



A WELCOME PLACE FOR NEWCOMERS?

IMMIGRATION AND MID-SIZED CITIES

Source: Institute for Canadian Citizenship/Alyssa K. Faoro

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INTRODUCTION

Each year, the Canadian government welcomes nearly 300,000 immigrants to the country. In 2016, a year of global unrest, this number was also inclusive of 62,000 refugees, many of whom were being reunified with their families in Canada. Not only is immigration and refugee settlement an important part of Canada's history, but the government also views attracting newcomers as an opportunity to grow the country's population and foster economic prosperity (Government of Canada, 2017). Settling largely in the country's "gateway cities" (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal), newcomers are attracted to the urban amenities and opportunities (Walton-Roberts, 2011) found in these larger urban centres. However, an economic divide continues to grow between Canadian cities, with large urban centres thriving as they attract internal migrants, young people, and new immigrants (Florida, 2003; Gertler, 2003). This divide has created what researchers are calling an "uneven interurban geography" (Donald & Hall, 2015) whereby new "fault lines" (Bourne & Simmons, 2003) are opening up between cities creating "have" and "have not" places.

It was, therefore, not surprising that in 2016, then-Minister of Immigration John McCallum publicly shared that he would like to see immigrants settle in rural communities and smaller cities, presumably to help foster local economic development outside of Canada's largest cities. While the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects newcomers' rights to settle in locations of their choice, countries like Australia and New Zealand now offer incentives to newcomers to settle and find jobs in specific regions that benefit the host country (Barutciski, 2017). In the 2000s, in an effort to connect immigrants with labour market demands outside of the big three cities, Canadian immigration policy began to allow for a greater role for the provinces; the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP)

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and Temporary Foreign Worker programs encourage provinces to take a more active role in recruiting newcomers to cities outside of the traditional gateway locations (Ferrer, Picot, & Riddell, 2014).

Preliminary findings from a report on the PNP (Canada, 2017) showed that of the 247,796 Provincial Nominees that arrived in Canada between 2010-2015, 90% spoke English and 81% were between the ages of 18-24. Living primarily outside of gateway cities, over 65% of Provincial Nominees settled in the provinces of Manitoba (24.2%), Alberta (22.4%) and Saskatchewan (19%). An evaluation of the PNP showed that the "vast majority of PN [became] established economically, with high employment rates and employment earnings that increase[d] over time after admission". Provincial Nominees that were surveyed described their first jobs in Canada as "highly skilled" occupations, and three quarters of respondents characterized the jobs being offered as either "commensurate with" or "higher" than their skill level (Canada, 2017).

In her research on immigration in Canadian mid-sized cities, Reese argues the importance of further study on the role that local initiatives can play in "augmenting" (Reese, 2012, p. 315) these types of federal and provincial programs. Reese's policy recommendations include adding a diversity lens to local economic development programs, as well as offering support to help immigrants enter the labour market or

become entrepreneurs. Her recommendations suggest that coordinating these settlement and job training initiatives through local non-profit groups can assist with their overall effectiveness (Reese, 2012).

Given the points outlined above, the purpose of this paper is to, first, examine the current literature on immigration and mid-sized cities. Secondly, using the City of Guelph as a case study example, this paper will provide an overview of the strategies that local institutions in this mid-sized city are using to attract, retain, and support newcomer communities. This paper also aims to highlight the opportunities and challenges faced by immigrants in smaller urban centres and marks the launch of a broader research agenda focused on the institutional response to welcoming newcomers to mid-sized cities across Canada.

MID-SIZED CITIES AND IMMIGRATION

The literature on mid-sized cities presents a dichotomy: on the one hand, mid-sized cities can be lauded for their bucolic settings, ample green space, and high quality of life (Burayidi, 2013; Filion, Hoernig, Bunting, & Sands, 2004; Sands & Reese, 2017), but cities of this size have also experienced significant core area decline due to prolific suburbanization (Brewer & Grant, 2015; Bunting, Filion, Hoernig, Seasons, & Lederer, 2007). The challenges of mid-sized cities,

many of which have a historic manufacturing base, are further exacerbated by an economic shift towards a knowledge-based economy. The networks, connections and talent found in big cities are fueling this new, knowledge-driven economy (Florida, 2002; Madanipour, 2011; Vinodrai, 2015), making it difficult for smaller cities to compete (Gertler, 2003).

