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A case study of recent immigrants to Colchester County, Nova Scotia

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Rural Immigrants Who Come to Stay

A case study of recent immigrants to Colchester County, Nova Scotia

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Abstract/Résumé: The case study finds that immigrants are usually first attracted to this rural region through personal relationships or family ties with area residents, and that the strength of these ties correlates with the likelihood that immigrants will remain. Other findings are that immigrants who are visible minorities, immigrants who have difficulties with English, and immigrants who are female have the most difficulties integrating into the community and that immigrant professionals have difficulties with credential recognition. The report develops a typology of immigrants who arrived with different expectations and faced different problems. Data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with thirty immigrants.

Keywords/Mots-clefs: immigration, rural, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, case study, attraction, retention

Introduction

Colchester County is located just north of Halifax County and stretches from Cobequid Bay in the southwest to the Northumberland Strait in the north. Almost half the county's 49,305 residents are concentrated in the Truro-Bible Hill area. The rest of the population is scattered widely in many small villages and rural areas. The landscape ranges from rolling agricultural land in the south to forested mountains and seashore in the north. The manufacturing sector is the largest employer in the region, followed by retail sales and health and social welfare occupations. Only about six percent of the workforce is employed in the traditional rural occupations of farming, forestry and fishing.

Colchester County's population has grown slightly in the last decade, but it has also aged. The county's birth rate is declining, and the number of younger working aged people (20 to 40 years old) has fallen in both relative and absolute terms, a trend that is expected to continue in the future (Canmac 2003). An aging population coupled with a shrinking younger work force clearly challenges the county's plans for economic growth. One possible way to meet the challenge is to encourage immigrants to settle in the region. This is an attractive option since besides supplementing the work force immigrants often contribute new skills, ideas, resources, and investment capital. But Colchester County has a very small immigrant population (1610, or 3.3% of the total population) and the number of immigrants coming to Colchester County is declining. Only about 15% (240) of these immigrants arrived in the decade between 1991 and 2001, the lowest influx of immigrants during any ten-year period since 1951-61. Yet many of the immigrants who do live in the County enjoy successful careers, make significant contributions to their communities, and seem relatively satisfied with life in the region. I undertook this research project to find out more about these people.

People decide to come to Canada for many reasons. Every immigrant arrives with a unique set of hopes and expectations. The great majority of Canada's immigrants settle in Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal (Statistics Canada 2003) and most of Nova Scotia's immigrants settle in the Halifax area (Akbari and Dar 2005), but every year a handful of immigrants choose to start a new life in Colchester County. What factors attracted them to Colchester County, and what factors kept them there? What obstacles do they encounter during immigration process itself and afterwards? Are there ways to make Colchester County a more "welcoming community"? Since most recent immigrants to Canada have settled in urban areas there are relatively few contemporary studies of immigrants to rural regions. Most of these studies focus on the issues of "attraction" and "retention". Some studies differentiate among immigrants according to their immigration category, their professional skills, or their country of origin. No studies that I am aware of classify or "type" immigrants to rural areas with reference to their hopes and expectations. My intention is to address this gap in the literature.

If Colchester County hopes to attract –and retain - more immigrants it would be useful to know what sorts of people to be looking for, and where and how they might be found. Retention is of primary importance. A recent report indicates that more than six out of ten recent immigrants to Nova Scotia leave the province within five years of arriving (Akbari and Dar 2005). Life in rural and small-town Nova Scotia is not for everyone. On the other

hand many different kinds of people live in Colchester County so it can be expected that people find life in the area satisfying for different reasons. This study begins with the assumption that *different kinds* of people are attracted to Colchester County for *different reasons*: immigrants arrive here with distinctly different hopes and expectations. Following this logic it can be imagined that the people most likely to remain – and those upon whom recruitment efforts should be focused - are those whose hopes and expectations are realistic and most closely match conditions “on the ground.” With this in mind I have developed a typology of immigrants to facilitate recognition of people most likely to adapt to life in this region.

Research methodology

The research design was qualitative rather than quantitative. It was based on informal observations and semi-structured, open-ended interviews with a limited number of respondents rather than on statistics and structured surveys with a predetermined range of responses. As part of my research I attended the monthly Immigration Partnership meetings at the Colchester Regional Development Agency (CoRDA) and I participated in two immigration information sharing sessions in Truro sponsored respectively by the Nova Scotia Regional Development Agencies Association and the Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre and a cross-cultural awareness workshop sponsored by CoRDA. I visited an English as a Second Language (ESL) class for immigrants sponsored by the Colchester Adult Learning Association (CALA) where I talked with students and teachers. However most of the information for this report was obtained from open-ended interviews conducted in May and June of 2005 with thirty immigrants who had moved to Colchester County after 1991.

