented in the city.

The Province of Manitoba has set and reached high per capita immigration targets. In 2007, Manitoba welcomed nearly 11,000 immigrants, of whom approximately 70% were provincial nominees. The Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement (CIMA) came into existence in 1996 and serves as the province's main immigration policy framework. CIMA is one of the first agreements of its kind in the country, outlining an innovative and cooperative arrangement between the federal government and a province, and granting the province increased autonomy and responsibility regarding immigration (Amoyaw 2008). Since the late 1990s, Manitoba has benefited from economic and social growth, partly due to increased immigration. In 2007, immigration to Manitoba represented 4.6% of total immigration to Canada and the province's 2.6% population growth is largely attributed to immigration. Most newcomers settling in Manitoba make their homes in Winnipeg, but a significant number settle in rural centres such as Steinbach, Brandon and Winkler.

Over the past four years, the number of TFWs migrating to Manitoba to fill labour shortages has doubled. In 2003 there were 1,426 TFW arrivals; this number reached 2,878 in 2007. Interestingly, 45% of TFWs arriving in Manitoba went to communities other than Winnipeg (Manitoba Labour and Immigration 2008). Many of the TFWs arriving in Manitoba enter Canada with the knowledge that they may apply for permanent residency after having worked six months in the province under the PNP. In Manitoba, TFWs are considered a source of permanent immigration, thus contributing to the province's annual immigration targets. With this option of permanency, there is a fundamental need to reconsider

how migrant workers are perceived and treated when they arrive through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program pilot project to work in occupations requiring lower levels of formal training (NOC C and D).

Brandon has remained relatively homogenous over time; population growth has been steady, yet low. Today the community is rapidly diversifying and will likely continue to do so in the future as family members join spouses and relatives. Brandon's population has risen from 39,716 in 2001 to 41,511 in 2006 (Statistics Canada 2007). Historically, immigration to Brandon has been low, but in 2007 the community had the highest rate of immigration growth in Manitoba, tripling 2006 levels to 642 newcomers. Thus Brandon has recently become the third destination community in Manitoba after Winnipeg and Winkler (Manitoba Labour and Immigration 2008). It is estimated that if all TFWs and their families stay in Brandon, this will represent an addition of about 5,100 residents to the city by 2011, or approximately 12% of Brandon's 2006 population (Bucklaschuk, Moss, and Gibson 2008). Initial estimates from Maple Leaf Foods indicate that over 90% of TFWs apply for provincial nominee status. Family reunification began in the fall of 2007 and should continue, as a large percentage of TFWs receive provincial nominee status.

Maple Leaf Foods has been a large driver of the recent increase of migration and immigration to Brandon. The Maple Leaf hog processing plant in Brandon opened in 1999, and implemented a full second shift in June 2008. The recent second shift expansion has made the Brandon mega-plant the largest Maple Leaf facility in Canada (Maple Leaf Foods 2008). Maple Leaf Foods staffing in Brandon occurs in three streams: domestic, international and salaried. Efforts are made to recruit and hire employees domestically, but national recruitment strategies have been unable to fully meet the company's staff needs. International recruitment of foreign workers began in 2002 with the first group arriving from Mexico. Since then, workers have been recruited from China, Colombia, El Salvador, Mauritius, and Ukraine (Rural Development Institute 2008b). TFW recruitment efforts have resulted in the arrival of approximately 1,000 newcomers. Of the 1,700 employees at the Brandon plant, 60% are international recruits (Boeve and Annis 2008).

Small centres and rural regions face unique challenges in retaining newcomers. Amenities and services associated with large-scale immigration and urban centres may not exist or have the capacity to serve rapidly arising diverse needs (Foster and McPherson 2007). It is therefore critical to have open, trusting and effective communication channels connecting individuals and organizations within a community. It is important that the drivers of migration, community planners, and service providers communicate to enhance awareness and understanding regarding future plans and the impact of growth. Perspective dictates how changes and needs are viewed; it is often difficult, perhaps even impossible, to fully understand the transformative nature of large scale migration without "putting yourself in somebody else's shoes."

Brandon has benefited from a proactive approach that encourages collaboration and communication across sectors to plan for challenges and needs. To aid the settlement process and increase communication, six Maple Leaf Foods employees have been assigned roles as Community Steering Committee (CSC) liaison officers to serve as a bridge between the company and the community. Each CSC liaison represents one of six settlement priorities: housing, education, health care, transportation, childcare and language and support services (Rural Development Institute 2008b). Maple Leaf Foods representatives meet regularly with community planners and local service providers to work towards addressing the current and future needs of newcomers and long-time community residents. The Rural Development Institute's Temporary Foreign Worker Dialogue Group brings government, community and academia together to explore community, program and policy needs. Both groups are illustrative of the cooperative approach emerging locally to prepare and plan for the evolving needs of newcomers and the community.

