

Immigration and the Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities

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The 1967 Immigration Act has had profound effects in redrafting the social geography of immigration in large Canadian cities. The Eurocentric orientation of the old immigration regime has given way to a global regime, with about half of each year's new Canadians now arriving from Asia. This cultural reworking has of course major implications for the professional work of physical and social planners, social workers and NGOs, architects, landscape architects, and other design professionals in metropolitan areas. In this short article our mandate is to describe some of these changes in Canada's four million cities, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Ottawa. In the limited space available we will first identify the immigrant profile of each city, and then comment briefly on several selected themes associated with the new ethno-cultural face of metropolitan Canada.

It is a peculiarity of recent immigration that settlement has been far more focussed in major cities than in the past. The 1996 Census reported that 17.4 percent of Canadians were immigrants, but these numbers were heavily concentrated in a few locations: in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) the figure reached 42 percent, the highest for any major centre in North America, closely followed by Vancouver (35 percent). Montreal (18 percent) and Ottawa-Hull (16 percent) fell closer to the national average. During 1998, three out of four newcomers landing in Canada identified one of these four cities as their destination, with Toronto cited by 42 percent.

Immigrant Class

There is also a notable variation between cities in their share of immigration landing categories, a matter of real significance in shaping

client/customer requirements for public and private services. Vancouver, for example, typically receives the highest share of the economic class (65 percent of the city's arrivals in 1998 and 70 percent in 1997), which includes millionaire households landing through the business immigration program, and the smallest proportion of refugees (5 percent in 1998), a profile that has important implications for settlement services such as housing. In contrast a much higher proportion of refugees are destined for Montreal (20 percent of all arrivals in 1998) and Ottawa-Hull (28 percent) with proportionately fewer who qualify as skilled workers. Though Montreal does receive a reasonable share of business immigrants, the wealthiest of the entry classes, many of these are subsequently lost to Toronto or Vancouver through secondary migration. Toronto's profile falls between the other three cities, with a smaller share of economic immigrants (58 percent of arrivals in 1998) than Vancouver but more than Montreal or Ottawa, but with a smaller share of refugees (11 percent) than these cities, while more than Vancouver. The remaining major entry group, the family class, where family sponsorship and a welcoming social network allay some initial settlement needs, is distributed more evenly (25-30 percent in 1998) among the four CMAs.

Immigrant Origins

As the Table shows, the geographical origins of immigrants display further diversity between metropolitan areas. Country of origin is of importance because from it accrues an ethno-cultural profile that may influence ease of integration and types of service needs. Ability to speak English or French, for example, has been shown to correlate significantly with economic achievement, while some origins tend to be associated with a broader set of socio-cultural attributes that may affect the life chances and integration potential of immigrant households.

Toronto has the most global set of immigrant origins. Its overall profile shows the effects of both the old European migration, including the United Kingdom and Italy in the first two ranks, and more recent movement from the rest of the world that includes large numbers from Hong Kong, India, and China in the next three ranks. These relations are transformed among more recent arrivals where the first five national origins are in Asia, but the top ten is rounded out by one country from Europe, three from the Caribbean, and a sixth from Asia. More recent data listing 1998 arrivals indicate a growing focus on Asia, source of eight of the top ten countries, and also that only one of the ten, Jamaica, has English as mother tongue, while Russia is the only European origin. A distinctive feature of the Toronto CMA is the high level of suburbanisation of immigration, with a number of inner suburbs showing higher concentrations of immigrants than the old City of Toronto.

Vancouver, with its Pacific Rim location, had developed an Asian profile earlier. The 1996 Census indicated that the first seven sending countries in the 1990s were from Asia, and 80 percent of all immigrants, with only the United Kingdom and the United States representing the old migration sources in the top ten. The mix of old and new source countries show up in the overall enumeration of immigrants, where the United Kingdom remained in second position in 1996, though like some other European populations its numbers are aging and in decline. The 1998 update shows little change, though (as in Toronto) Hong Kong has slipped in numbers and been passed in first rank by China. During the 1990s notable outward expansion of immigrant districts has occurred with significant concentrations of Chinese, mainly from Hong Kong, in Richmond, and immigrants from India – principally Sikhs – in North Surrey.

Québec has one of the highest rates of immigrant concentration, with almost 90 percent of the provincial total located in the Montréal CMA.

Even within the CMA, and unlike Toronto, there is a further level of concentration on the Island of Montréal, in the city and its immediate older suburbs. While the overall immigrant share of 18 percent is lower than the levels of Toronto and Vancouver, the countries of origin are distinctive, with a clear francophone and Latin emphasis among the total immigrant stock in 1996, when the leading immigrant sources included Haiti, France, Lebanon and Viet Nam and the southern European nations of Italy, Greece and Portugal. To a lesser extent this inflection is present among 1990s arrivals also, though the Asian fact has also become well-established, with six of the top ten sending countries. But the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of the city is maintained as Algeria and Morocco, nations with few representatives in other cities, emerged in second and seventh ranks (with France in the leading position) in 1998.

