



SUMMARY

French-Language Immigration in Calgary

Keywords: French-speaking immigrants, integration, minority community, Calgary, socio-occupational integration, worker mobility, community life, multiple affiliations

Introduction

The main objective of this study was to gain a better full understanding of the redefinition, growth, diversity and determination of Francophone communities in Greater Calgary. A growing number of immigrants from French-speaking countries are settling in Calgary, a booming city, yet Calgary's Francophone population does not have the means to meet the reception, infrastructure, integration and linguistic identification needs of French-speaking immigrants or to accommodate their cultural plurality. The key issue in this study can be summed up in a single question: What can we do to live together? How shall we live together?

The study drew a contemporary portrait looked at the current profile of Calgary's Francophone community, identified problems encountered by various groups, as well as issues and needs, both general and specific. and situated issues and needs within specific and general perspectives. The images and experiences of a number of immigrants were compared in order to gain insight into and grasp the complexity of identification, integration and Francophone life. What makes this study unique is that it examined statistical and lived experiences individual profiles with a view to developing a new governance model that will would help support residents in living together harmoniously.

Methodology

The study used two approaches: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative approach was based on data from the last three censuses compiled by Statistics Canada between 1991 and 2006, a post-census survey on the vitality of official language minorities and information from Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Permanent Resident Data System.



Two alternate definitions were used for the statistical analyses of Francophones: people whose mother tongue is French, and people who understand and speak French well enough to carry on a conversation. Based on the first definition, the number of Francophones increased from 11,800 in 1981 to 18,240 in 2006. However, based on the broader definition, the number increased from 41,500 to 85,000 in the same period.

The qualitative approach was based on semi-directed interviews with 78 people: 40 men and 38 women. Of those, 47 were visible minorities and 31 were white. They were from a variety of places, including Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Quebec, Europe, the Caribbean, Alberta, New Brunswick, Ontario, the United States and the Middle East.

Quantitative Results

French-speaking people in Calgary have a greater tendency to be mobile, both within and outside Canada, than Anglophones. The French-speaking population increased 31% based on mother tongue and 51% based on proficiency. In the latter group, 22% of Francophones are members of a visible minority. Almost half the French-speaking population have at least a university degree, compared with only 27% among English speakers. Whichever definition is used, the economic situation of Francophones is as good as that of Anglophones in general, and of persons born in Canada in particular.

Newcomers, who by and large are well educated, have tremendous difficulty finding a job on par with their training and experience. With regard to residential distribution, Francophones tend to settle in the four areas on the edge of the city as well as in the downtown core, which includes the historically French-speaking neighbourhoods.

Qualitative Results

The analysis of the interviews focused on five major themes, which are summarized below.



Worker mobility

The interviewees moved to Calgary for many reasons: employment, family, workplace-related problems, low taxes and the booming economy. Francophones in Calgary followed one of two occupational paths: they either had a job when they arrived, or they started looking for a job when they arrived. Most of the people in the first group are fluent in English and are mostly from another Canadian province. Most of the people in the second group are immigrants with little knowledge of English. They came for economic reasons and generally hold low-paying jobs.

Socio-economic integration

Socio-economic integration refers to the process through which a person integrates into the socio-economic system and thereby finds a place in society and a particular social sphere. The main strategy used by the interviewees was to go back to school in order to improve their English or learn the language. The factors that made the interviewees' socio-occupational integration easier included securing a job before moving to Calgary, being fluent in English or being bilingual, having a Canadian diploma or degree, having a diploma or degree in a field in which there is strong demand, good luck, their social network (i.e., social capital) and technical skills.

Social and community life

Perceptions of Anglophone and Francophone life in Calgary are shaped by thirteen social dimensions, including arts and culture, communication and media, education and training, family, migration, heritage and history, religion, health and well-being, sports and recreation, and relationships among groups.

Four themes concerning the impact of immigration on Calgary's Francophone population emerged from the interviews: questions about bilingualism, strengthening of the Francophone community, diversity in educational and religious institutions, and cultural development.

Integration

The conceptions of integration are based on six elements: citizenship and access to all rights and services; adaptation to the locality; reception that relies on community support; knowledge of the city; success in



employment and work life; and last but not least, the relativity of the concept of integration. Thus, integration into Canadian society is greatly facilitated by an appreciation of Canadian values, open acceptance of immigrants and the possibility of living in the French language.

Multiple affiliations

With respect to the international Francophonie, interviewees who so consider themselves view it as an open door to the world. The sense of belonging to one's roots (African heritage, for example) was revealed with respect to six major categories: 1. love for and knowledge of one's roots; 2. openness, adaptation and independence in the face of an array of possible affiliations; 3. promotion of a positive image and values of one's country or region of origin; 4. rejection of negative messages and images; 5. a desire to hold on to cultural and linguistic elements and to take the best of those elements to craft cross-cultural identification that shows creativity; and 6. the opportunity for greater self-knowledge.

Creating a New Governance Model

Calgary's Francophone population is bilingual, well educated, sophisticated and cosmopolitan, which has the potential to be a tremendous asset for the city, the province and Canadian society.

It is therefore important to reposition the city's Francophone population relative to its image, its representativeness and the way it functions. This repositioning means embracing globalisation and opening up to the world, focusing on the inclusion of the French language and minority French-speaking cultural communities in Canada. Increased openness to and understanding of others requires increased civic action and responds to the need to relocate the minority within citizenship and to ensure public expression of cultural and linguistic differences.

Affirming one's status as a full-fledged Francophone means *taking one's legitimate place in Canadian society*. A number of tangible actions have been suggested domestically, among them shared governance, a community-based approach, increased civic involvement, promotion of the community' cosmopolitan nature, and strategic location of French-language institutions.



External repositioning requires a whole political program to ensure inclusion in society based on relationships rooted in collaboration and partnership, which need to be established and implemented with expertise, experience and elegance. Special attention must be given to precariousness, credential recognition and the evaluation of skills and experience.

Conclusion

The study attests to the mobility and adaptability of Francophones, whatever their origins. The reception and integration of immigrants and the involvement of Francophones in society in order to ensure a greater civic contribution to Canada depends on the internal and external repositioning of minority Francophone communities.

Contribution to Policy Development

The subject is of interest to the Department of Canadian Heritage, whose mandate includes support for development of minority official language communities. The results of this study could be useful in developing policies and programs to address that priority.

To find out more

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Project sponsors

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Final Report

- <http://educ.ucalgary.ca/profiles/yvonne-hebert>