

Trapped in the Big City? Re-Thinking Regionalization of Immigration

Abstract

In the 1990s Canada adopted a policy of constant immigration increase to offset a predicted population decline by the 2020s. While the broader approach was a success, immigration now being the main population increase driver, a problematic divide has emerged: most immigrants settle in the biggest cities while the smaller and more distant ones are depleting with alarming economic and social consequences. This literature review paper explores the state of research on these issues and on regionalization of immigration in Canada – i.e., ways to favour immigrant dispersal among regions. Three major findings appear, highlighting challenges related to immigrants' socioeconomic outcomes, community competitiveness in attracting new residents, and effectiveness of existing policies. Economically, immigrants are doing worse on average in the Metropolis than their counterparts in smaller areas. Paradoxically, however, they are less attracted by remote communities who are unable to compete with big cities in attracting international and internal migrants. If population renewal and economic development in smaller centres are to be societal objectives, this paper argues for better connected policies between population renewal objectives, dynamic attraction programs, and proactive regional development.

KEYWORDS: *Regionalization, immigration and settlement, population renewal, remote communities, competitiveness, human capital, local development.*

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Introduction¹

At the turn of the 1990's demographers predicted that birth rate decline would bring the population of Canada to decrease by 2020 (Bourne & Rose, 2001). To offset this tendency, Canadian policy makers consistently increased immigration targets (Green & Green, 2004). Thanks to this ongoing approach, the main population driver is now immigration and it will remain so for decades (StatsCan, 2010).

This policy acted well on the number of immigrants² crossing the borders but not necessarily on where they would settle. Another phenomenon was at play. Some regions were less

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²Immigrants are defined in this paper as foreign-born permanent residents, whether naturalized or not. This excludes temporary and seasonal workers.

attractive. By the end of the 1990's and onward it was clear that smaller regions were more associated with employment and population decline (Polèse & Shearmur, 2006). To illustrate, half of Canadian cities with populations below 250,000 lost residents between 1996 and 2001 (Bourne & Simmons, 2004). This dynamic did not slow down during the following decade. For instance, 88 counties and regional municipalities in Canada suffered a demographic decline in 2010 alone, compared to 2009 (StatsCan, 2011a).

In the other direction, growth trends continued to progress in the bigger cities and provinces during the 2000's (Mwansa & Bollman, 2005; Mulder & Krahn, 2005; Bollman & Clemenson, 2008; Carter, Margot & Amoyaw, 2008; Newbold, 2011; Chagnon, 2013). According to 2011 census counts, one half of Canadians lived in just eight census metropolitan agglomerations (CMA): Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Hamilton. Compared to 2006, the 2011 overall population of this group of cities increased by eight percent and immigrants comprised 44% of that increment. Furthermore, among the 6.7 million immigrants accounted for in 2011, four out of five were living in these same city-regions.

While hyper-urbanization attracts most of the immigrant population (Price & Benton-Short, 2008), many smaller communities and their leaders resist giving in to the prospect of population decline (FCM, 2009). This resistance is with reason since fewer people equates less human resources, hence a direct challenge to keep companies up and running. Additionally, fewer people means less political influence for the whole community, such as the ability to secure government spending on basic services, like education and health, or on needed infrastructure upgrades (Bourne & Simmons, 2003). These leaders argue that rural Canada helped build this country, particularly by making natural resources available. As such, they remind that regions are still playing an essential part in the overall economy with 50 percent of exports being fed by resources (FCM, 2009). They conclude that a strong national economy needs all regions functioning well. Put differently, thriving regions are also important to city-dwellers' wellbeing.

Like their big-city counterparts, small-town leaders understood that immigration could infuse new energy and new opportunities to their communities, as well as mitigate population decline (Idem). Attracting immigrants is not an easy task however, especially for the more economically stagnant regions. The Maritimes is a stark example since they were only able to attract between 2 to 3 percent of newcomers each year during the early 2000's (Akbari, 2006). To help accomplish more and compensate for population concentration in the Metropolis, smaller region politicians and the civil society advocated for policies that would assist them in bolstering immigrant attraction.

This is the reason why 'regionalization of immigration' was considered a complementary policy in the early 2000's. The policy refers both to the dispersal of settlers and to the active participation of the provinces and territories in the immigration system, such as choosing their own immigrant candidates. To help chart this path, a special study issued in 2001 by then Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) – changed to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada in 2015 – titled *Towards a More Balanced Geographic Distribution of Immigrants* (CIC, 2001), received attention and inspired debates.

