

Immigrant settlement in rural Nova Scotia: Impacting the location decisions of newcomers

Margot Bégin-Gillis, Ec.D. (F)

Immigration attraction and retention efforts can be an important tool for economic development in small and rural centres. This paper argues the techniques used to directly target immigrants to the Colchester Region of Nova Scotia could be employed by similar centres throughout Canada to positively impact economic development by addressing labour market issues and skill shortages. Through interviews with recent immigrants to Colchester and a data comparison with immigration trends in Manitoba, the author demonstrates how social networking, effective marketing and communications and providing enhanced information on employment can significantly influence the perception and geographic dispersion of immigrants.

Keywords: immigration, small and rural centres, geographic settlement.

Introduction

Most immigrants to Canada continue to settle in large gateway cities. More than 75% of all immigrants coming to Canada have traditionally settled in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) figures. The natural decline in population of small and rural centres across Canada has led to an interest in recent years in using immigration as a tool of economic development. This paper will focus on the immigrant attraction and retention efforts of the Colchester Region of Nova Scotia in its efforts to contribute to positive economic growth through the attraction of people, skills and investment and provide a qualitative analysis of their efforts to influence location decisions of immigrants.

While there remains some dispute over whether or not immigration or immigrant attraction can be effectively used as a tool of economic development, the research undertaken for this paper is based on the assumption that under the right conditions, it can. Increasingly, it can be an important tool of economic development for small and rural centres.

Existing research supports the theory that a wider dispersal of immigrants to small and rural centres could reduce the pressures imposed by aging populations, out-migration and skill shortages. Additionally, a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrant settlement could contribute to promoting multiculturalism in smaller centres and increase the political weight of rural Canada. (Card, 2001; Reitz, 2001; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2001). In

recognition of these potential opportunities, the Colchester Region incorporated immigrant attraction and retention into its overall strategy for economic growth and development in 2003.

Attracting immigrants is based on a region or community's ability to influence the location decisions of prospective immigrants. Location decisions are influenced primarily by three key factors: social connections (the presence of family or friends); employment or business prospects; and pre-migration perceptions in influencing location decisions. The Colchester Region approach posited that certain of these factors could be influenced to the benefit of the region's overall economic development through direct intervention. While clearly, it is not possible to impact the pre-existence of family in a given area, the Colchester approach is based on the view that social connections and friendships could be actively facilitated through active social networking. Pre-migration perception could be influenced by effective marketing and communications and while the availability of employment and business opportunities could not be directly influenced, access to information about those opportunities could be enhanced.

Recent migrants to Colchester were surveyed to gauge the impact of this direct intervention on their decision to locate in the region. The qualitative data gathered suggests that this intervention had a significant impact on the location choices of many immigrants. The data further suggests that small and rural centres throughout Canada may be able to employ similar techniques to influence geographic dispersion of immigrants and to positively impact economic development through the attraction of people, skills and investment.

Background

The county of Colchester is located in the central Northern region of Nova Scotia. The population of the region is 51,000 with the greatest concentration of people (11, 500) located in the Truro area. Colchester's key economic sectors are light manufacturing, agriculture, and transportation and distribution (Table 1). There are large public sector employers in health care and education. It is home to two public and two private post-secondary educational institutions.

Truro is considered to be 'metro-adjacent' due to its proximity to Halifax (approximately 100 kms away). Average home prices in Colchester are approximately \$170,000. This is below the Nova Scotian average of \$206,668 and well below the average for Canada's major cities which represent key immigrant destinations.

The diversified economy of Nova Scotia and of the Colchester region in particular has cushioned the impact of the recent recession. While some participants in the local manufacturing sector (particularly those who export heavily to the US) have experienced decline in 2008-2009, others have continued to expand and have been able to absorb the surplus labour.

