

# REFLECTING ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> REFLECTION DAY ON FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

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**Over the last decade, research dealing with Francophone immigration to Canada has become a lot more common. The Reflection Days on Francophone Immigration, which have been part of the Metropolis conference since 2006, are an essential tool for the dissemination of this research.**

In the early 1970s, in her classic work, Freda Hawkins already pointed out that immigration in Canada has to be more than a policy aiming to meet job market demands, but a national policy that must respond to geographical, identity and social considerations<sup>1</sup>. The author also pointed to the crucial role of research in the development of public policies. At that time, research was mainly done as an individual venture, not as a collaborative effort such as Metropolis or part of broader partnerships like Pathways to Prosperity or the *Alliance de recherche sur les savoirs de la gouvernance minoritaire*, which have greatly contributed (and still do) in establishing a vast interdisciplinary field for research. Another one of Hawkins' recommendation was that research has to raise public awareness of immigration's benefits to Canadian society. The author also argued that the Canadian population had to better understand the demographic shifts Canadian society was undergoing and particularly the increase of immigrants coming from non-European countries.

Canada's immigration landscape was transformed during the 1990-2000 decade. The increase of individual mobility, a more aggressive liberalism, the diversification of migration flows, reforms in the immigration system, the implementation of more targeted selection mechanisms; all these factors became the major trends of the new immigration paradigm. The federal government also directed more efforts to assigning new immigrants all over the Canadian territory. In 2001, the federal government's regionalization policy was thus beneficial to Canada's Francophone communities, these communities wanted to establish immigration as a priority in their development and their commitment to governance mechanisms that promoted official languages and language duality.

Over the last fifteen years, it has become quite common to see more research being done on the issue of Francophone immigration to Canada. This happened gradually. On one hand, Francophone community-based organisations realized

quite early on the importance of immigration on Francophone minority communities. Faced with a demographic decline that has been happening for quite some time, immigration became over the years a key issue for these communities who considered the arrival of those Francophones from “somewhere else” a new opportunity to boost and vitalize the “francophonies from here”. On the other hand, academics and researchers developed this new research field so as to inform policymaking. Reviewing the research that has been done gives us a good idea of the evolution and diversity of the work on Francophone immigration<sup>2</sup>.

In the beginning, research on Francophone immigration had this privilege of positioning itself somewhat as the “younger sibling”, it came from the peripheries and was able to ask different questions which were likely to give us a fresh take on the dominant or profoundly “national” approach to immigration. The questions that were raised aimed to explore new avenues for understanding, for example, relations between minority and majority groups and the consequences of these relationships on how immigration was approached. Is the famous “us” and “them” dichotomy different when considered within minority communities?<sup>3</sup> How do the specificities of bilingual communities align with the cultural diversity of Francophone immigrants?<sup>4</sup> Through field studies, research has been able to illustrate the pathways to integration of newcomers in contexts such as schools and urban and rural environments. Immigration research has also uncovered new challenges related to identity, such as the place of the discourse on ethnic diversity within linguistic duality and within a rather homogenous Francophone narrative. However, today, the issue of Francophone immigration has to be articulated around the current reforms to Canada’s immigration system. It is crucial for minority Francophone communities to position themselves in relation to those profound transformations and to be able to find their place amidst them. There is an important need for research to be done in that regard, in other words we need to better evaluate the economic performance of Francophone minorities and the capacity of minority Francophone communities to operate within the new paradigm of economic immigration. We know it, the introduction of the Expression of Interest model by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2005 will probably have a profound impact on the selection of qualified immigrants who can meet the country’s short term economic needs. Are Francophone communities ready to partake in this game? What could the short and medium-term impacts be on Francophone immigration and on minority Francophone communities?

It is in this spirit that the Reflection Days on Francophone Immigration, which have been part of Metropolis conference for the last eight years, have enabled us to discuss research on Francophone immigration. These events also give us the opportunity to bring researchers, policy makers and community stakeholders together in order to share knowledge as well as to ponder in a constructive manner about our diverse

research needs.

Titled “*Francophonie canadienne et diversité immigrante: les défis d’une rencontre réussie*”, the 8<sup>th</sup> day to reflect on Francophone immigration thus addressed the successes and challenges of immigration within minority Francophone communities both from the perspective of the immigrant and of the host society. It is through the meeting of those two entities that integration and inclusion happen and questions about policies and institutional capacity, as well as about the different pathways of immigrants, arise. The theme of the day was meant to direct our attention to the main challenges faced by Francophone communities, including how to ensure a successful immigration experience, both from the point of view of the immigrant and the host society. It often becomes clear that that success is not uniquely dependent on the immigrants alone, or on the conditions under which they are received, but also depends on the interaction of both and the different mechanisms for integration and inclusion that are locally available. In other words, it might be necessary to leave behind this very global approach that conceives of immigration in terms of supply and demand in order to consider a more sociocultural approach, which could also enable us to better understand the relationship between Francophones “from here” and the cultural diversity of immigrants “from somewhere else”. Within this framework, it is of course questions concerning access to pre-departure information, the choice of communities, the place of diversity, conditions of insertion in the local economic fabric, the level of awareness of business owners of the challenges associated with immigration, but also the variety of migration pathways, that have been discussed during the event.

The overall theme was discussed in light of four main strategic priorities of Francophone immigration research:

- Who is this “us”? In other words, which Francophone community or communities are we talking about?
- Who acts? In other words, who are the key actors in Canada’s immigration policies and how do their different interventions interact in the federal context?
- Who are we talking about? In other words, are we able to introduce more uniqueness and more contrast in our way of understanding the different migration processes and how do they connect to the way we, in Canada, develop immigration policies?
- What are the needs in terms of research? Faced with this diversity of communities, actors, migration processes, what should the researcher’s role be and what goals should they pursue?

