Quebec Community Groups Network

2011 Metropolis Conference

Basic information

In 2006, Quebec immigrants for whom English was the only official language they knew upon arrival represented nearly 20 per cent of total provincial immigration.

This was up from just under 16 per cent in 2002.

Too often, immigrants to Quebec for whom English is their first official language spoken fall between the cracks and fail to receive the services that would allow them to remain and fully integrate into Quebec society. There is an opportunity to achieve both service delivery and retention for new arrivals through the English-speaking community in a win-win fashion, particularly in the regions of Quebec

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The Senate Standing Committee on Official Languages:

states that “the issue for the English-speaking population of Quebec is to find ways of attracting newcomers to English-speaking communities without damaging the aspirations of the French-speaking majority.” (*The Vitality of Quebec’s English-speaking communities: from Myth to Reality, the Senate Standing Committee on Official Languages* p. 67)

The report emphasizes the fact that the English-speaking community should be seen as an asset to Quebec, rather than a threat and that relationships should not be zero-sum. The report summarizes the situation as follows: “The English-speaking communities, like their French-speaking counterparts outside Quebec, want the federal government to play its role fully in attracting immigrants, helping them to integrate and thus enabling official language minority communities to rejuvenate themselves. They also want newcomers whose first language is English, whether they come from other provinces of Canada or other regions of Quebec, to be able to identify themselves as full members of the community.” (p.67)

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Commissioner of Official Languages:

In his annual report for 2008-2009, the Commissioner of Official Languages, sets out the following vision: “English-speaking communities in Quebec have had many years of experience in immigration and integration, and they continue their work in order to ensure that English-speaking newcomers are integrated and actively contribute to the development of Quebec society.” (p.75)

He goes on to state that “The issue of immigration is different in Quebec, since the English-speaking communities have already benefited for several decades from the addition of newcomers. In fact, the proportion of English-speaking newcomers who settle in this province remains strong, and the number of immigrants capable of becoming fluent in this language on arrival has risen. In Montréal, for instance, the dynamic cultural scene and the city’s unique cosmopolitan character attract and retain many young musicians, artists and others from all over.” (p.75-76)

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English-speaking regional communities

The English-speaking communities in the regions can act as a gateway to attract and support immigrants, migrants and returnees to become adapted and integrated into everyday living in a majority French-language Quebec. At the same time, the English-speaking communities can enhance their own vitality through the economic and community development that will result from the increased presence of newcomers who have an affinity to English as their first official language spoken or mother tongue.

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Ongoing commitment

To address the issue of renewal after decades of out-migration from the English-speaking communities of Quebec, the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) has undertaken a number of initiatives since 2007 to develop a strategy for welcoming newcomers. In particular it has engaged in a discussion with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), leading to a successful partnership and innovative thinking about solutions to the challenges faced by the Official Language Minority Community in Quebec. Financially this has resulted in a multi-year investment of $63,000 per year for the English-speaking communities of Quebec.

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Recent activities

A two-day workshop in February 2011 to host discussions on the issue of community renewal through the welcoming of newcomers, thanks to support from CIC.

Participants included representatives from five regional association members of the Quebec Community Groups Network – specifically Townshippers' Association, the Megantic English-speaking Community Development Corporation, the Committee for Anglophone Social Action, the Regional Association of West Quebec, and the Voice of English-speaking Quebec.

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Issues

1. Renewal is about welcoming newcomers and this should be the main message for sustaining English-speaking communities in the regions.

2. Newcomers include immigrants, migrants and returnees so that the renewal concept is meaningful and adaptable to regional communities as well as being politically acceptable.

3. Integrating a newcomer into an English-speaking community means that the individual will become integrated into Quebec society as well – it is not a question of one but both. This may take more time but the English-speaking community should be seen as a gateway into Quebec society, not a threat to it.

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Issues cont.

4. The English-speaking community should work with existing networks and agencies as much as possible, but should be prepared to spearhead activities if this turns out to be the best mechanism for service delivery to the community.

5. Understanding what we do and don't know about English-speaking communities and the questions surrounding newcomers is probably the most important first step in any future initiative. Being able to renew our communities through newcomers is recognized as a good strategy, but much remains unknown at a local level to be able to provide adequate baseline data to measure future outcomes.

6. The English-speaking community has difficulty engaging provincial and municipal government due to complex jurisdictional issues.

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Issues cont.

7. Job opportunities are the most important factor affecting the number of newcomers who might arrive and stay in a community. Communities with employment prospects will obviously fare better in this effort than those with fewer prospects. While there are some systemic issues involved in this question (i.e. decline in natural resources industries) there are also multi-jurisdictional, dimensional and departmental aspects that should be considered. In this regard, the “Welcoming Newcomers” strategy should dovetail with other strategies for the community regarding employment and economic development.

8. Whether to actively recruit vs. simply welcoming newcomers who have arrived will remain a strategic choice depending on the circumstance of each region. Quebec City has employment prospects through which it can recruit, whereas the Gaspé is not in the same situation. In a general sense, all regional communities should be prepared and equipped to welcome newcomers as ‘arrivals’, and ready to consider recruitment if the circumstances present themselves

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Recommendations for Next Steps

Research

Research projects should be undertaken to prepare the groundwork for further initiatives (positioning) and in preparation for recommendations for the next five year investment in Official Language Minority Communities (2014-2019). This would include research to

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Recommendations for Next Steps

Investment

Given the very limited extent of federal government support on the question of renewal in the English-speaking communities of Quebec, representations need to be made to CIC to tailor policies and programs to best fit the needs of the English-speaking community.

Similarly, representations should be made to other federal departments (in particular Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) and Canadian Heritage (PCH)) for interdepartmental contributions that could enable the non-immigration aspects of the research and positioning to be developed. The result of this work could be an interdepartmental working group between federal departments and the QCGN to develop an investment strategy in the English-speaking community around the issue of newcomers

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Recommendations for Next Steps

Communication

A communication strategy needs to be developed and implemented in order to raise awareness and improve understanding of the need to renew the regional English-speaking communities of Quebec. This communications strategy will have to have different components for targeted audiences, that is to say the federal, provincial and regional levels of government, majority French-language immigration networks and agencies, and for the English-speaking communities themselves