Colchester has experienced a larger than average increase in immigration during the past census period (2001-2006) and much of this increase has been attributed to attraction and retention efforts at the community level. (Chronicle Herald, June 2008) Colchester is home to immigrants from more than 40 countries around the world, yet immigrants from any one country of origin are not present in sufficient numbers to constitute an ‘ethnic community’ in the usual sense. The Korean ‘community’, for example, currently consists of two families. The largest ethnic cohorts are from Lebanon, Iran and the UK.

Table 1: Employment statistics for the Colchester region

Characteristics	Colchester County			Nova Scotia		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Industry						
Total Experienced labour force	25,160	13,245	11,915	468,590	242,580	226,005
Agriculture and other resource-based industries	1,460	1,135	325	27,400	22,180	5,220
Construction industries	1,685	1,510	165	29,965	27,200	2,765
Manufacturing industries	3,575	2,310	1,270	41,710	30,090	11,620
Wholesale trade	1,470	1,120	345	16,440	11,545	4,895
Retail trade	3,285	1,455	1,825	58,565	24,400	34,165
Finance and real estate	740	340	400	21,355	8,680	12,675
Health care and social services	2,365	340	2,025	54,695	9,460	45,235
Educational services	1,875	670	1,205	34,690	11,635	23,055
Business services	3,905	2,265	1,645	80,930	47,340	33,585
Other services	4,790	2,085	2,705	102,840	50,045	52,795
Occupation						
Total Experienced labour force	25,160	13,245	11,915	468,590	242,580	226,005
Management occupations	2,015	1,200	810	41,700	25,430	16,270
Business, finance and administration	3,835	1,055	2,775	79,440	21,210	58,230
Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	885	725	160	25,025	19,975	5,050

Health occupations	1,360	215	1,145	31,120	5,570	25,555
Social science, education, government services, religion	2,000	675	1,325	39,350	13,170	26,180
Art, culture, recreation, sport	405	130	275	12,740	5,440	7,300
Sales and service occupations	6,525	2,445	4,080	122,870	49,815	73,050
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	4,835	4,555	285	69,965	66,445	3,525
Occupations unique to primary industry	1,320	1,075	245	24,490	20,805	3,685
Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing and utilities	1,975	1,165	810	21,890	14,720	7,170

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006

As a smaller centre, it lacks some of the settlement infrastructure seen in larger urban centres such as language training centres and exclusively immigrant serving agencies such as the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Agency located in Halifax. Settlement services are typically provided through existing service providers and volunteers which are coordinated through the Colchester Regional Development Agency. There is 'buy-in' at the local and municipal level supporting the attraction of immigrants to the area. Immigrant attraction and settlement support is a core function of the Colchester Regional Development Agency and this activity is funded equally by federal, provincial and municipal partners.

Research Methodology

Twenty-six semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with immigrant clients of the Colchester Regional Development Agency. The study group was a nonprobabilistic purposive sampling of existing clients who had made the decision to attempt a move to the Colchester Region. When contacted, the immigrants were at various stages of the immigration process. They had applied under a variety of immigration streams and came from ten different countries of origin. Of the twenty-six, nine had completed the immigration process and

permanently settled in the region. Three had decided not to move to the Colchester area and the remaining fourteen were in the process of relocating to the Colchester region.

The interviews focused on the factors that influenced their decision to locate (or not) to the Colchester region and the role of particular groups/agencies in assisting or initiating immigration.

The respondents ranged in age from 27 to 48 years and came from the following countries of origin listed (Table 2).

Findings

Employment/Business opportunities

While the ability to earn a living remains a key consideration for almost all respondents, there was a strong demonstration of flexibility in terms of the type or location of employment.

Q: How important is it that you are able to connect with employment or a business opportunity?

