IMMIGRATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF REGIONALIZATION

Francophone Immigration in New Brunswick

ABSTRACT

In the past few years, Francophone immigration outside of Québec has become a reality of Francophone immigration and regionalization in Canada. This article examines initiatives undertaken by the Acadian community of New Brunswick and its efforts to develop a strategy to attract immigrants to the Francophone regions of New Brunswick. In conclusion, a few recommendations are suggested to develop durable policies to further orient the regionalization of immigration.

CHEDLY BELKHODJA

Chedly Belkhodja is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Sciences at the Université de Moncton. Mr. Belkhodja, who holds diplomas from the Université Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV and the Université de Montréal, works on the phenomenon of populism and the democratic deficit in Western societies, as well as on the new modalities of politics.

In Canada, immigration remains a phenomenon strongly linked to the urban reality of the country. Several studies indicate that the vast majority of newcomers choose the larger urban centres – Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal – as their destination. In 2003, approximately 75% of newcomers settled in the three largest cities : Toronto (97,476/44,0%), Vancouver (30,766/13,9%) and Montréal (33,732/15,2%). Certain observers have underlined the increasing gap between large cities and rural areas: in 2017, Toronto will count more than 7 million residents, with more than 50% of its population of immigrant sources. To raise the question of the regionalization of immigration in Canada therefore amounts to rising to this particular demographic, economic and social cohesion challenge.

From a theoretical standpoint, it seems that the regionalization of immigration flows from the reconfiguration of the traditional roles of the Nation-State in a post-Cold War context. Since the 1990s, major upheavals provoked by globalization have highlighted the increasing openness and mobility of individuals, ideas and goods, as well as a significant increase in migration flows (Castles and Miller, 2003). Globalization has also confered the legitimacy of the State to new actors in order to engage more freely in questions such as immigration. Furthermore, the evolution of the Canadian federal system toward greater decentralization facilitates the participation of new actors, such as provinces and municipalities. These actors play a greater role in external relations, in specific areas (Belkhodja, 2000).

Canadian provinces are therefore increasingly called upon to play a role in immigration and to adapt to cultural and ethnic diversity. Beyond the accords ratified between the provinces and the federal government – the more comprehensive accord being that signed with the Province of Québec in 1991 – provincial initiatives are defining a general immigration policy.[1] In this context, the Atlantic provinces are trying to position themselves on very competitive terrain and are being confronted with very specific regional challenges. The first is that the region attracts a small percentage of the annual share of permanent residents admitted to Canada. According to the *Annual report to Parliament on Immigration 2003*, the four Atlantic provinces received 2,655 newcomers, or 1.2% of the total 221,352 immigrants in 2003 (CIC, 2004). More specifically, in 2003, Nova Scotia was identifed as the province that attracted the most newcomers – 1,476 – and these settled mainly in the Halifax area (80%). New Brunswick welcomed 667 newcomers, while 359 newcomers settled in Newfoundland and Labrador. Retention rates were also deemed quite poor, especially in Nova Scotia (40%) and in New Brunswick (62%). The second challenge is tied to demographics – specifically a poor birth rate, an aging population and the exodus of young adults toward large urban centres. The third challenge is the well-established image of a regional, traditional and conservative culture that's always lagging behind, due to weak economic performance and a high unemployment rate. This image does nothing to entice immigrants to come to the region, as they are looking for satisfying and permanent work and quality of life.

This being said, it seems important to take into consideration two new dynamics. First, the increasing diversity of the Canadian population is more and more evident and is becoming the basis

of a new, pan-Canadian identity. In a study published by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC), Andrew Parkin and Matthew Mendelsohn mention the fact that attitudes toward diversity are accepted and that the gap between large cities and regions is relatively small. The Atlantic provinces can profit as much from diversity as metropolitan areas and must resist becoming a homogeneous white region that becomes estranged from the new cultural and ethnic reality of the country.[2] Furthermore, in the past few years, the Eastern provinces' growth rate has been steadily rising and have been diversifying their economies in specific sectors, allowing them to attract a highly-qualified workforce from different countries. Cities such as Moncton, Halifax and St. John's (NFLD and Labrador) have been able to capitalize on this new economy and are beginning to develop their newcomer settlement capacity. When faced with budding diversity, public policies must adapt by developing innovative strategies and be able to garner support from all local actors – public and private – who invest in economic and social development.