The economic development challenge for mid-sized cities is significant. Attracting new companies to smaller centres can be a challenge; cities of this size often lack deep talent pools, regional transit options, and urban amenities, all of which are attractive to a new generation of workers. Research shows that economic development strategies focused on improving quality of life, funding the public realm, and supporting “human capital” through employment and entrepreneurship programs (Leigh & Blakely, 2017; Reese, 2014; Sands & Reese, 2017) appear to have the greatest impact on local prosperity in mid-sized cities. As mid-sized cities grapple with transitioning their economies, maintaining their populations, and creating jobs, researchers offer evidence of the important role that immigration can play in the social and economic health of cities.

The scholarship on mid-sized cities and immigration highlights the value of attracting immigrations to smaller cities (Burayidi, 2013; Carr, Lichter, & Kefalas, 2012; Reese, 2012; Sands & Reese, 2017; Teixeira, 2009; Walton-Roberts, 2011). Burayidi’s “EnRICHED”

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model of downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities identifies "courting new immigrants" (Burayidi, 2013, p. 73) as a key strategy for building a downtown population and bolstering the labour market. His research finds that a community's "openness" to newcomers directly correlates to economic growth. Burayidi is careful to point out that economic growth is one outcome of immigration to smaller urban centres, and he argues in favour of creating a culture that celebrates diversity and welcoming newcomers into the civic fabric of a city.

Contrasting the experiences of two smaller American cities, Carr et al. ask whether immigration can quite literally "save" small town America (Carr et al., 2012).

Undertaking research in two declining small American towns, they uncovered differential approaches to welcoming new immigrants. Carr et al. argue that local leadership is instrumental in creating policies and a culture that can either divide or include newcomers (2012). Similarly, Canadian researcher Walton-Roberts explores the important role that government policy plays in attracting immigrants to "second tier", or smaller, Canadian cities (2011, p. 453). She illustrates how, through policy tools, smaller cities in southern Ontario are beginning to challenge the traditional "first tier" gateway cities and are becoming viable options for newcomers. Outlining a number of national and provincial programs aimed at attracting newcomers to mid-sized cities, Walton-Roberts finds

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that universities are a key player in this dynamic. Not only are universities actively recruiting international students, but they also have been found to act as an important “buffer” with respect to mitigating discrimination experienced by newcomer students to Canada (2011).

Implicit in this research is the notion that small and mid-sized cities can benefit from immigration. Immigration can provide a much-needed population boost, but also immigrants can offer additional diversity and entrepreneurial thinking, and can ultimately help foster local economic development (Reese, 2012) in smaller centres. What emerges as a key concern

in the research, however, is the varied reception that new immigrants receive in smaller cities. Research shows that discrimination in the labour market and issues around recognizing foreign credentials (Ferrer et al., 2014) can present real barriers to newcomers accessing employment. Moreover, the culturally homogenous nature of smaller cities in Ontario can present challenges to new immigrant integration. This speaks to the importance of social planning at the municipal level in smaller cities and, more specifically, to the importance of creating programs and providing services and support to a diversifying population.

CITY OF GUELPH



Guelph, Ontario

The City of Guelph is located an hour west of Toronto; with a population of 131,000 residents, it is a single-tier, mid-sized city. Guelph boasts a historic downtown core, a top-ranked comprehensive university, and an economy steeped in agribusiness and advanced manufacturing. In 2006, downtown Guelph was also designated an urban growth centre by the province of Ontario, meaning that the city's core area would have to achieve a targeted 150 jobs and residents per hectare in its core, and the city would have to grow to an overall population of 191,000 by 2041

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(Ontario, 2006). Despite these advantages, Guelph has also experienced some degree of core area decline, driven by extensive residential and commercial suburbanization (Bunting et al., 2007), and it struggles with similar challenges faced by other cities of this size—namely, its ability to coordinate regionally to support new enterprise and to attract federal and provincial funding for much-needed infrastructure investments.

In 2016, *MoneySense*, a magazine popular for ranking cities, named the City of Guelph one of the top ten places in Canada for newcomers to settle (Brown, 2016). *MoneySense's* data showed that a low unemployment rate coupled with a growing immigrant population and affordable rental housing made Guelph an ideal spot for newcomer settlement. The 2018 Guelph Community Foundation *Vital Signs* report showed that one out of every five Guelph residents immigrated to Canada, and that 20% of citizens speak a first language other than English (O'Rourke, 2018). A scan of local services shows that the City of Guelph offers a range of services to newcomers through non-profit groups, local higher education institutions, and faith-based organizations. In addition to traditional settlement services such as providing language and job search training to newcomers, several new programs have been launched in recent years targeted at immigrant employment and community engagement.