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As previously mentioned, the permanent nature of temporary migration in Brandon is unique and attention must be focused on how to meet the needs of individuals as they evolve through migrant/immigrant categories and subsequently reunite with family. However, service providers and community planners encounter challenges related to policy and program regulations based on status and immigrant category. Recent provincial policy adjustments have enabled local immigrant service providers to increase support for temporary migrants. It is without question that changes and adjustments need to be made to regulations, precluding the provision of support and services to those defined as "temporary." The decision to permanently remain in Brandon will be influenced by initial experiences. When there is nothing temporary about temporary, permanent supports need to be provided or else the community and company will be at risk of being trapped in a cycle of continuous recruitment. Retention rates are directly linked to welcoming communities that have the capacity to successfully absorb newcomers and assist their integration. The interim period between the time that TFWs arrive and the day that they become permanent residents is a time during which the community can impact newcomers' decisions to stay in the area. Community preparedness and

welcoming initiatives are imperative (Rural Development Institute 2008a).

Transnational families, though not a recent phenomenon (Ho 2008), are increasing as industrial and developmental strategies foster reliance on international labour pools (Landolt and Da 2005, McGuire and Martin 2007, Pottinger 2005, Suarez-Orozco, Todorvova and Louie 2002). Globalization, increased immigration, temporary migration, and mobility have left few states static. Migrants to Brandon are often single young men or men with dependants who have remained in their country of origin. The subsequent reunification of spouses and children can be considered a second wave of migration/immigration to the community. Industrial developments in the United States during the 1990s prompted similar patterns of migration to non-traditional immigrant-receiving locales. These destination communities often experience a series of stages influenced and shaped by gender (Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2000).

Concern regarding family separation and the presence of relatively high numbers of "single" males has the potential of having long-term repercussions on migrant families and the community. A Manitoba study indicated that factors such as loneliness, differing cultural norms, boredom, anonymity and an increased sense of freedom can sometimes place newcomers at risk. The same study also found that bars become a major source of recreation and social interaction for newcomers (Foster and McPherson 2007). There is local concern that migrants and their families may face domestic strain and possible family breakdown owing to long periods of separation. Family reunification is a goal of many TFWs as they arrive in Brandon; however, two years is a long time to be separated from one's family, and this may negatively impact family members as they relocate to Canada. In some instances, when families are reunited they no longer function as a single-family unit. In cases of family breakdown, local service providers offer assistance to spouses to ensure that they are able to obtain food and shelter, apply for social assistance and child support, and seek legal aid. These issues require further attention as women and children are put at risk of poverty, social isolation, domestic violence and possible homelessness. An increased understanding of family reunification, associated needs and challenges is timely and necessary (Rural Development Institute 2008c).

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In addition to ensuring that basic needs are met, the community is faced with positive challenges related to an increased demand for services. Historically, the Brandon School Division has experienced an annual decline in enrolment and 2007 was the first year without a decline. There are about 7,000 students in the Brandon School Division. Approximately five new students register per week, compared to the previous average of two per week. The school division has noted that the increase has been gradual thus far, allowing for better settlement and planning. Between May 2008 and June 2009, the Brandon School Division expects to welcome approximately 167 new English as an Additional Language (EAL) students, in addition to the 276 EAL students who are currently enrolled. Without immigration, enrolment from kindergarten to grade 8 would be in decline. With increasing enrolment, adequate physical space is not a concern; however, sufficient programming, resources and personnel are of great concern (Rural Development Institute 2008c).

Immigration is increasing more rapidly than are government resources. The Brandon School Division, like many local stakeholders and service providers, recognizes the need to collaborate and share information to plan holistically for local growth and change. The school division works with Maple Leaf Foods to pre-register potential students, enabling planning to occur based on accurate numbers from actual anticipated arrivals. Understanding differences amongst EAL learners and newcomers is needed to ensure enhanced education and a positive, effective experience. EAL students have traditionally arrived with higher levels of English language proficiency; in many instances these children's parents had high levels of formal education. It is critical to understand how needs have evolved; this change is partly due to different categories of immigrants and skill levels. Since 2005, the Brandon School Division has known a period of adjustment and transition as more EAL students arrive with lower levels of English language proficiency. The greatest need for EAL support is in secondary schools, as those students have the least amount of time to complete their education in an additional language. It is vital to establish mechanisms in support of EAL development in addition to integrating newcomers into the student body.

The Brandon story is unique and must be recognized as such, in order to ensure that policy and programming effectively meet local needs and enhance the experience of newcomers and the community. The nature of the community and the ability to welcome and absorb newcomers will impact retention rates. Attraction of migrants and newcomers is well underway; however, without community planning and preparedness, Brandon could become merely a transitional destination. Family reunification is an important contributing factor to retention and integration into the region. Multi-level partnerships and communication are vital to ensuring

that the municipality receives needed provincial support. Successful settlement is as much about integration as it is about ensuring a welcoming community that positively reacts to newcomers and includes them in community life. A welcoming community respects diversity and fosters positive attitudes towards the arrival of newcomers, who come bearing different languages and cultures. Anti-racism initiatives and cultural diversity celebrations are critical components of a welcoming community, as are successful settlement and integration. Families must feel included in their new community and efforts must be made to ensure a hospitable environment. A community that welcomes newcomers and works toward ensuring their full participation in society will reap the benefits of population and economic growth and increased diversity.

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