Indeed, relatively little was known about the policy orientation at that time and some commentators insisted on the need to identify the underlying issues before formulating programs:

More significant and substantial steps must be taken before undertaking a regionalization of immigration initiative. At the very least this includes a concerted effort to link policies and programs related to regionalization of immigration with policies and programs on population growth as well as community economic and social development (Garcea 2003, Conclusions, second paragraph).

This excerpt shows that issues of convergence remained to be spelled out to make sure that the policy initiative would not benefit only one class of actors. For instance, would only the big industries be favoured in their search for labour? How would local communities be supported in their attempt to consolidate their weakening social fabric? Would immigrants themselves just be considered an economic commodity, or would they be given the chance to set roots with their families and participate in the community's social and political structure? These are just some examples of the policy tensions and ethic challenges discussed among stakeholders.

With Garcea's caution in mind, which suggested a link between immigration and socioeconomic drivers, I conducted a literature review on regionalization of immigration in Canada. My objectives were twofold: to take stock of the advancement and effectiveness of the policy initiative a decade later, and to probe the state of knowledge regarding the underlying issues either hindering or favouring immigrant settlement in smaller towns. In other words, did the regionalization approach work? How was it implemented? Did more immigrants choose to settle outside of big cities? What are the factors that can attract them to these smaller communities and keep them there? How would they do economically, professionally, and socially if they were to make that choice?

After reporting on methodology in the next section, this paper will present some key findings organized by overarching themes. These are meant to critically structure the otherwise scattered knowledge and suggest an overview of attraction factors, growth challenges, policy responses, and obvious contradictions. Based on what is learned through this overview, a discussion follows which first underlines major convergences related to immigrant socioeconomic outcomes, smaller community competitiveness, and effectiveness of existing policies. These highlights set the tone, secondly, for a critical reflection on broad policy directions inspired by Peter Hall's (1993) policy paradigms. To conclude, it will be argued that policy solutions should strike a balance between individual choice, dynamic attraction programs, and proactive regional development policies. Research directions will propose a more focused and interdisciplinary approach to continue uncovering the links between economic development and immigrant attraction in smaller communities.

Methodology

In this literature review study, priority was given to peer-reviewed research papers that emphasized knowledge on the subject and its subset topics. A first-round search was conducted through Ebsco and Proquest engines using key words such as "settlement factors," "urban," "smaller cities," "immigration choice," "immigrant destination," "immigration dispersal," and "attraction." Since the knowledge had to relate mainly to the Canadian context, results of that phase showed a scarcity of papers. The search strategy was then widened by cross-referencing keywords with some encompassing terms such as 'regionalization,' 'outcomes,' 'population,' 'ethnic demography,' and 'integration.' More papers were found and complementary searches

were conducted through Google scholar and by screening bibliographies of acquired titles. Finally, direct searches into scholar journals dedicated to population and immigration issues in Canada brought encouraging additions.

Titles were then considered both in French and English, within a 20-year range of publication, and according to their contribution to the research questions. As a result, 57 empirical research articles and 20 essays or analyses were kept. In addition, research studies from governmental and non-governmental sources were considered when their methodology and reporting showed sufficient scholarly approaches.

A first observation is that evidence regarding regionalization of immigration is spread out among multiple disciplines. Geography, demography, urban planning, economy, sociology, psychology, social work, regional development and public policy, among others, provided various studies. This finding appears consistent with the nature of immigration studies in terms of interdisciplinary interest (Kimberlin, 2009; King & Skeldon, 2010; Castles, 2010). Although research treatment in the publications did not emerge as interdisciplinary as expected. Indeed, a variety of foci, methodological approaches and theoretical backgrounds complicated the analysis. For instance, studies encompass different spatial levels such as big cities, small towns, regions, provinces, etc. They compare different sampled populations from specific geographical designations or different demographic characteristics such as age, gender, immigration or profession status. They try to answer a range of research questions touching settlement patterns, economic outcomes, community development, or factors influencing moving and settling in certain types of cities, among others, using quantitative and qualitative inquiry approaches.

A second observation concerns the apparent dearth of research on the subject of immigrant diffusion and its subsets. This shortage contrasts with the broader interest in population and immigrant outcomes in the biggest cities, such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. This disparity is understandable considering the concentration of foreign-born in these areas, as outlined above. It also echoes Vatz-Laaroussi & Belkhodja's (2012) assertion that research on regionalization of immigration in Canada is still at an embryonic stage, that is, it is just starting to coordinate. A promising example is the recently initiated 'Pathways to Prosperity' seven-year research alliance on immigrant integration and welcoming communities, particularly in Northern, rural, and francophone communities outside the province of Quebec. The initiative launched in 2012 is expected to generate more research partnerships and interdisciplinary research on related topics.

