

The Regionalization of Immigration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On February 21, 2003 Metropolis hosted a closed-door conversation on the Regionalization of Immigration sponsored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Participants sought to examine the success and failures of previous regionalization strategies and propose new and innovative policy solutions. This summary provides an overview of the key debates.

To access the full report, please visit the *Research and Policy* section of <http://www.canada.metropolis.net>

Why is regionalization an important issue?

Although the regionalization of immigration has always been a concern for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, several developments have made a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants a pressing issue:

- Each year more than 74.48% of Canada's 200,000 immigrants settle in Montreal, Vancouver or Toronto. This concentration has been at a sustained level for fifteen years which taxes these cities' ability to accommodate immigrants.
- There is an increasing emphasis on the size and quality of the labour force as a prerequisite for economic development. By 2026, immigrants will account for all net population growth, and by 2011, for all net labour force growth.
- Census data reveal that an ageing population, declining birth rates, and out-migration are resulting in the depopulation of Canada's rural areas, municipalities and smaller cities. Provinces and cities are interested in using immigration to reverse these trends.

Metropolis Conversation Series

The Metropolis Conversation Series brings together researchers, public servants, business leaders, policymakers and community leaders to identify and explore current public policy debates. Each conversation is a closed and highly focused meeting promoting candid face-to-face exchanges. The gatherings are small—usually 15 to 20—consisting of carefully chosen people who share common interests, but whose perspectives vary substantially. The reports resulting from the conversations are available at: <http://www.canada.metropolis.net>

About Metropolis

The Metropolis Project was conceived in 1994 and launched in 1996. It aims to improve policies for managing migration and diversity by bringing scientific expertise to bear on policy development; and by involving policymakers, researchers and NGOs in all of their initiatives. Metropolis' goals are to:

- enhance academic research capacity;
- focus academic research on critical policy issues and policy options; and,
- develop ways to facilitate the use of research in decision-making.

The project has been structured as a partnership with both domestic and international components. It holds national and international conferences, workshops, seminars and roundtables to encourage communication between interested stakeholders. To register for upcoming events visit:

www.metropolis.net

What have governments done in the past?

As a starting point for the discussion on the regionalization of immigration, participants assessed the goals, strategies, successes and failures of previous initiatives. Their assessment highlights both the diversity of the approaches undertaken and the challenges facing policymakers. Key to the success of the strategies discussed, is the coordination of groups at all levels, both within and outside of government. In particular, they explored the way that provinces have taken advantage of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).

Quebec initiatives for regionalization were explored in some depth. Quebec has developed a variety of strategies including creating infrastructure in the regions; investing in an attraction policy; trying to establish a critical mass of about 10 or 12 families in small urban centres and, examining selection policy to be more effective in regionalization. Quebec's experience with regionalization efforts demonstrates the challenges facing policymakers. A program aimed at encouraging immigrants to move from Montreal to Quebec, using information sessions, tours of the city, and employment services has resulted in only a 30% increase in the number of immigrants moving to Quebec.

What are indicators of a successful regionalization strategy?

As participants explored previous strategies, they discussed the criteria by which success could be measured. Although participants agreed that increasing the numbers of immigrants choosing to settle outside of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal is an important indicator of success, they also agreed that retention is important. However, they cautioned that retention in Canada –not in a particular region–is the key issue and that limiting the voluntary movement of individuals within Canada would be contrary to democratic values and economic goals.

What factors affect immigrant settlement choice?

After discussing previous initiatives, participants identified the determining factors for immigrant settlement choice. The characteristics of the receiving community include: a critical mass of already established immigrants from a similar background; a welcoming community; services provided by the community especially immigrant services; and, educational, cultural and economic opportunities. Although all of these characteristics are important, a critical mass of 10 to 50 families was emphasised. The preliminary results of a survey launched in Quebec, to evaluate the results of the 1996 selection grid, reveal that 30% of skilled immigrants choose a location based on the presence of parents, friends and people of the same origin. In some cases, immigrants are willing to compromise their economic status to live close to their ethnic community.