The Local Immigration Partnership announced in 2018 that it had received provincial funding to create an Immigrant Entrepreneur Program targeted at providing additional employment supports to newcomers. Conestoga College offers counselling to newcomers who are looking to have their credentials evaluated against Canadian standards. The local Volunteer Centre, in partnership with Immigrant Services, launched a New on Board program focused on attracting newcomers to leadership roles on local boards and committees.

In addition to its long history of immigration, in 2015 Guelph became known, both nationally and internationally, as a settlement location for newcomers when local business owner and philanthropist Jim Estill personally donated \$1.5 million to sponsor 58 Syrian refugee families. Creating a vast network of local volunteers and a system of support for newcomers, Estill's approach to refugee settlement leveraged community organization and local businesses. Applying his business acumen, Estill organized teams of local volunteers to oversee everything from housing to mentorship to education. Estill's company, Danby, offered a tailor-made Ease Into Canada program, training newcomers on the job and teaching English over shared lunches (Mann, 2016).

However, despite these important local initiatives, the same year as *MoneySense Magazine* positioned Guelph as a top-ranked city for newcomer settlement, findings from the Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership (GWLIP) immigrant survey (Dipti & Ella, 2016) were released—and GWLIP’s data tell a more complex story of the challenges newcomers have faced integrating into Guelph and cities in the surrounding region. With 59% of respondents describing themselves as “economic immigrants”, one-third of respondents reported feeling “out of place” at school or work; 44% were not working in their field of training; 42% reported not always having access to healthy food; 58% found housing to be “somewhat” or “not” affordable; and 35% were unemployed (Dipti & Ella, 2016). GWLIP’s report also offers policy recommendations that are focused on: increasing the inclusion of newcomer perspectives, on such things as housing and food security issues; better disseminating government information about transit and foreign credential recognition; and ensuring that newcomers are consulted on local recreational initiatives and programming for public spaces.

While these findings are cause for concern and highlight a disconnect between federal immigration programs, local initiatives, and the lived experience of newcomers in Guelph, they also provide valuable insight into the real challenges faced by newcomers outside of larger urban centres.

NEXT STEPS: A MID-SIZED CITY IMMIGRATION RESEARCH AGENDA

This preliminary review of the literature on immigration and mid-sized cities emphasizes the importance of coupling local initiatives with federal immigration programs (Reese, 2012) to foster overall community economic prosperity. The literature also speaks to the importance of community openness (Burayidi, 2013) and local leadership (Carr et al., 2012) when integrating newcomers into smaller urban centres. When the scholarship in this area is coupled with a scan of services and programs offered in the mid-sized city of Guelph, Ontario, it exposes an important disconnect between government programs and immigrant experiences, which is worthy of additional research.

Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership Survey Results

- 59% self-identify as “economic immigrants”
- 33% reported feeling “out of place” at school or work
- 44% are not working in their field of training
- 42% do not always have access to healthy food
- 58% found housing to be “somewhat” or “not” affordable
- 35% were unemployed



Credit: Institute for Canadian Citizenship/Julian Haber

There are innumerable questions to be answered on this topic, and the next phase in my research will involve site visits, key informant interviews, and focus groups that will explore the following: what role do local institutions play in welcoming and retaining newcomers? What are the outcomes of programs targeted at immigrant inclusion? Are there effective newcomer programs and services in larger urban centres that can be adapted for mid-sized cities? What are the specific benefits and challenges for immigrants settling in mid-sized cities? What role does the adoption of a city-wide diversity strategy play in immigrant settlement and inclusion?

The research tells us that immigration is an important component of local economic development in smaller urban centres. Immigrants bring credentials, entrepreneurial thinking, and diversity to these cities. With new, proactive government efforts to attract newcomers to locations outside of the traditional gateway cities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, there's an opportunity for mid-sized cities to undertake additional research and evaluations of programs and supports offered to newcomers. Not only would this research expose any gaps in service provision, but it would also begin to expose whether local initiatives are either 'one-offs' or part of a broader strategy to support diversity and immigration.

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