Limitations

Choices were made in order to keep the scope of this review as close to the original problem as possible. The literature on temporary foreign workers, for instance, was not considered due to resource constraints. Part of this productive sector of research inquires and debates more specifically and critically into the ethics of temporary immigration statuses, construed then as a way to exclude lesser-skilled migrants from permanent residency attainment than as a viable solution for small-town long-term demographic challenges. Although of interest and surely having an impact on regional immigration, especially if the policy allows temporary migrants to apply for permanent residence at the end of their initial stay, the topic merits a literature review in itself.

Moreover, considering that temporary statuses can hardly constitute structuring a long-term policy solution for the population challenges of smaller communities, I have preferred a focus on direct permanent immigration programs for this research.

Findings

Attraction and repulsion factors of immigrants in smaller cities

According to a survey conducted internationally, immigrant candidates tend not to see themselves settling in remote areas far from other immigrants, and more so if they lack settlement services (Eurostat, 2001). For those capable of choosing, such as economic immigrants, their perception of places and branded lifestyles play a role. The Internet, of course, influences them in that regard since they can explore city destination features (Di Biase & Bauder, 2005).

For those who land in a destination without any compatriots around, however, being culturally isolated, while trying to get a foothold in the new society, entails a huge sense of discontinuity (Baker, Arseneault, & Gallant, 1994). It can be highly stressful. It is no revelation then that the concentration of immigrants in an area can have a significant effect on the choice of others to join – see Walsh et al. (2011) on the attractive power of compatriots on co-national migrants, often called ‘chain migration.’ Although, MacDonald (2004) underlines that the size of this effect depends on the education level and the ability of prospective newcomers to speak the local language – i.e., English or French. In other words, the more fluent and educated, the readier they are to settle away from immigrant clusters (Kritz et al., 2013).

Once landed, however, newcomers do not necessarily remain in the initial vicinity. Evidence drawn from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada shows that mobility is higher among recent newcomers (Newbold, 2011). But this relocation phenomenon does not necessarily favour smaller and remote towns. In fact, secondary migration – i.e., the moving of permanent residents inside the country – tends to reinforce the concentration of immigrants in the three major CMA – Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver – mainly because of social, cultural and family needs (Newbold 2007).

This decision to move from one city to another can also be based on economic factors. For instance, a study on secondary migration among settled refugees in Alberta explained that their decision to stay in an area was not only based on the presence of compatriots but also on the vibrancy of the local economy, as long as it translated with job availability and recognition of previous skills and education (Krahn, Derwing, & Abu-Laban, 2005).

To sum up, significant pull factors in smaller communities are related to two issues. The first is the social networking potential, expressed as the presence of family, friends, co-nationals or simply immigrants. The second is occupational: employment, business, and education opportunities (Sherell, Hyndman & Preniqi, 2004; Akbari, 2006; Ocasí, 2012, Wiginton, 2013). Conversely, other factors are portrayed as direct deterrents, such as unaffordable housing, particularly in richer communities (Teixeira, 2009; 2011), and the lack of settlement services (Walton-Robert, 2005; Stewart et al., 2008), which is obvious in terms of intent to attract newcomers.

Negative attitudes of natives also dissuade newcomers. For instance, highlighting newcomers' accent, showing impatience at attending them, or simply being reluctant to include them in the social life, are all listed as symptoms of latent racism or intolerance in communities less experienced with accommodating ethnic diversity (Lai & Huffy, 2009).

This brings up the topic around what constitutes a 'Welcoming Community' to immigrants (Esses et al., 2010). Most of the 17 characteristics outlined by Esses and colleagues approximate the abovementioned, such as employment and educational opportunities, fostering social capital and social engagement, affordable housing, a positive attitude that is inclusive to diversity, newcomer sensitive services, and immigrant-serving agencies. They add accessible health care and public transit, the possibility to use recreation facilities, safety and positive relationships with the Police, favourable local Media coverage of immigrants, occasions for political participation, and a diverse religious representation to the list. To make all these characteristics work in a coordinated way, finally, they emphasize active networking between concerned local actors.