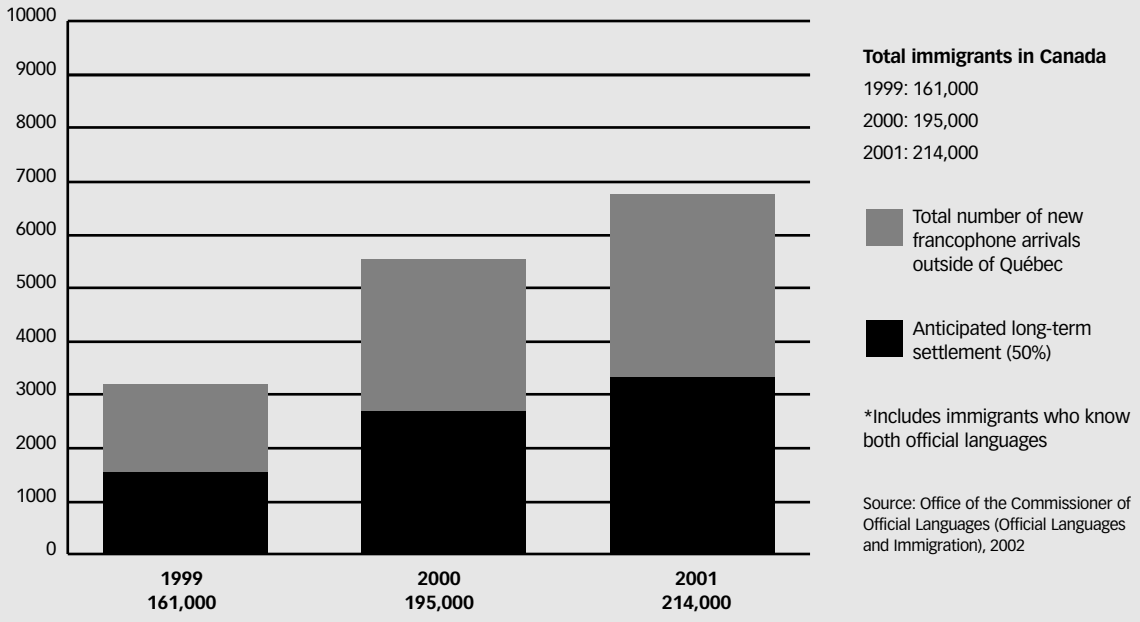
Francophone immigration in New Brunswick

Francophone immigration outside Québec remains, for the moment, a relatively circumscribed phenomenon: only 3.1% of immigrants who settle outside Québec are Francophones (Citizenship and Immigration, 2003). However, it is of note that a new dynamic is emerging, following efforts to redirect newcomers to the regions in Canada. In 2001, Québec launched a three-year workplan pertaining to regionalization, in an effort to increase immigration rates outside Québec to 25% and to triple the number of newcomers in the Estrie region (MRCI, 2002). The other Canadian provinces are also supporting the regionalization of immigration, as proposed by the main federal government agencies (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Heritage Canada), to foster cultural diversity throughout the country, and to promote dynamic economic and social development of small communities and a decrease in the demographic pressures that exist in the major urban centres (Krahn, Derwing and Abu-Laban, 2003). Since 1999, a slight rise in the number of Francophone immigrants settling outside Québec is clearly emerging.

In March 2002, Citizenship and Immigration Canada created a committee mandated to examine the situation of Francophone immigration to Francophone minority communities. The committee quickly presented a strategic plan with a clear message: "Francophone and Acadian communities must take ownership of Francophone immigration and recognize its importance for their own development" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Strategic Framework to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities*, Government of Canada, November 2003, 4). Several objectives were put forth: improve the Francophone communities' ability to welcome newcomers, ensure the economic integration of immigrants, ensure social and cultural integration of immigrants, and favour the regionalization of Francophone immigrants outside Toronto and Vancouver.

