

The University of Guelph's Department of Geography is home to a group of researchers interested in immigration issues outside of gateway cities. Under the leadership of Harald Bauder, graduate students have been organizing seminars that focus on these debates. This paper provides a brief overview of the third installment of the Immigration Series at the University of Guelph, held on September 8, 2006.

Immigration Series at the University of Guelph

The Role of Secondary Cities – A Brief Summary*

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For the past three years the Department of Geography at the University of Guelph has organized a seminar that addresses immigration issues in non-gateway cities. This year, the seminar was sponsored by the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) and was held on September 8, 2006. This report provides a brief description of the seminar presentations, and a summary of some of the themes examined during the roundtable discussion that followed.

The title of this year's workshop was Immigration Series at the University of Guelph: The Role of Secondary Cities. The main topics of discussion were the social and economic barriers facing immigrants in smaller communities, and the role of support institutions for immigrants in second-tier cities in overcoming these hurdles. The objectives of the seminar were twofold. First, the event was to provide a venue for individuals and organizations on the "front lines" of second-tier cities to give their opinions and feedback on current immigration issues; secondly, the seminar presented some of the current and ongoing academic research on immigration in

smaller communities. In attendance were representatives of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, municipal governments, non-government organizations, multicultural centres, local colleges, as well as students from various universities.

Overview of the presentations

The format of the presentations at this year's event reflected the objectives of the seminar. Presenters included immigrants who live in second-tier cities, academics, and representatives from immigrant support organizations. After some introductory remarks from Dr. Harald Bauder, the seminar began with two presentations by individuals who shared some of their personal experiences living and working in a smaller urban centre. Victoria Szucs lives and works in Guelph and is part of the Foreign-Trained Doctors Study Group, a group of immigrant professionals who meet on a regular basis at the Guelph Multicultural Centre to prepare for the accreditation process. Mrs. Szucs, who was a medical doctor in Yugoslavia but is unable to practice in Ontario, outlined some of the hardships facing first-generation immigrants in Canada as well as the difficulties experienced by foreign-trained professionals trying to complete the accreditation process. For example,

* We thank the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) for sponsoring this workshop. We are grateful, in particular, to all the participants of this year's seminar for making the event a success.

she recounted how immigrants seeking professional employment had to take Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examinations every other year. This becomes a financial burden as under this system, immigrants repeatedly pay for the examination despite having already illustrated their language proficiency. The second speaker was Edward Akinwunmi, an entrepreneur who currently lives in St. Catharines and produces Niagara Region's first newspaper devoted to multiculturalism, the *Mosaic Edition*. He spoke about potential benefits that immigrant entrepreneurs might reap smaller communities. Rather than settling in Toronto, he decided to migrate to St. Catharines because he felt that his business opportunities were better in a second-tier city. Mr. Akinwunmi had been concerned that in Toronto, the *Mosaic Edition* might become one among numerous other ethnic enterprises and get "lost in the mainstream." In the Niagara Region, however, the *Mosaic Edition* is now circulating in stores and libraries.

The next two presentations were by the author. The first, titled "Immigration Studies in Second-tier Cities: A Research Agenda," highlighted some of the current research being spearheaded by the University of Guelph. The focus of the presentation was an overview of a CERIS-funded project titled Local, Regional, and Transnational Networks and the Integration and Settlement Dispersal of Filipino Immigrants. This project is a collaborative effort involving the University of Guelph, Margaret Walton-Roberts at Wilfrid Laurier University, the Guelph Multicultural Centre, the New Canadian Program, and the Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre, and is based upon an empirical study of immigrant communities in three of Southern Ontario's second-tier cities. The project's research sites are Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo and Welland, and its objectives include the documentation of the socio-economic experiences of Filipino immigrants in these communities, and an examination of how immigrant networks form linkages at the local, regional and international levels. The project will also focus on the types of relationships immigrant groups in second-tier cities entertain with ethnic communities in Toronto, the primary gateway city for immigrants in Canada.

The second paper in this section was presented on behalf of Éric Quimper and Michèle Vatz Laaroussi from the Immigration Observatory on Low Immigrant Density Areas, a group of

researchers based at the Université de Sherbrooke. It provided an overview of one of their current research projects, titled Municipalities and their Ethnic, Religious and Cultural Diversity Management in Urban and Rural Regions: Analysis of Research in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Quebec. This collaborative project, which involves researchers from the Université de Sherbrooke, the Université de Moncton, the University of Saskatchewan and the Université Laval, aims to analyze the managerial policies of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in numerous urban and rural municipalities. The presentation used the City of Sherbrooke's 2004 immigrant welcome and integration policy as a case study and demonstrated how the policy faced social and political hurdles in meeting its goals of ensuring accessibility to all services and employment for newcomers. It concluded with some suggestions of ways that the municipal policy could be revised to better meet the stated objectives.

After a refreshment break, which was used by many participants for networking, the third series of presentations began. These papers were written by representatives of various immigrant support organizations in second-tier cities. The first presenter was Tanya Bouchard from the Canadian Access for International Professions and Skilled Trades. This employment agency, based at the Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre,¹ provides newcomers with many services including settlement assistance, employment training and legal advice. The presentation focused to some of the funding problems facing support organizations in smaller communities. For example, one of the primary difficulties is that the needs of secondary cities are different from larger centres, but funding remains based on a comparative analysis. As a result, smaller organizations do not receive adequate funding to meet all the needs of newcomer communities. A second theme was that many of the employment barriers facing immigrants in second-tier cities are similar to those experienced in larger urban centres, and newcomers in the Niagara Region often expressed frustration at not being able to find employment in their fields due to issues such as their lack of "Canadian experience." The next presentation was by Djurdjica Halgasev, from the Guelph and District Multicultural Centre,² who further outlined some of the social and economic

¹ www.wellandheritagecouncil.com.