Table 2: Origin countries of Colchester survey respondents

Country of Origin	Number of Respondents
United Kingdom	16
United States	2
Netherlands	1
Korea	1
Ukraine	1
Mexico	1
Israel	1
India	1
France	1
Honduras	1

A: Although there might not be a lot of job openings in this exact field of work, there are regularly job openings for IT-business analysts in the region to which my husband could apply. (Immigrant from Netherlands, August 2009)

A: Companies in my industry are currently undergoing province-wide expansion and re-structuring, so there is a strong possibility of vacancies in the very near future. If I wasn't able to

get a job in Truro, I would consider commuting from Colchester County to Halifax if I were offered employment in the Halifax area. I would prefer to live in Colchester even if I was employed somewhere else. (Immigrant from Mexico, July 2009)

A: I am a fully qualified and very experienced chef/catering manager. I have been in the industry for the past 17 years. I have worked my way up the career ladder which gives me a greater advantage within the catering industry as I have experience within every aspect, from pot washer to executive chef. In the winter months when my work load is reduced I often volunteer my services to local schools demonstrating how to cook various healthy dishes to the children and their parents. I would be willing to look at any and all opportunities relating to my skills in order to successfully establish myself in the region. (Immigrant from UK, January 2009)

Lifestyle/Safety/Security

While the ability to connect with employment or business opportunities was cited as a key factor for most respondents, four of the respondents indicated that they would work outside of their current career path in order to establish themselves in the community and provide a better life for their families.

Q: What factors influenced your decision to locate in Colchester?

A: I want something better for my children. People are so friendly here and helpful. I want my children to be able to go to a good school, to play outside and be involved in activities that they wouldn't have access to at home. I'm happy to work at Wal-Mart. I'll do whatever it takes. (Immigrant from UK, June 2009)

A: There is a relaxed and laid back feel with an emphasis on family life and community spirit which is very important to us. We will be able to purchase a well sized property with a garden. The schooling system is of a high standard along with the health care system. We feel as a family that we are making the right decision in moving to Nova Scotia and feel that our children will be safer with lots of opportunities in the future. (Immigrant from UK, January 2009)

A: In the future when we have settled down we would like to have children. For us this is one of the reasons why we started thinking about migration, as we do not want to raise our children in the Netherlands. We think that a rural area, like Colchester, is a very good place to raise children. We also heard about the good quality of education that is available in Nova Scotia. (Immigrant from Netherlands, August 2009)

A: We wish to be in a place where there is a stronger sense of community, and with a tranquility that comes from a slower pace of life. Mexico has very little organised charity, a very restricted

ethos of voluntary service and a very inward-looking, family focused view of one's place in the community. Whilst the focus on one's family is not a bad thing, it excludes much else that may be of greater mutual benefit. (Immigrant from Mexico, July 2009)

Housing/Land availability

Q: What factors influenced your decision to locate in Colchester?

A: My long term aim is to purchase farm land and to engage in sustainable, organic crop and livestock farming. Nova Scotia offers the unique opportunity to pursue my career in finance while providing me with access to affordable tracts of arable land within short distances of urban amenities. Land scarcity and real estate prices in the UK would make this type of venture impossible for someone in my position. (Immigrant from UK, May 2008)

A: Housing is affordable here. We have a beautiful home, but we aren't under the same pressures we would be at home to earn enough to maintain our lifestyle. I earn less than I did in my previous job, but I have more time for my family and am still able to make ends meet. (Immigrant from UK, May 2009)

Social connections

Only three of the respondents had family connections in the region. One respondent had made friends while vacationing in another country. Respondents tended to speak more about their overall impressions of the level of friendliness and the degree to which they felt welcomed than about specific pre-existing connections to the region.

Q: Did social connections influence your decision to locate in the Colchester region?

A: Yes, my sister lives here. I visited four years ago and wanted to move here ever since. (Immigrant from Ukraine, August 2009)

A: No. We were introduced to some people during our first visit who have become friends, but it had more to do with the help and support we received through the immigration process. We would not have moved here if it were not for Margot and the staff at CoRDA. (Immigrant from UK, May 2008)

A: We met a group of Canadians while vacationing in Cuba. We came over to visit them and fell in love with the place. (Immigrant from UK, July 2009)

Settlement support

Settlement support programs were not specifically cited as a key factor in influencing the location decisions of the respondents. Many of the respondents were English speaking and required very little in terms of the traditional forms of settlement support. Those that did require language training, for example, tended to be the respondents who had family in the area. In those instances, their location decision had more to do with the presence of family than of their knowledge of existing settlement support programs.