The characteristics of the immigrant and his or her source country as determinants for settlement choice were also discussed. First, participants discussed immigration class. Some suggested that regionalization strategies should target highly skilled immigrants because their skills could be used to meet labour shortages in smaller communities. Other participants suggested that to complement the economic goals of regionalization, the focus should be on skill development for less-skilled immigrants and refugees. Participants

agreed that foreign students would be a potential target of regionalization strategies because they sometimes attend Canadian universities in smaller centres. Second, participants suggested that if an immigrant comes from a country where second-tier cities and rural areas lack adequate economic, educational and cultural opportunities, he or she is more likely to choose a large city.

New regionalization strategies

The strategies proposed drew on the insights of previous initiatives as well as on the determining factors for immigrant settlement. Participants identified key actors and their roles in three broad areas: government (all three levels, but with particular emphasis on the local level); receiving communities; business; and educational institutions.

There was some debate about the extent to which the Federal Government should be involved in regionalization strategies. Some participants felt that the Federal Government should give provinces and municipalities the tools to develop their own strategies. Other participants felt that the Federal Government needed to provide leadership and establish the frameworks within which other actors could participate in regionalization. All participants agreed that funding local initiatives is essential to successful policy development in this area.

Governments, receiving communities, business, educational institutions and policymakers in a variety of areas like health, housing and employment must work together.

The term “receiving community” refers to local groups, organisations and individuals that would welcome and help to integrate immigrants. Receiving communities should ensure that adequate services including language training and employment services are provided; and, involve prepared community-based immigration workers to assist in immigrant integration. Many policy areas need to be considered at a local level, for example housing, health, employment and education.

Educational institutions could play a key role by actively recruiting foreign students to universities in smaller centres and by providing training and bridging programs. Institutions could arrange work-placements for students which would help ensure they had Canadian work experience and contacts. They could also provide accreditation services for immigrants. (For a more comprehensive analysis of the problems and issues relating to recognizing foreign skills and experience see Metropolis Conversation 8. Available at: <http://www.metropolis.net>.)

Although some participants were hesitant about the potential for business to contribute to broader national goals, business was identified as having a key interest in this issue because of current and future labour shortages. Since business shares in the benefits of regionalization, it was suggested that they should also share in the costs. It was also noted that some businesses play an important role in integration and retention.

Participants identified a variety of marketing strategies to address misconceptions about smaller city and rural area living. This is imperative when promoting Canada abroad through publications, visa officers and when conducting business.

How can we create, expand and consolidate networks to develop regionalization strategies?

Participants emphasized that for any policy to be successful, it would need to bring together all key players and actors. To do this, they suggested expanding and consolidating networks to develop regionalization strategies. For example, one participant suggested the creation of local community-based councils or boards to bring educational institutions, regulators, school boards, employers and other agencies together. Together, they could determine the needs of the community, identify how immigration can help fulfill those needs, and decide what services to provide to newcomers. Another participant suggested a five-prong network, comprised of CIC, HRDC, two provincial and territorial ministers, and the municipality.

What research do we need?

Participants agreed that there was some very interesting research available on regionalization strategies at a macro level. However, they suggested that at local levels, where in some cases the impetus for regionalization should occur, there isn't enough adequate data to support a comprehensive regionalization strategy. Funding should be provided for localized research on the specific demographic challenges facing smaller communities and on how that community can be successfully marketed to potential immigrants.

Other Metropolis Conversations

Conversation ONE:	Absorptive Capacity
Conversation TWO:	Second Generation Immigrants
Conversation THREE:	Health
Conversation FOUR:	Brain Gain, Brain Waste, Brain Drain
Conversation FIVE:	Recent Economic and Social Performance Outcomes of Immigrants
Conversation SIX:	Growing up in Cities: Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth
Conversation SEVEN:	Ethnicity and Labour Markets in Canada: A Research Agenda
Conversation EIGHT:	Accreditation of Immigrants and Federal Public Service Employment

All reports are available online at: <http://www.canada.metropolis.net>

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Metropolis Project or the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.