About the respondents

Members of the Colchester Immigration Partnership put me in touch with recent immigrants who were willing to be interviewed. I chose the interviewees to reflect the wide range of immigrants who have settled in Colchester County. Sixteen were women and fourteen were men. The youngest were in their early 20s and the oldest in their mid 60s. Fifteen of the respondents lived in or near the town of Truro and fifteen lived in more remote, rural parts of the county in the vicinities of Tatamagouche and Stewiacke. All but four of the respondents were married, and when possible I interviewed both partners in cases where both were immigrants. Of the seventeen married couples, eleven had immigrated as couples. All of the married couples had children, though the children of three older couples no longer lived at home.

The people I talked to were born in fifteen different countries. Thirteen were born in Europe, eight in Asia, four in South America, three in North America and two in Africa. “Country of birth” does not tell the whole story because the majority of the respondents were experienced world travelers: indeed eleven of them had immigrated to Canada from a country of residence other than their country of birth. Only four came as single persons, and one of these was sponsored by a child who had immigrated earlier. Six persons (five women and one man) had come to Colchester County specifically because they were married or engaged to someone already residing in the county.

The respondents were well-educated. All had completed high school, and all but three had some post-secondary education. Fourteen had university degrees, and, of these, five had graduate degrees. Ten others had college diplomas or some other form of technical certification and three had attended university or college but had not received a diploma. Prior to coming to Canada the respondents were engaged in a variety of occupations. One was a senior business manager and five had had occupations related to business, finance or administration. Four had been in retail sales and service, and four worked in social services or education. There were four health professionals, including two physicians. Three respondents had been employed in the natural or applied sciences, and five had previously been farmers. Three had worked in the skilled trades, and one in the arts. Only one respondent had not held a paying job immediately before coming to Canada. Altogether, six individuals had owned their own businesses, and two couples had operated farms.

Why they chose Colchester County

Nine of the respondents had not planned to settle in Colchester County when they arrived in Canada. Three had initially located in Toronto, two in Hamilton, one in Vancouver, one in New Brunswick, and three in Halifax. Of these nine, two were attracted to the Truro area because their spouse's parents lived there. The other seven came primarily because of better job opportunities, but five of these had relatives living in the area. Of the twenty-one persons who immigrated directly to Colchester County, six were attracted to the region because they had relatives living there. Eight had become interested in the area because friends from their home countries were already residing there. Five came to be with their fiancés or partners. One couple came because they were sponsored as refugees by a local church. In sum, twenty-eight of the thirty respondents became aware of Colchester County because they had a close personal connection with at least one County resident before they arrived.

Most respondents didn't decide to live in Colchester County just because a friend or relative lived there, or because they had been offered a job. They were also drawn by the promise of a better quality of life for themselves and their children. Respondents were most likely to mention the area's rural character as an important factor in their decision. They liked the fresh air, open space, sparse population, and relatively unspoiled natural areas. They often remarked on the strong sense of community that existed in the small towns and villages. Many felt it was a safer and healthier environment for their children.

“It was beautiful and wild! There were trees, there was space! The village was small and friendly. Everybody knows everybody. There's a certain atmosphere in the village that you don't find in many places anymore.”

The immigration process

At the time of the interviews six of the respondents had not actually completed the process of becoming permanent residents, though all but one seemed fairly confident that

they would be landed¹. Nine of the respondents had applied or were applying as business entrepreneurs – three had not yet been landed. Eight had been granted permanent residence through the points system. Six had been sponsored by a spouse and two by a family member. Two had landed as refugees, and three were provincial nominees. None of the provincial nominees had completed the immigration process when I spoke to them, though one had obtained a temporary work visa. All three were expecting to be landed in the near future.

Twenty-four of the respondents offered criticisms of the Canadian immigration system. The most common complaint was that the immigration process took such a long time, putting applicants' lives "on hold" while they awaited a decision. On average, respondents had to wait about a year and a half after submitting their application to receive landing papers, though several had waited more than three years. Applicants sponsored by family members or fiancés experienced the shortest waiting times and were usually able to enter Canada and obtain temporary work visas while they were waiting.

"It was a very hard time. It took two times as long as they said. It took about a year and a half. I shouldn't be complaining. I was very lucky in comparison to some people that I know now. But my life was on hold. I couldn't do anything. There was a period of eight months that I was in that situation."