Ottawa-Hull has the lowest immigrant quota among the four CMAs, below even the national average. Nonetheless the CMA contained over 160,000 immigrants in 1996, with an eclectic mix of sources from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa, led by the United Kingdom. The important role of refugees in the metropolitan profile is highlighted by the ranking of arrivals in the 1991-96 period, led by Somalia, and including also Yugoslavia, Iran and Ethiopia in the top ten list, giving Ottawa-Hull a singular configuration among Canadian cities. Indeed the ten immigrant source countries that are over-represented in Ottawa-Hull are all dominated by refugee landings. Aside from the traditional port of entry in the inner city district west of Bronson Avenue, immigrant numbers are dispersed in a number of nodes throughout the Ontario portion on the region, though numbers are much lighter on the Hull side of the Ottawa River.

Immigrant Segregation

Residential segregation has always been a feature of Canadian cities, like others. While we tend to think only of poorer areas like Vancouver's

Downtown Eastside, especially if they are also immigrant areas like a Little Italy or a Chinatown, segregation is no less true of established, wealthier groups in districts such as Rockcliffe or Westmount. The growth or expansion of new immigrant communities in Canadian cities in the past generation has however contributed to a new round of discussion. Should we be concerned that many immigrants tend to settle in ethno-cultural clusters?

A first point to note is that while segregation for many groups in Canadian cities is moderate (Hiebert, 1999; Bourne, 2000) it scarcely ever approaches the high concentrations noted in Black-White studies in the United States. Second, we should remember, as Ceri Peach (1996) has noted there is both 'good' and 'bad' segregation. Good segregation involves concentrations of ethno-cultural groups among whom there are close social ties and networks of support provided by the extended family, home region clubs, and places of worship. These institutions meet many immigrant needs including shelter and employment within the ethnic enclave economy, and offer advice and experience for successful settlement. In sustaining homeland culture through language, religion and diet, they provide a nurturing and welcoming community.

Usually such communities provide a transitional home and after some years, at most a generation, measures of integration follow, though a few groups, including Jews and Italians, continue patterns of segregation in second generation suburban districts. For other groups, however, there is a penalty for continued residential segregation, for studies in Vancouver have shown that residential concentration of ethnic groups is associated also with other forms of separation – occupational segmentation, in-group marriage, and mother tongue retention – and that all of these measures of separation correlate negatively with personal income (Ley, 1999). In other words, and here is a 'bad' consequence of segregation, prolonged spatial segregation can impair economic success.

Multi-ethnic Neighbourhoods

Because segregation levels in Canadian cities are typically moderate, and not high, many immigrants share residential space with others of different national origin. The image of immigrant settlement as comprising a mosaic of 'little homelands' needs to give way to a more subtle model of ethnic diversity (Germain 1999). The diversification of national origins in recent immigration has created more cosmopolitan landscapes and widespread multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. In Montreal, for example, Parc Extension, a district of 30,000 people in the middle of the Island, was two-thirds Greek thirty years ago, but is now home to Turks, Haïtians, Sri Lankans, and Latin Americans, among others. Of course there remains a Chinatown near Old Montréal (even if the Chinese share is much reduced) and Greeks still comprise a third of Parc Extension. But the proximity of others of very diverse origins is now the local, daily experience of many inhabitants of both central neighbourhoods and the suburbs. In such districts the real minorities may be the so-called charter groups, Canadians of French or British ancestry.

Co-habitation in common spaces, defined both physically and symbolically, becomes a dominant ingredient of interculturalism in everyday life, whether the contacts be positive, or, as they occasionally are, conflictual.

Immigration and Housing

An important issue about which we have space to say very little here concerns the insertion of immigrants into the housing markets of Canadian cities. Because many immigrant incomes are typically lower than native-born Canadians, particularly for recent immigrants, and yet they are drawn to more expensive metropolitan housing markets, they often experience acute affordability problems, sometimes alleviated only

by crowding. Compared with 17 percent of the native-born population, 21 percent of immigrant households suffered core housing need in 1996, a CMHC index that includes quality and affordability criteria. But among recent (1991-96) newcomers, core housing need rose sharply to 39 percent of households. Though candidates for subsidised housing because of income constraints, immigrants may find themselves at the end of long waiting lists in the major cities. They typically enter the rental market, and here they encounter significant affordability problems in the early years (Murdie and Teixeira 2000). There is evidence from Toronto, too, that some immigrants are stigmatised and face discrimination from landlords (Hulchanski 2000).

A common objective is homeownership, and proportions rise steadily with length of residence, from 30 percent of 1991-1996 landings to 77 percent for households landing before 1976, an ownership level considerably above the 66 percent for native-born (Ley et al. forthcoming). Vancouver is an exception to the national picture, for the higher level of economic (particularly business) class entries has accelerated home-ownership among recent immigrants arriving from Hong Kong and Taiwan especially. In contrast in the other cities higher proportions of refugees with limited capital face serious housing problems, particularly in the tight housing markets of Ottawa and Toronto.

Conclusion

From a limited base, a great deal has been learned in the past five years from Metropolis-funded research about the encounter of immigrants and refugees with the built environment of Canadian cities. Our intent in this paper has been to provide an outline of research results relevant to practitioners engaged in planning, design and service delivery to diverse communities in multicultural cities.

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