A welcoming community is therefore a set of services and attitudinal factors that influence individual migrants regarding their dwelling choice. Communities that strategize to promote this image are therefore entering a competitive race.

Competitiveness of smaller cities

Many remote towns are trying to attract a small portion of the foreign-born willing to part from big cities. Besides the natural resources and small businesses they can draw upon to support employment, or the local amenities and welcoming attitudes they can showcase to prospective settlers, other factors also affect the competitiveness of smaller communities in attracting immigrants. One of them is size. Of course, the size of cities matters when it comes to attracting newcomers (Hyndman, Shuurman & Fiedler, 2006), especially in the Canadian context – in the USA, for instance, the trend is different as immigrants tend to spread out more evenly to mid-sized cities and smaller towns (Lichter & Johnson, 2006; Partridge & Olfert, 2007).

While size correlates positively with economic and social vibrancy at the local scale, thus influencing the aforementioned push and pull factors, it also has to work in conjunction with other variables. For instance, to attract immigrants with a graduate degree to Canadian regions, size and centrality of cities are said to be factors (Delisle & Shearmur, 2010; Chénard & Shearmur, 2012). However, there is little evidence in this case that local amenities alone – i.e., service levels usually associated with size – is the key activator, while there is with regard to career opportunities (Darchen & Tremblay, 2010).

Studying settlement and mobility patterns of graduate migrants along the smaller towns is also a good way to highlight the connection between human capital³ and local economic vibrancy. The presence of human capital can indeed be viewed as a factor of competitiveness, especially in

³ Human capital is usually construed as a sum of knowledge and skills acquired by individuals for economic purposes (Chénard & Shearmur, 2012, citing OECD). This mainstream definition is therefore focusing on education level and work experience, in other words, solely on the immediate economic value of individuals as labour, alas, discounting the cultural and social capital they also bring.

communities that intend to diversify their declining traditional economy (Barnes et al., 2000) towards knowledge-based sectors (Malecki 2004; Powell & Snellman, 2004). Since knowledge-intensive industries are primarily fuelled by innovation and technological advancement (Cooke & Leydesdorff, 2006), specialized and highly-skilled workers are viewed as essential but they must be lured in.

One strategy to attract the tech-savvy and creative people is to broaden the search to the immigrant population. After all, as a result of the Canadian ‘point entry system’ that favoured higher-skilled applicants during the last two decades, immigrants are more educated on average than the Canadian-born (King, 2009). For instance, half of the graduate degree holders in science, engineering, mathematics and computer technologies in 2011 were foreign born (StatsCan, 2013).

The human capital model to immigration – i.e., focused on admitting the higher-skilled – speaks to certain theories of economic diversification. Such is Richard Florida’s (2003) ‘creative class’ asserting that competitive cities are now those who are able to attract creative minds. According to this thesis, smaller and mid-sized cities must become places where intelligence and talent thrive. To foster this, Florida and colleagues argue that cities must convey a culture of tolerance, open lifestyle, and education possibilities. In support of this theory, they published empirical findings that associate openness and tolerance toward racialized immigrants with regional economic growth and higher regional income (Florida, Mellander, & Stolarick, 2008; 2010). By extrapolation, then, attracting immigrants and fostering an open and diverse community serve two intertwined objectives: to attract talent to bolster the economy, and to nurture a diverse social environment, which helps in turn attract more talent.

Florida’s prescriptions to achieve a knowledge-based economic diversification, however, are being challenged. Evidence from the 2008 recession shows that specialized labour is more volatile and mobile than expected (Pratt & Hutton, 2013). Others discuss whether all regions can provide the relevant system of reference for knowledge-based economic development (Cooke & Leydesdorff, 2006). They warn of the pitfalls of a one-size-fits-all strategy which could yield uneven results along the varied Canadian landscape. I argue additionally that it risks putting all the onus of failure on individual communities, especially the more remote ones. Indeed, while cities are compelled to compete for human capital, particularly through immigration (Derwing & Krahn, 2008), geography is determined to play a role, such as through distance.

As the following case illustrates, attraction of highly educated individuals by a lively city-region can work but only to a certain point. Testing Florida’s tenets in St-John’s Newfoundland, Lepawsky, Phan, and Greenwood (2010) revealed mixed results: The size of the local economy and its cultural-social life are surely positive factors in attracting the highly-skilled, but distance from major urban centres and a lower level of internationality – i.e., diversity – play negatively. In fact, it seems that talented and educated people, including immigrants, tend to use this environment more as a hub to gain experience until opportunities arise to secure better positions in bigger cities.