In New Brunswick, the spokesperson for the Acadian community, the Société des acadiens et des acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick (SAANB), has undertaken a study on the question of immigration, in particular on such questions as integration of Francophone newcomers. This strategy stems from a national and provincial context, wherein Francophone communities outside Québec have launched a vast reflection on immigration and in particular on the question of cultural diversity. Between 1999 and 2001, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada, an organization which represents provincial Francophone associations, launched discussions

Figure 1 - Francophone Immigrants* settling outside the Province of Québec



on the future of Francophone minority communities. Initiatives such as *Dialogue* and *Vive la différence* underscore the importance of immigration and cultural diversity. In its final report, the *Dialogue* group calls for an action plan on immigration (Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, *Parlons-nous ! Rapport du groupe de travail Dialogue*, 2001). *Vive la différence* is presented as the natural extension of the adaptation process of Francophone and Acadian communities to cultural and ethnic diversity. During a meeting in Ottawa held on November 20 and 21, 2003, we were able to observe the various viewpoints of Francophone communities on immigration and diversity. Certain western Francophone organizations, particularly those from Manitoba and from British Columbia, adapt more readily to the diversity discourse, as they recognize the positive impact that newcomers can have on the community. In contrast, Acadian associations in Nova Scotia and on Prince Edward Island remain somewhat suspicious of the idea of a new and plural Francophone identity. It is important to note that these associations base their demands on the discourse of duality; this has allowed them to consolidate the Francophone minority communities since the 1960s.

In New Brunswick, the SAANB is aiming to establish a dialogue between the host society and newcomers. In a document entitled *Plan de développement global de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick*, the integration of newcomers is presented as an important challenge to the Acadian community, which faces the constant assimilation of its population and the exodus of its young Francophones to large urban centres. Consequently, the SAANB would like to develop an immigration strategy in order to [translation] "foster the integration of newcomers, in French and within Acadian culture and community and associative life of Acadia." It also would like to [translation] "facilitate the integration of newcomers to the community and associative life of New Brunswick's Acadia" (Plan de développement global de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick, 2000). By creating this provincial task force on immigration, the SAANB has initiated a closer collaboration between the various actors of Acadian society and its associations of cultural communities. The task force, composed of government, community and university representatives, was able to publish a study on the key questions surrounding Francophone immigration to New Brunswick (Baccouche and Okana, 2002). The study underscores the fact that the discourse on immigration has a tendency to focus on the two main preoccupations of the Acadian community of New Brunswick. First, the demographic dimension largely dominates this discourse, due to the New Brunswick Acadians' weak birth rate, to the high rate of assimilation, to the exodus of young Francophones to other regions, and to the poor retention rate of Francophone immigrants. Therefore, immigration is often presented as a demographic solution for the Francophone population. The 2001 Census data are indeed worrisome: the New Brunswick population is constantly decreasing (-1.2%) while the national population is on the rise (+4%). Second, the economic dimension of this discourse constrains immigration to a question of resources being replenished in specific economic sectors. The positive impact of immigration is all too often reduced to the question of employment.

According the Annual report to Parliament on immigration 2003, the four Atlantic provinces received 2,655 newcomers, or 1.2% of the total 221,352 immigrants in 2003 (CIC, 2004).

Conclusion

At the outset of the 21st century, the regionalization of immigration to Canada in a global context is characterized by a logic of migration flows which are increasingly mobile and diversified. Immigration has therefore also become an important aspect of economic and demographic growth. This is why certain regions of Canada are trying to reap the rewards of immigration and are creating establishment and integration policies. Our research on Francophone immigration in New Brunswick leads us to identify three key elements which should guide all policies dealing with the regionalization of immigration.

First, major research efforts must be directed towards certain representations of identity (Gallant and Belkhodja, 2005). The issue of Francophone immigration has allowed us to see a new dynamic in Canada's Francophone communities' ongoing identity formation. Most actors develop immigration strategies and are now left to face the difficult task of conciling linguistic duality and cultural diversity. In this very different context to the one that characterizes Francophones throughout the country, cultural diversity is received quite differently: it seems to be embraced much more readily by Francophone minority communities used to shared and plural spatial identification, especially in western Canada. This being said, Francophone communities entrenched in duality and biculturalism fear the discourse of diversity and the spectre of being diluted in a bigger group and losing something along the way. It is important to understand the trajectory of minority Francophones, for whom it has always been a battle to have their linguistic rights, neglected by the Anglophone majority, respected. Since the 1960s, by waging on Canadian linguistic duality, Francophone minorities were able to consolidate their communities. A Francophone milieu was constructed through important gains in several sectors, including linguistic rights, access to employment and a French curriculum. The discourse of Canadian diversity is therefore unsettling because it heralds readjustments in all Francophone minority communities.