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barriers facing immigrant professionals in smaller communities. Using immigrant physicians as an example, she demonstrated the prohibitive costs involved in the accreditation process and showed how the financial expense of these examinations acts as a barrier for many immigrant professionals. The final paper was presented by Brian Wiley of the Lutherwood Adult Employment Services,³ an organization in Guelph that offers employment assistance for immigrants such as support services for individuals with no Canadian work experience or training, language training, and direct links to employers who are hiring. The presentation, titled "Barriers to Immigrant Job Searching in Secondary Cities" provided an overview of the labour market integration of immigrants in Guelph and focused on some of the barriers facing newcomers to the city. Of note was the importance of language proficiency, one of the most common reasons cited by employers in Guelph for not hiring immigrants.

Following the presentations, there was a roundtable discussion on some of the issues covered during this part of the seminar. At this point, the audience asked questions and offered feedback on some of the presentations, and shared their own experiences. What followed was an interesting debate, where new issues were raised and which provided many directions for further investigation or research.

Synthesis of debates

As regards the settlement and integration of immigrants in second-tier cities, the presentations and roundtable discussion raised three main issues:

- Many of the barriers experienced by immigrants in labour markets are not unique to second-tier cities, but are rather similar to those facing newcomers in large gateway cities. For example, the "usual suspects" of a

complicated accreditation process and a lack of "Canadian experience" are common sources of frustration for professional immigrants in second-tier cities. The main difference, however, is that in many cases these barriers are compounded by the fact that many services related to the accreditation process are only offered in larger cities. Thus, as Tanya Bouchard pointed out in her presentation, larger urban centres typically provide more opportunities for training and professional development. Furthermore, many professional associations examinations are held in larger cities; therefore, immigrants must sometimes travel considerable distances to take qualifying exams. These types of geographic restrictions to the accreditation process can add further expenses to already strained resources. A similar barrier is the need for additional services, such as English language training. Brian Wiley showed that in some smaller cities the level of English as a Second Language (ESL) training is only available up to Level 7. While this provides enough training for most jobs, professional and management positions typically require sector-specific ESL requirements and a Level 10 grade of instruction. This level of training is not conveniently available in many smaller cities, and immigrants must travel to larger urban centres for instruction. Again, this adds considerable barriers in terms of time and expense for newcomers.

- Although immigrants in gateway and second-tier cities face similar barriers, their ability to navigate through these hurdles is influenced by the infrastructure available to them in terms of support institutions or programs. During the discussion, it was noted that many second-tier cities lack the infrastructure needed to facilitate successful immigrant settlement. For example, presenters from Guelph and the Niagara Region pointed out that there was a need for reliable public transportation in these areas. Many newcomers are unable to afford an automobile, and must rely upon public transportation as a means of mobility. When there is a lack of

² www.gdmc.org.

³ <http://aes.lutherwood.ca>.

these types of services, immigrants find it difficult to get around the city. A lack of public transportation can therefore pose significant barriers to the successful labour market integration of immigrants in two ways. First, it limits employment opportunities due to prohibitive travel times and second, it may limit access to employment-based services (e.g. professional training). From this position, it would seem that if second-tier cities aim to become more immigrant-friendly, municipal governments must improve existing service provision to ensure newcomers are able to easily access the employment or organizations that will aid in their successful integration in the community.

- Some barriers are unique to second-tier cities and centre on the difficulties in connecting newcomers and a welcoming community. One participant in the discussion observed how immigrants are sometimes perceived as competitors in the local labour market and therefore as a threat in smaller communities. Such feelings are compounded in economically depressed areas that have experienced an out-migration of young people. In other words, residents have seen their sons and daughters leave to find opportunities elsewhere but are now expected to be welcoming towards newcomers. It should be noted that similar barriers exist among the immigrant community. For example, according to Chyang Wen from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, one of the issues blocking the expansion of the business class program of investors into smaller cities is the perceived lack of a welcoming ethnic infrastructure. Even though investors may be interested in smaller urban

centres, they have not been able to form a connection with an ethnic population in the second-tier city and feel more comfortable in a gateway city. There is therefore a need to form a bridge between newcomers and existing ethnic communities if second-tier cities are to attract and retain recent immigrants. These issues illustrate the complexity of barriers to the social and economic integration of newcomers in second-tier cities. They involve the “local” population as well as existing immigrant communities. A concentrated effort by all parties will be needed to ensure that smaller communities become attractive alternatives to gateway cities for newcomers.

Conclusion

Since this seminar series began three years ago, there has been increasing attention and participation on behalf of those interested in immigration issues outside of gateway cities. We hope this trend continues and intend to provide a forum for agencies and organizations that work with immigrants on a daily basis to voice their concerns about current immigration issues, while showcasing the most recent academic research on these debates. In addition, we hope that immigrants continue to participate in these seminars and share their stories so we can all learn from their experiences in second-tier cities.

About the author

TOM LUSIS is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Guelph. His research interests centre on the transnational activities of the Filipino-Canadian community in Toronto and in Ontario's second-tier cities.