In sum, because of their size, their level of internationality, and their distance, smaller and remote communities can hardly compete with the biggest CMA, namely Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. To offset these obvious disadvantages, smaller community leaders advocated for specific policy measures to help stem the tide of newcomers (Denton, 2004).

Policy responses

The turn of the millennium saw a political acknowledgement of the need for immigrant dispersal. The 2001 CIC study mentioned earlier was published in the midst of policy talks about regionalization held by both federal and provincial immigration ministers who wanted to get involved (Walton-Roberts, 2007).

In the wake of a trending discourse, regionalization-like initiatives emerged with various aims, scopes and successes. The following highlights four significant policy applications. Many other local and regional ventures involving lower levels of government, provincial and municipal alike, have been initiated, but they are too exhaustive to mention here. Exploring such cases would serve the purpose of another paper focused on best practices in smaller cities.

The first application is the use of the refugee program in the late 1990s to channel publicly-assisted refugees in smaller and more remote communities – i.e., those overseas United Nations refugees resettled in Canada with the support of the state. Although the effect of that approach was clearly to remain insignificant at a larger scale – mainly because of the low number of publicly-assisted refugees admitted each year at that time, between 7 and 10,000 – the experiences resulted in a high out-migration rate towards bigger cities, only a year after resettlement (CIC, 2001).

The second application is the involvement of Quebec's administrative regions during the 2000s. Already holding the highest level of devolution from the Federal government in immigration matters since 1991, the Quebec government involved regional development agencies, mainly comprised of mayors networked with civil society, through immigrant attraction accords. These regional policies had very little impact in terms of distribution and retention of immigrants, however (Poirier-Grenier, 2007; Vatz-Laaroussi & Bezzi, 2007). Recent retention rates in a city like Sherbrooke, known for its hospitability towards immigrants, prove her right, with only 23% of newcomers staying after a few years (Deglise, 2015).

A third initiative, called Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), involves efforts on behalf of local stakeholders to coordinate services and strategies to attract and integrate immigrants (Burr, 2011). LIPs were experimented under the non-renewed Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement, in the second half of the 2000s, which aimed at encouraging Ontarian municipalities to become more welcoming (Walton-Robert, 2007). After some successes in this context, the LIPs were promoted in various other provinces except in Quebec. Around a hundred of these active networks have been funded to date and are operating in both official language settings (Pathways to Prosperity, 2014). Running on a larger scale since 2010, this program is currently under evaluation by Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada who will assert their effectiveness (Kurfurst, Simms and Filteau, 2015).

A fourth, and by far the most significant in scope and tangible outcomes, is the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). It was implemented gradually in all provinces and territories, starting with Manitoba in 1998 (Lewis, 2010). This program basically allows provincial and territorial governments to choose immigrant candidates according to their specific labour market needs. It

also facilitates and expedites treatment of applications from abroad – not to be confused with the recent 2015 Express Entry program.

In its merits, the PNP has helped distribute a larger proportion of economic immigrants outside of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. In 2011, 38,000 provincial nominees were accepted, which accounted for 15 percent of all immigrants to Canada (CIC, 2012) – note that the number of persons admitted under this program includes dependents. As of July 2012, the categories contain semi-skilled workers, which can further help improve settlement outcomes in regions, especially those relying on trade jobs.

At first glance, PNP outcomes regarding dispersal and retention of immigrants are promising. In 2008, for example, three quarters of the nominees remained in their initial landing destination, with lower rates in the Maritimes (40%) and the highest in British Columbia and Alberta (95%) (CIC, 2011). Manitoba is often cited as a success, not only for its retention rates, at 80 percent during the 2000s, but also because of its higher dispersal of settlers among smaller towns and rural areas (Carter, Margot & Amoyaw, 2008). One of Manitoba's hallmarks is the close partnership between the provincial government and the municipalities. Notwithstanding this, Lewis (2010) underlines service gaps in this jurisdiction, in terms of settlement infrastructure, stating that the province often shovels most of the burden onto local communities.

What is more problematic, additionally, is a fragmented marketization effect in that same province: particular employers, immigration consultants and ethnocultural organizations tend to prefer certain groups of immigrants over others, for example Mexicans, creating unequal opportunities for others at entry. This could hinder ethnic diversity, argues Lewis (2010), and affect the sustainability of immigrant attraction in the longer term, or limit intercultural understanding in some locales.