Second, it is important to prepare and sensitize host societies to immigration. Recruitment and promotion necessitate a certain openness to diversity on the part of Acadian and Francophone communities. Although the numbers remain low, it is interesting to consider the positive aspects of immigration as an emerging dynamic, particularly in urban contexts.[3] Immigration in 'regions' allows us to unveil new integration strategies that are quite different from those geared toward metropolitan realities. In communities too often constrained to the image of collective homogeneity, immigration can help construct

public space that is favourable to exchanges between local and immigrant cultures.

Finally, we must not make immigration a strictly utilitarian affair left to immigration entrepreneurs who promote a selective logic resting solely on economic criteria. We must be weary of the subjective definition of 'good immigrants' in the selection process, which tries to recreate the same type of homogeneous and poorly diversified community. This type of selection of immigrants does not necessarily foster cultural diversity, which is why governments must play a role in questions surrounding ethics and citizenship that lay at the heart of durable immigration policies.

References

Abu-Laban, Y. & C. Gabriel. *Selling Diversity : Immigration, Multiculturalsim, Employement Equity and Globalization*, Peterborough: Brodview Press, 2003.

Baccouche, N. & S. Okana. *L'accueil et l'intégration des immigrants Francophones au Nouveau-Brunswick*. Société des acadiens et acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick, 2002.

Belkhodja, C. "Entre la discorde et l'indifférence : Le Québec, le Nouveau-Brunswick et la Francophonie internationale." In Michael Tucker, Raymond Blake & Penny Bryden (eds). *Canada and the New World Order. Exploring the Changing dynamics of Canadian Foreign Policy*. Toronto: Irwin Publishers, 2000, 185-200.

Belkhodja, C. & N. Gallant. "D'un déficit de diversité… à la production de la diversité : L'expérience immigrante Francophone au Canada et au Nouveau-Brunswick." In J. Gatugu, S. Amoranitis & A. Manço (eds). *La vie associative des migrants: quelle reconnaissance?* Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004, 79-94.

Castles, S. & M. Miller. *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*, New York: Guilford Press, 2003.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *Strategic Framework to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities*. Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2003.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *Facts and Figures 2003. Immigration Overview : Permanent and Temporary Residents*. Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2004.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *Regionalization of Immigration*. Metropolis Conversation Series 9, 2003.

Denton, T. "Canada's Regionalization Challenge." Paper presented at the Ninth International Metropolis Conference, Geneva, September 30, 2004, www.metropolis2004.ch/en/workshop_g.shtml.

Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA). *Évaluation de la capacité des communautés francophones en situation minoritaire à accueillir de nouveaux arrivants*. March 2004.

Gallant, N. & C. Belkhodja. "Production d'un discours sur l'immigration et la diversité par les organismes francophones et acadiens au Canada." *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Études ethniques canadiennes*, 2005, forthcoming.

Krahn, H., T. Derwing & B. Abu-Laban. *The Retention of Newcomers in Second and Third Tier Cities in Canada*, Working Paper nº WP01-03, Prairie Centre of Excellence Metropolis, 2003.

Notes

1 Several important initiatives can be cited, such as a provincial conference on immigration in New Brunswick held in June 2004, and the creation of a provincial immigration policy in Nova Scotia. The governments of both of these provinces are referring to Manitoba's policy and the success it has had in balancing the selection of economic immigrants with the unique practice of sponsoring refugees. From now until 2010, that province intends to double the number of newcomers from 5,000 to 10,000 (Denton, 2004).

2 Certain articles published by the major newspapers often insist on this dichotomy between a New Canada and an Old Canada, as well as on the community- and folkloric-based regionalistic representation of the culture of Atlantic Canada. In particular, one article, published on August 20, 2004 in the *Globe and Mail* by reporter John Ibbitson, "Why Atlantic Canada Remains White and Poor" was particularly explosive in the region and ignited several reactions on immigration.

3 Il faut également considérer des expériences d'intégration en milieu rural comme à Florenceville et Saint-Léonard au Nouveau-Brunswick et dans la région de Truro en Nouvelle-Écosse.