The first workshop’s objective was to identify the way minority Francophone communities understand issues

related to immigration and diversity. This is not always an easy task because it implies multiple perspectives, both normative and empirical. How do minority Francophone communities deal with immigration and diversity? How do minority Francophone communities define themselves and how can we define them according to their particular take on immigration? How do immigrants become part of the host society? While they recognize the value of the project of Francophone immigration to Canada, a project which aligns with the objectives of the Official Languages Act, Rémi Léger (Simon Fraser University)<sup>5</sup>, Monica Heller (University of Toronto)<sup>6</sup> and Isabelle Violette (University of Moncton)<sup>7</sup> proposed the groundwork for a critical reading that identifies pathways between nation and globalisation, community and individuals, integration and mobility. The main marker of identity of Francophone communities remains language, but this marker evolves through its relation with the newcomer. Cédric de Chardon, research manager for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, has reminded us of the importance of working with a definition of minority Francophone communities that is measurable.

The second workshop has focused more particularly on governance in relation to immigration and notably on the role of local authorities. The successful meeting between immigrants and host societies implies collaboration between different stakeholders and jurisdictions. Recent changes to the Canadian immigration system and current new ways of thinking about settlement give rise, among other things, to new roles for governmental actors at the local, provincial/territorial and national levels. Within this context, Erin Tolley<sup>8</sup> and Aude Claire Fourot<sup>9</sup> have each approached through their specific angle the issue of governance and the division of powers between the federal and the provinces and the increasingly active role of municipalities.

The discussion was then continued in the form of two round tables whose objective was to foster an exchange of ideas with the audience. The first roundtable examined the way in which the immigration continuum is being approached from the point of view of its actors. Over the last few years, policies and initiatives have put a lot of emphasis on the idea of a continuum in Francophone immigration. The idea of continuum implies that we provide support to immigrants on their path leading up to the moment where they obtain Canadian citizenship. What are the challenges and the opportunities associated with implementing a pathway for Francophone immigrants? What are the best practices for collaboration between Francophone and Anglophone settlement services? How do immigrants experience this continuum? Does the community sector have access to data on the journey of newcomers? What are the impacts on their respective roles and the capacities of minority Francophone communities? Through the experiences and knowledge of different stakeholders we tried to shed some light on those questions, notably by considering some of the specificities of the different

journeys of immigrants, but also by discussing integration into minority Francophone communities.

The second roundtable was about the challenges of research on immigration in minority Francophone communities. Even if there is interest within the research community towards the study of issues related to immigration and diversity in minority Francophone communities, researchers working in that field are faced by challenges on many different levels: financial, structural, thematic. What kind of research and data do we lack? What are the knowledge gaps that we should we prioritize? The discussion started out between a few panelists and was broadened to include audience members; we discussed possible avenues for reinforcing research capacities and encouraging a new generation of researchers to get involved. Many issues have surfaced from our discussion. First of all, being able to do research depends on stable financial support. It is important to note that in the context of the new roadmap for linguistic duality, some funds have been allocated to research on official language communities in minority situations. Secondly, research depends on the researcher's involvement in the process of knowledge generation. On one hand the researcher needs to assess his commitment towards exploring issues that respond to the needs of members of the community. On the other hand, the researcher has the moral obligation to ask the questions that no one wants to ask and to put forward analyses that might diverge from the dominant discourse. From this perspective, the emphasis put on fostering a new generation of researchers is a priority because it allows for a diversified discourse to develop and through the discussions generated that day we were able to see the pertinence of working beyond the scope of the Francophone community in order to bring new perspectives on Francophone immigration.

In conclusion, it is important to remind ourselves that research has to respond to the needs of the community. The fact that research has to be useful to community stakeholders is a crucial consideration that seems to sometimes not be fully understood by funding agencies. One of the greatest achievements of the Metropolis project was to establish a relationship based on trust between researchers, policy makers and the community and the development of a common language. The challenge now is to ensure that this trust blossoms and leads to a fruitful collaboration.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration. Public Policy and Public Concern*, Montreal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972

<sup>2</sup> Diane Farmer and Emanuel Da Silva, *Vitalité des milieux, vitalité des parcours. Réflexions sur l'évolution de la recherche sur l'immigration Francophone en milieu minoritaire*, Centre de recherches en éducation franco-ontarienne (CREFO), 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Nicole Gallant and Chedly Belkhdja, "Production d'un discours sur l'immigration et la diversité par les organismes Francophones et acadiens au Canada", *Études ethniques du Canada*, vol.37, no. 3, p. 35-58.

<sup>4</sup> Christophe Traisnel and Isabelle Violette, "Qui ça, nous? La questions des identités multiples dans l'aménagement d'une représentation de la francophonie en Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick" (with Isabelle Violette), in *Produire et reproduire la francophonie en la nommant*, Nathalie Berger, Nicolas Garant et alii (dir.), Sudbury: Prises de parole, p. 101-122, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Raffaele Iacovino and Rémi Léger, "Francophone Minority Communities and Immigrant Integration in Canada: Rethinking the Normative Foundations", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Volume 45, Number 1-2, 2013, pp. 95-114.

<sup>6</sup> Monica Heller. *Paths to Post-Nationalism. A critical Ethnography of Language and Identity*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Violette, Isabelle (to be published) "Discours, représentations et nominations: le rapport au "chiac" chez les immigrants Francophones à Moncton (Acadie)", *Vues sur les français du Canada*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval.

<sup>8</sup> Erin Tolley and Robert Young (dir.), *Immigrant Settlement Policy in Canadian Municipalities*, Montréal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Aude Claire Fourot, *L'intégration des immigrants. Cinquante ans d'action publique locale*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2013.