The idea of inequalities in the selection process has transpired differently in another study on the economic category of the PNP in Nova Scotia. There, the experience of outsourcing the program to a private corporation backfired once it was discovered in 2006 that the incumbent and allied companies were channelling their preferred immigrant labour (Dobrowolsky, 2011). Amidst overt conflicts of interest, this specific approach was soon after abandoned, but not without leaving a bitter aftertaste as to how immigrants could so easily become mere commodities.

Overall, these regionalization policies have yet to achieve their aim, according to Golebiowska (2009). Her analysis unveils that in absolute numbers, net settlement in less populated provinces is still too low to influence current demographic trends. She is echoed by Lewis (2010) who stresses that secondary out migration of provincial nominees affects the smaller provinces more, such as the Maritimes, and does not impact population growth where it should.

The paradox of immigrants' socioeconomic outcomes

As most Canadian-born do, immigrants tend to move inside the country according to professional and educational opportunities (Finnie, 2004). If this is entirely true, however, because of their concentration in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, one would expect to find better

socioeconomic outcomes for immigrants established there, compared to smaller regions. Is this really the case? More evidence shows a contradiction.

First, poverty rates are higher among immigrants living in the biggest cities. Indeed, the proportion of recent immigrants relying on social assistance was twice that of their counterparts in the rest of Canada, as accounted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Quality of Life Reporting System, between 2001 and 2006 (FCM, 2009a). In the same way, the unemployment gap between Canadian-born and immigrants appeared higher in the big centres: 2.3 percentage points more for immigrants living in the CMAs versus 1.4 in the rest of the country. These figures are consistent with lower participation rate figures for immigrants living in Vancouver and Montreal, compared to the rest of the country (Grant & Sweetman, 2004). In addition to these general figures, other studies highlight that racialized populations – even more so the ones located in the biggest CMA working-class districts (Smith & Ley, 2008) – were consistently overrepresented among the poor (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001; Zhu & Helly, 2013).

Second, the time required for immigrants to match their previous occupation levels, both in salary and responsibility, appears slower in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver than elsewhere in Canada (Frank, 2013). Here again, according to research based on longitudinal data, racialized immigrants experience an even slower 'recovery' rate, especially if they are living in big city working-class districts. More findings validate that immigrants starting off in a big-city ethnic cluster, such as a Chinatown, may have a harder time making their way up to broader job markets (Fong, Chan & Cao, 2009). One of the reasons identified is undeveloped official language skills.

Immigrant earnings are also an indicator of a widening gap. As suspected, following the above findings, earnings tend to be lower for those living in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, compared to other immigrants in Canada (FCM, 2009a; Bauder, 2003). Conspicuously, newcomers from developing countries are more impacted by economic fluctuations and earn less than Canadian born and fellow northern-country immigrants (Zhu & Helly, 2013).

Finally, these differences in immigrants' socioeconomic outcomes are denounced as a blatant devaluation of human capital (Krahn, Derwing & Mulder, 2000; Aydemir, 2009). In other words, immigrants' education and previous skills are not easily recognized, and worse if they are racialized, women, or Muslims (Ogbuagu, 2012; Agrawal, 2013). This situation does not appear to be new, unfortunately. In fact, evidence from the 1990s had been previously unearthed (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001; Phythian, Walters & Anisef, 2011), with obvious signs of systemic barriers (Lamba, 2003; Li, 2003), the latest being the pretense of the 'Canadian experience' as a condition for recruitment (OHRC, 2013).

The paradox of immigrant socioeconomic outcomes in big cities, to conclude this section, is that despite doing worse than their smaller region counterparts on average, they still massively congregate in big urban agglomerations where they remain trapped within the mirage of better economic opportunities.

Discussion

Following this overview, major convergences regarding immigrant outcomes, factors affecting smaller communities, and relevance of regionalization policies are discussed below:

1. Immigrants settling in the biggest cities seem to do worse economically, on average, with poorer return on their human capital than their counterparts in smaller communities.

As accounted in the research literature, immigrants in the Canadian Metropolis, more so if racialized, fare worse in major economic indicators than other immigrants settling in smaller communities, for example in earnings, time to catch up with their previous job status, level of social assistance, unemployment, poverty, and human capital value.

This recurrent and deepening situation contradicts the official narrative around the skills preference of the Canadian immigration system. In fact, it lets immigrants believe that their education and labour experience are not really valued once landed. Since they are more educated proportionally than the Canadian born (FCM, 2009a; King, 2009), this negative outcome is portrayed as an unfulfilled promise. The knowledge spillover – since their human capital is underused – works against productive gains in the economy and fuels a downward spiral conducive to cheaper labour and more job insecurity (Bertinelli, 2004).