Q: How did the availability (or lack thereof) of settlement support initiatives influence your decision to locate in the Colchester region?

A: We knew very little about what was here when we came. We talked to CoRDA and they were so helpful. They helped us to find a job and my husband takes English classes now. (Immigrant from Ukraine, August 2009)

A: I initially came to this area on a work permit. It wasn't until I spoke with Margot at CoRDA that I realized that it might be possible for us to immigrate permanently. My partner will require ESL, but it was more important that we find somewhere that was willing to accept us. (Immigrant from US, November 2008)

Support through the immigration process

This was cited as a key factor of influence for all respondents. Even respondents who had chosen not to locate in the Colchester region acknowledged the importance of having someone to answer questions and to provide support through the often stressful application process. Many also cited the importance of personal intervention in connecting with employment and in establishing social ties. The most significant finding with respect to this factor of influence and the one that follows, '*Access to Information*,' was that many of the respondents would not have located in the Colchester region without it.

Q: How did support through the immigration process influence your decision to locate in Colchester?

A: The major thing was having your support. It's hard when dealing with embassy officials, because you can't speak to them directly. You're left wondering. It was great to have you on the other end of a phone to talk things through. It alleviated a lot of the stress. (Immigrant from the UK, May 2008)

A: We didn't know where to start. CoRDA helped us to find a job and they made us feel welcome. Without CoRDA, I think we would have had many more problems. (Immigrant from Ukraine, August 2009)

A: After moving here from the UK, it seems to me that people in Colchester work together. They make progress. They're people oriented. CoRDA was instrumental in helping me discover that. (Immigrant from UK, May 2008)

A: We couldn't have got this far without you so THANKS!
(Immigrant from UK, January 2009)

A: It's quite difficult to learn about a new community from far away. We would never have completed such a thorough investigation into Truro on our own. Without your help I doubt we would have come to the decision that Truro is right for us. We did like Halifax, but our last couple of days there showed us that it wasn't really our ideal location. Meeting school officials and seeing inside some of the homes that were for sale helped show the children and us what Truro had to offer. (Immigrant from UK, March 2008)

A: We have to thank you so much for all the help, advice and time you gave to us during our exploratory visit. It wasn't expected, so thanks very much indeed. It was a great help and knowing there is help on hand when needed is a great comfort. (Immigrant from UK, May 2008)

Access to information

Q: How did access to information influence your decision to locate in the Colchester region?

A: We can't thank you enough for taking the time to speak to us and subsequently supporting our application. We never would've been able to do this if we hadn't learned about the Community Identified Stream through you. (Immigrant from UK, Jan 2009)

A: I would never have even considered Colchester if I had not met you at the immigration fair at Sandown. I was originally planning to move to Toronto or Vancouver and had never really considered Nova Scotia. Through your help I was able to learn about business opportunities and make some friends. This is a much better fit for me. (Immigrant from UK, May 2008)

A: We were so depressed when we first met you. We thought that we had no hope of moving to Canada. Other people had told us that Canada didn't need people with our qualifications. It was like a breath of fresh air to learn that Nova Scotia had opportunities for us. It never would've been possible without your help. (Immigrant from UK, March 2008)

A: When we learned that we didn't qualify under the Federal Skilled Worker Stream we were so disappointed. We were ready to give up when we met you at Utrecht. You explained the

Nominee Program and it was perfect for us. We can't wait to start our new life in Colchester. (Immigrant from Netherlands, August 2009)

A: We had visited Vancouver and Calgary and we knew that wasn't for us. We would have never considered Nova Scotia if we had not met you and learned about all it has to offer. When we visited, the people were so friendly and welcoming. We knew this was for us. (Immigrant from Honduras, August 2009)

A: Never underestimate the importance of the support and friendly advice that you provide. Without it, we would not have considered the Colchester region and I am sure many others feel the same. (Immigrant from UK, July 2009)

Other factors of influence

There was some indication that geographic affinity and proximity to a larger urban centre played a role in the location decision of respondents, "I wouldn't live somewhere that didn't have hills." (Immigrant from UK, March 2009). Typically, however, these factors were of lesser importance. The respondents would not have based their location decision on geography alone. If employment and support through the immigration process were not present, for example, a geographic affinity would not have been sufficient to prompt any one of the respondents to choose to locate in Colchester.