In the meantime, smaller and distant communities are in serious need of workers and human capital, and can hardly afford to be finicky. The necessity of their situation enables them and their employers to more easily make place for newcomers at valuing, for instance, their earned-abroad university degrees (Bernard, 2008). This potential association between supply and demand suggests a higher probability of symbiosis between migrants and employers (Bauder, 2003), although at a different scale, since the integrative capacity of smaller towns can be less, especially when the receiving community is not that prepared to accommodate a more diverse population.

2. Size and distance of communities appear as greater determinants to immigrant attraction than local amenities and innovative environments.

Using the models of human capital and knowledge-based economy, as popularized by Florida (2003), some smaller cities are still trying to enlighten their attractiveness to immigrants. They do so among other things by promoting economic diversification and by fostering innovative environments, in a bid to attract talent. However, research shows otherwise as local amenities are less a factor than the size of communities and their distance from major markets.

Bigger cities already offer immigrants many things that smaller cities have a hard time competing with, such as a more diversified job market, structured immigrant-serving agencies, comprehensive public services, transportation, housing, and a more obvious presence of ethnic communities. Additionally, as governmental support to settlement services weakens, which has been the case in the last few years (Shields, Drolet & Valenzuela, 2016), smaller cities are easily left to themselves in assuming the burden of proper immigrant service delivery and successful attraction strategies.

Competing against uncontrollable structural factors, such as size and distance effects, and exogenous ones, such as broader economic trends – think of the recent 2008 financial crisis – smaller and distant communities are more likely to lose the race, and this plays as a second

unfulfilled promise, this time on the side of smaller cities. In other words, cities are not all equal in competing for human resources and immigrant settlers while having to assume the brunt of the responsibility in terms of means and outcome.

3. Success of population renewal in smaller and remote communities is limited by inadequate immigration policies aligned with knowledge-economy theory and with marketization of labour.

Smaller communities need as many people to support their current level of service and livelihood as their employers need adequate workers to fuel their productivity and growth. The two necessities should be considered on equal grounds in policy terms since they directly influence each other's outcomes.

Immigration policies, however, even those playing the regionalization scheme, did not support both objectives appropriately during the last decade – i.e., providing labour and securing community livelihood. For example, the PNP in the Maritimes shows very low retention rates and teaches that a one-size-fits-all approach does not serve population renewal everywhere. Because of economic decline and out-migration of youth, the volume of immigrant intake through the PNP in the smaller eastern provinces is too low to have a significant impact on population renewal, even less on increase.

While the current immigration policy promotes a commodification of immigrants primarily as skilled labour, coupled with a commodification of communities bound to compete with each other for a minority of newcomers comfortable with distance, a third promise is being broken in terms of policy relevance. The rules to play the game of competitiveness, in both cases, that is, immigrant labour against Canadian-born and smaller communities against bigger ones, are unequal.

Against this, more specific policy approaches should intervene where equality gaps are detrimental for both individual immigrants and the receiving communities' development objectives; namely, out-of-the-silos economic development and population renewal policies that involve immigrants, their integration aspirations, and their unbiasedly appreciated human capital, one that goes beyond education levels and work experience to embrace their cultural and social capital. Following the current survey of the research literature, a gap appears in understanding the co-influence of local development measures and immigrant attraction outcomes.

Towards binding policy streams and goals

The call of the early 2000s cautioning policy makers to better understand mobility behaviours of immigrants, and the necessary connections between regionalization of programs and socioeconomic development, did not resonate much after all. In essence, the literature reveals that the admission of newcomers remains entrenched in a commodification of migrants as potential skilled labour, free to settle anywhere, but mainly attracted by big city prospects. In this logic, immigrants are responsible for meeting their own economic outcomes, that is, finding employment at appreciable wages. They are also more subject to human capital discounting by employers.

With the skilled-labour approach of the PNP, the Federal government can conveniently say it has given provinces and cities workable tools. Still, the burden of negative outcomes falls onto these communities themselves, suggesting they might not be welcoming, attractive, productive, innovative or competitive enough.

Amidst an iterative immigration policy architecture, therefore, relying mainly on market economy tenets – i.e., competitiveness of individuals and of local communities – challenges appear at connecting policy streams in order to reach substantive effects on population renewal, immigrants’ human capital valorization, and local economic development. Inspired by Hall’s (1993) policy paradigms, three option paths are now exposed in Table 1 and further discussed.