Analysis

Existing research on the location choices of immigrants to Canada clearly identifies the existence of family or friends as one of the most important factors influencing immigrants in their choice of settlement location (Longitudinal Survey on Immigrants to Canada 2003). Various data suggest that between 44% and 59% of immigrants cite proximity to family or friends as the most important factor of influence. The availability of employment or business opportunities is the next most important factor of influence. After that, the factors vary.

Teo (2003) describes how perceptions of destination play a role in shaping migration patterns. The pre-migration transfer of information to immigrants prior to their arrival in Canada also has an influence on location decisions. (Mahler 1995; Abu-Laban et al., 1999; Teo, 2003). Destinations that are well known to prospective immigrants (such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) receive the greatest number of immigrants. Immigrants move to places they know. (Bauder and DiBiase, 2005)

There have been numerous examples of cities and regions that have been able to implement successful marketing and communication strategies and influence the pre-migration perceptions about their communities and lifestyles. The Colchester strategy was based on the tenet that, 'if

people move to places they know, increasing their knowledge of the Colchester region will positively impact our ability to attract immigrants.’ Multiple authors have cited the importance of this access to general information from both an attraction and retention perspective. (Abu-Laban et al., 1999; Hrovat, Gambrah and Barbour, 2004) Access to this information can be enhanced through internet and direct marketing outreach programs. To that end, representatives of the region have been participating in a variety of overseas immigrant attraction fairs for the past four years.

It stands to reason that if location decisions of immigrants are linked to their perception of places before their departure, (Bauder and Di Biase, 2005) then those decisions can be influenced by providing information of the anticipated future benefits of a given location.

Community case studies on immigration to rural Manitoba revealed that personal ties and connection to a ‘human face’ can also increase the likelihood of immigration. Though immigrants will continue to settle in rural areas in small numbers, a carefully planned and strategic intervention has the potential to impact immigration flows and settlement patterns. (Silvius, 2005) These findings have been borne out in the Colchester experience. Census data reveals an increase in immigration to the region that coincides with the development and implementation of an active immigrant attraction and retention program.

While major urban centres continue to attract the most immigrants, it is not always for the reasons that one might assume. Successful attraction and retention is linked to the existing social and economic context of a region, but it is not necessarily determined by the size of the community. (Walton-Roberts 2005) Immigrants do not choose Toronto simply because it is bigger or because it is a large urban centre, for example. Setting aside those migrants who base their location decision purely on the basis of the presence of family or social connections, it is useful to consider some of the other factors at play. While urban living may appeal to some prospective migrants and some may choose a more densely populated area because of the perception that it will offer expanded employment opportunities, many immigrants choose Toronto simply because that is all they know of Canada. The experience of rural Manitoba and now of rural Nova Scotia is showing that in situations where prospective immigrants are provided with more information and provided with more choices, they often choose differently.

Earlier discussions of the regionalization of immigration have focused on such factors as critical mass, linguistic enclaves, familial ties and educational, cultural and economic opportunities as the key determining factors influencing immigrant settlement / location choice. (Metropolis, 2003) While these factors may be important for some, current evidence in the Colchester region suggests that they are less important for others. Immigration is continuing to increase despite the lack of critical mass, linguistic enclaves and in many cases, familial ties. This suggests that there are other factors at work.

In 2002, the then Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada made the assertion that the capacity existed to deliver effective immigrant attraction and retention programs through multi-jurisdictional partnerships with federal, provincial, and territorial governments, as well as the non-governmental sector.

A multi-sectoral capacity assists newcomers through a settlement continuum that begins with information to immigrants overseas, through orientation and adaptation services in Canada to the acquisition of citizenship (Dorais, 2002).

This type of multi-jurisdictional partnership exists on a small scale in the Colchester region. It relies heavily on the existence of a Provincial Nominee Program through which regional development authorities are mandated to deliver certain aspects of the immigration program in partnership with the provincial government. A significant challenge has been that very little public funding exists to provide local settlement services and there are no public funding programs to support the attraction and marketing efforts needed to influence location decisions through outreach and or direct marketing efforts.

Though the findings suggest that the existence of settlement services may not significantly impact location decisions, their absence will most certainly impact retention. Consider, for example, the impact on a newcomer who requires language training, but is unable to access that service. It is likely that this would impact that newcomer's ability to successfully connect with employment. Without a means to generate income, the retention of that newcomer in a community would be unlikely.

Colchester survey respondents were not specifically asked about the factors that influence retention due to the fact that many had only recently settled in the area, but it stands to reason that the ability of a community to retain immigrants over the long term is as important as its ability to attract them. In the context of economic development, a successful immigrant attraction strategy implies the ability to retain the skills and investment that immigrants bring over the long term.

In 2005, the National Working Group on Small Centre Strategies released "Attracting & Retaining Immigrants: A Tool Box of Ideas for Smaller Centres". Colchester's immigrant attraction and retention strategy was, in fact, based on early drafts of this document that focused on the importance of creating a 'welcoming community'. In this context, a 'welcoming community' is defined as one that is not only ready to receive newcomers, but one that also has the programs, services, facilities and employment in place to help them become part of the community. The current version of the Tool Box document describes a welcoming community as one that respects diversity, has accessible public services, has a range of educational opportunities, promotes health and wellness for all, is safe, invites newcomers to share leisure-

time activities, and acknowledges faith and spirituality (National Working Group on Small Centre Strategies, 2007).

The challenge for smaller centres is that they often lack the resources, both human and financial to systematically address these welcoming community priorities. They are unlikely to be able to provide the range of settlement and integration supports offered by immigrant-serving agencies and settlement organizations in larger urban centres. Historically, access to funding for these types of activities has been limited. Federal funding through Citizenship and Immigration Canada for programs that help connect newcomers to the community (Host Program) and provide language instruction (LINC Programs) are based on a rolling average of total immigration to a given province in previous years. As a result, this figure lags any increases in immigrant attraction, creating a strain on immigrant serving agencies when immigrant numbers rise. Funding is also most often concentrated solely in urban centres where immigrant concentration is greatest.

Nova Scotia's "Framework for Immigration" prepared in 2004 listed five provincial priorities to support the development of welcoming communities that focused on embracing diversity, awareness and education. To date, however, there has not been a coordinated provincial effort to advance these priorities. Limited, project-based funding has been made available to individual regions on an intermittent basis. Assuming that the Nova Scotian experience is not atypical of the rest of Canada, small and rural centres will not be able to rely wholly on outside funding or resources to advance their immigrant attraction and retention aims.

Recognizing these challenges, retention efforts in Colchester rely heavily on volunteers. Beginning in 2003, a grassroots approach was adopted that recognized the need for sustainability within an environment of limited resources. Colchester sought to develop an approach to becoming a welcoming community (and thereby supporting immigrant retention) that could be replicated in other small centres with similar resource limitations.

The overall approach has been based on the goal of expanding the capacity of existing programs and service providers rather than creating new (and potentially less sustainable ones).

The connection to employment or economic opportunity is both a factor of attraction and of retention over the long term. While larger centres may have employment search resources housed specifically in immigrant-serving agencies, for example, efforts in Colchester have focused on partnering with existing employment and career resource agencies to expand their existing mandates to include immigrants. These organizations already possess expertise in job-search skills that are relevant to Canadian-born job seekers and immigrants alike. An example of one way in which the capacity of these organizations has been expanded is the creation of a roster of volunteer interpreters. The roster is maintained by the regional development agency who then partners with the relevant employment support organization to connect with

interpreters as required. This enables the employment support organization to provide services in a variety of languages at no extra cost.