Table 1: Broad policy options to address regional immigration policy challenges*.

Type	Approach	Focus	Action
Status quo	Equilibrium	Immigrant individual choice	Laissez-faire
Marginal adjustments	Adaptation	Community attractiveness	Self-help support tools
Policy shift	Change	Inter-policy balance (immigration/ population/ regional development)	Inter-policy goals and bridges

* inspired by Garcea (2003) and Hall (1993).

The first option is the current state of affairs where regional immigration policies align with neoliberal values in favouring individual choice of immigrants regarding their destination (Dobrowolsky, 2013). Under that option, not much is attempted to change what is believed to be a ‘natural’ evolution, including population presence or decline in regions, until a new equilibrium is attained. Unfortunately, no one knows when this can happen and projections leave Canadian regions and their people undoubtedly abandoned to their fate. Social and economic consequences of such an option still need to be assessed in the longer term. It might be a cheaper option for the public treasury for now but a laissez-faire approach does not stem from the equalization tradition of Canadian federalism.

The second option tables on adjustments in helping communities become more welcoming, attractive and competitive. It can count on an array of specific measures, not necessarily connected, including for example settlement services and expertise, tolerance awareness campaigns, tools for community promotion, especially on the Internet, and local economic development resources such as entrepreneurial support. The idea here is to offer soft incentives to promote local self-help solutions so communities can play an active role on the ‘free’ market of attraction.

Again, as shown earlier, communities are not all equal regarding their competitiveness potential and many are bound to lose with this pat-on-the-back-type of arrangement. Evidently, this option is a corollary to the first one and searches to alleviate its effects at the lowest cost possible. An appearance of policy action might give communities the impression that their plea is being heard and that means are awarded for them to implement their own solutions.

The third option calls for a fundamental change in policy underpinning. If governments believe in principles such as shared-development opportunities for smaller communities and for immigrants, if population renewal in Canadian regions is considered as part of a vision of economic connectedness between urban and rural Canada, then new aims have to be designed to encompass three sets of policies: immigration, population, and regional development.

This inter-policy new deal calls for more specific programs, which can include effective policy tools to attend properly and connect population growth issues, immigrant credential recognition, preferential public support to settlement services, and proactive job creation measures.

This last option needs to go further than the current and past decade PNP. I contend that allowing provinces and territories to elect their own immigrant candidates, although commendable, is mainly a perpetuation of the same market logic unveiled above. Surely, it has been successful in the Prairies but it has not influenced population decline as such in the Maritimes. The difference in circumstances between these two Canadian regions undoubtedly resides in economic growth, as alluded recently by political commentators (Ibbitson, 2015), the most obvious example being the economic development fuelled by the oil patch in both Alberta and Saskatchewan – at least prior to the drop in prices.

Conclusion

This analysis contends that the current laissez-faire system will contribute to widening the rift between smaller and bigger cities, and hinder smaller communities' capacity to transition their position in the Canadian society. Indeed, by aligning immigration policies too closely to economic dictums, such as hard-core market rules – Dobrolowski and Ramos (2014) speak of “econocentric” – other imperatives like population renewal and community development will be easily curved. It will even lead to more inequities both for smaller centres and those migrants whose human capital is under-realized in the big cities. Of course, addressing this issue in big cities is also paramount to nondiscriminatory inclusion of immigrants in the workforce and in society.

One could argue that policy solutions should strike a balance between individual choice and some degree of public mediation. Without advocating for a blunt top-down policy approach infringing on immigrants' agency and mobility, the point is that without stronger incentives towards Canadian regions, through dynamic attraction and settlement programs, for instance, coupled with effective job-creating policies, immigrants will most likely continue to settle (and remained trapped) in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.

Prior to finding the right inter-policy alignment that will part from the recent disjointed policy cycle on regionalization of immigration, policy makers need to acknowledge the fundamental attraction factors of immigrants to smaller regions and cities, beyond settlement services and community inclusiveness attitudes: employment and job-level possibilities valorizing their human capital. Researchers also need to contribute by better informing the ties between local economic development programs and immigrant settlement patterns in the Canadian smaller-city landscape. In this process, an interdisciplinary approach, since it involves economic theory,

demography, and mobility patterns of Neo-Canadians, to start with, would greatly benefit all concerned stakeholders and policy makers.

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