Colchester has also taken advantage of existing programs such as the International Day for the Elimination of Racism and Canadian Multiculturalism Day to leverage resources that support diversity awareness activities. Ongoing educational and awareness activities that promote inclusion and celebration of diversity are an essential part of readying a community to become more welcoming and supportive of immigrant attraction efforts.

Currently in Colchester the largest number of immigrants is arriving from English-speaking countries such as the UK and US. These immigrants are typically not visible minorities and integration is aided by the existing similarities in culture. From an economic development perspective, these immigrants represent the 'easiest win' for a small rural centre. They bring skills and investment and help to mitigate the impacts of both an aging population and out-migration. Their settlement needs are minimal and their integration requires less of a cultural shift on the part of the host community than might be the case for a visible minority.

The work of Dr. Richard Florida and others suggests that communities hoping to attract innovation and the *creative class* will need to move beyond the 'easy wins' to attract and retain a broad range of cultures and ethnicities (Florida, 2002). Small and rural centres hoping to attract these immigrants must recognize that they will need to expand their welcoming community initiatives and settlement support programs accordingly.

Conclusion

The analysis of recent immigration trends in rural Manitoba, together with the qualitative analysis of recent immigration to the Colchester region, supports the theory that location decisions of prospective immigrants can be influenced for the benefit of small and rural centres. (This assertion pre-supposes that the small or rural centre views immigration as a positive influence on their ability to meet their economic growth and development goals).

Small and rural centres who seek to attract immigrants must ensure that they have adequate settlement and employment support as well as access to ESL when required. A commitment must exist at the municipal or regional level to ensure that these basic settlement support programs exist. There must also be an allocation of resources for the provision of or access to information and support through the immigration process. Without this, immigration to small and rural centres will continue to occur, but it will be on a much smaller scale.

Prospective immigrants to Canada will sometimes make their location decision based on the availability of assistance that allows them to successfully navigate the immigration system.

Smaller centres that are able to provide accurate information and guidance about immigration programs and process increase their chances of attracting newcomers to their area.

Prospective immigrants make location choices based on pre-existing perceptions of a place. Immigrants are typically unwilling to move to places they know nothing about. Providing accurate and accessible information about a location and its associated benefits will positively impact the attraction of migrants to that area.

Location choices are still predominantly made based on the presence of social connections. Allocating resources to a support person or organization to act as a ‘friendly face’ and knowledgeable point of contact when inquiries arise will increase the ability to influence location decisions.

While there is little that a small or rural centre can do to influence the availability of employment, the provision of accurate and timely information about employment options and / or business opportunities can positively influence location decisions.

Those small and rural centres where employment and / or business opportunities exist who are committed to allocating at least some resources toward the provision of support and information can impact the location decisions of prospective immigrants.

Despite the small sample size and relatively short duration of immigrant attraction efforts in Colchester, the Colchester experience supports the theory that by targeting attraction (information and support) efforts to meet existing labour market needs and by working to be a welcoming community, small and rural centres can look to immigrant attraction as an effective tool of economic development.

Author Biography

Margot Bégin-Gillis currently serves as the Director of Workforce and People Development with the Colchester Regional Development Agency in Truro, Nova Scotia. Margot joined CoRDA in March of 2003 and was charged with defining and implementing a range of “People Attraction” initiatives focusing on youth, families, and immigrant attraction. Margot has designed a successful immigrant attraction approach for small and rural communities and is trained in facilitation of the Toolbox of Ideas for Attracting and Retaining Immigrants to smaller centres. The Colchester region currently has a robust immigrant attraction and retention program that engages a wide variety of community volunteers for the delivery of settlement supports.

Her people attraction efforts on behalf of the Colchester Region have been recognized by a Special Order in Council in the Provincial Legislature in 2004 and in 2005, the Immigration Partnership led by Margot received an Award of Excellence in Community Economic Development from provincial and federal government partners.

Margot's EDAC certification journey began in Gander, Newfoundland where she completed her Year 1 and 2 studies with some of the finest in the economic development biz. She continues to enjoy the opportunity to learn from and connect with colleagues from across the country through EDAC events.

In her spare time Margot directs musical theatre and serves as Artistic Director of Truro Dance Academy; serving more than 300 young students from Truro and the surrounding area. Margot lives with her husband and two sons in Salmon River, Nova Scotia.

References

Abu-Laban, B. et al. (1999). The settlement experiences of refugees in Alberta. A study prepared for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Vol 1-3.

Aydemir, Abdurrahman. (2003). Effects of selection criteria and economic opportunities on the characteristics of immigrants. Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper 182. Ottawa, Canada: Statistics Canada.

Bauder, H. (2003, September 2). Newcomers: Get rich, go rural. *The Globe and Mail*.

Beshiri, Roland. (2004). Immigrants in rural Canada: 2001 Update. *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin*, (Vol. 5 (4) Catalogue no. 21-006-XIE). Ottawa, Canada: Statistics Canada.

Beshiri, Roland & Alfred, Emily. (2002). Immigrants in rural Canada: 2001 update. *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin* (Vol. 4 (2) Catalogue no. 21-006-XIE). Ottawa, Canada: Statistics Canada.

Bollman, R.D. (2002). Immigrants in rural Canada. *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin* (Vol. 4 (2) Catalogue no. 21-006-XIE). Ottawa, Canada: Statistics Canada.

Bruce, David. (2007). The challenges of immigration as a rural repopulation strategy in maritime Canada. In Bill Reimer (Eds.), *Our Diverse Cities*. No. 3, Summer, 90-96.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2001) Towards a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants. *Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada*. (ISBN 0-662-31552-9).

Clemenson, Heather A. & Pitblado, J. Roger. (2007). Recent trends in rural urban migration. In Bill Reimer (Eds.) *Our Diverse Cities*. No. 3, Summer, 25-29.

Fontana, Joe. (2003). Feeling at home: Settlement and integration – A sense of belonging. *Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration*.

Florida, Richard. (2002). *The Rise of the creative class and how it's transforming work, leisure and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.

Green, A., & Green, D. (1996). The economic goals of Canada's immigration policy, past present. (Working paper no. 96-04). Vancouver, Canada: RIMM.

Hou, Feng. (2005). The initial destinations and redistribution of Canada's major immigrant groups: Changes over the past two decades, (Statistics Canada, 11F00119MIF, no. 255).

Krauss, C. (2002, October 2). Canada lures immigrants to restock rural areas. *Chicago Tribune*, p.6.

Mahler, S.J. (1995). *American dreaming: Immigrant life in the margins*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association. (2003, December 8). Immigrants: A World of Experience.

National Working Group on Small Centre Strategies. (2007). Attracting and retaining immigrants: A tool box of ideas for smaller centres.

Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. (2004, August). A Framework for Immigration. Discussion paper.

Silvius, Ray. (2005). Issues in rural immigration: Lessons, challenges and responses. *Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies*, Brandon, Canada: Rural Development Institute.

Soroka, Stuart, Johnston, Richard & Banting, Keith. (2007). Ties that bind? Social cohesion and diversity in Canada. *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, Montreal, Canada: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Statistics Canada. (2003). Longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada, (Catalogue no. 89-611-XIE).

Teo, S.Y. (2003). *Imagining Canada: The cultural logics of migration amongst PRC immigrants.* (Paper no. 03-16), Vancouver, Canada: Working Vancouver, RIIM.

Walton-Roberts, M. (2004). *Regional immigration and dispersal: Lessons from small and medium-sized urban centres in British Columbia.* (Working paper no. 04-03), Vancouver, Canada: RIIM.