"It was quite drawn out. Difficult in that they didn't tell you until the last minute. You don't know whether you have got in or not. So you can't make plans. And you can't work towards it. We handed in our paperwork in September and got a note back in November to say that they'd received it. You don't know where you're going. You can't call because they won't take your calls. So the immigration side is very taxing."

Respondents also criticized the complexity of the immigration process. Only one (a fiancé) was fortunate enough to be processed within Canada on "compassionate" grounds. The rest had to apply through a Canadian visa office outside of the country. This was of course problematic for individuals who were already residing in Canada when they made their applications, but it was also a problem for some of those who made their applications while still residing in their home countries. In recent years Canada has "rationalized" its immigration services by consolidating them. Canada now maintains relatively few visa offices abroad that are authorized to process immigration applications. For instance there are only five authorized offices in Western Europe (in London, Berlin, Vienna, Paris and Rome) so an applicant from the Netherlands must go through the office in Berlin, while an applicant from Norway must apply in London. Similarly, an applicant from Japan must apply in Manila, and all applicants from the United States must work through the visa office in Buffalo, New York. Thus, most potential immigrants are obliged to make their applications by mail and some respondents had encountered serious difficulties with this system. Several respondents reported that Canadian visa offices had

¹ Immigrants who have achieved permanent resident status in Canada are popularly referred to as "landed immigrants".

lost or mislaid important documents, and in one case a cashier's cheque for a substantial immigration fee was deposited but not credited to the applicant. Other respondents reported that receipt of their applications (and fee payments) was not formally acknowledged. It is quite impossible to contact an official in a visa office by telephone since each office is equipped with a voice mail system that only offers a menu of recorded messages. Therefore applicants are obliged to communicate by mail or fax, and some respondents reported that their letters and faxes were not answered in a timely fashion – if they were answered at all.

Finding employment

Twenty-two of the thirty respondents were engaged in paid work when I talked to them. Eighteen had full-time jobs and four had part-time jobs. Two of the people I talked to were looking for work, and one was a full-time homemaker who was not looking for paid employment. The five remaining respondents had not yet been granted visas that permitted them to work for pay, but all five were working nonetheless - without pay - in businesses they had set up themselves. Three of them owned retail businesses, and one couple had purchased a farm. None of the respondents were receiving support from employment insurance or social assistance.

Fourteen of the people I talked to (including the five without work permits) were self-employed, and twelve of them had arrived in Colchester County with the intention of setting up their own businesses. Six (three couples) had purchased farms and six (including two couples) had purchased or set up retail businesses. The other two were women who had turned to part-time self-employment when they were unable to find work in the professions for which they had been trained.

Nine of the respondents had found jobs in their areas of expertise. Most of these were professionals, including two physicians, two engineers, an educator and a natural scientist. Four other respondents were employed in entry-level jobs, two in factories and two part-time in supermarkets.

Investment does not guarantee landed status

Most of the people I talked to described difficulties they faced as they tried to establish a livelihood in Canada. Most of these difficulties were directly related to the fact that they were immigrants. Almost half of the respondents had addressed the livelihood problem by creating their own businesses, and twelve of these had invested substantial sums in their businesses, typically their life savings. Yet investing a substantial sum in a business, even in an economically depressed rural area, does not guarantee landed status or even a work visa, as five of the respondents discovered. Age was almost certainly a factor here, since three of them were over the age of fifty, and one couple were in their mid-forties. According to this couple:

“If they're wanting to attract immigrants, they're not serving the immigrants they wish to attract. That's the shame of it all. If we didn't want to be here so badly we would have thrown in the towel long ago. We're incredibly frustrated. By how long it takes, and because there's not

a person we can talk to. We don't really know the outcome, and yes, it really is a big risk. We have invested almost a quarter of a million dollars of our personal money in renovating this business.”

The rest of the entrepreneurs had immigrated when they were in their thirties, and none of them seemed to have experienced any difficulties getting a work visa once they had submitted their business plans. All of these young entrepreneurs were located in rural areas. Two couples had purchased farms, one couple had bought a butcher shop, and one individual operated a small restaurant. For most of the younger entrepreneurs the major challenge was simply to earn enough money from the enterprise to make ends meet.

Difficulties establishing credentials²

Despite their training and experience, nearly all of the professionals I talked to had had difficulty finding work in their field, and this was usually due to problems with credentials. Most of the professionals I talked to had not anticipated how little recognition they would get for their training and experience abroad.

“The biggest challenge was getting recognition for my credentials. Most immigrants are highly talented. They are enthusiastic. They're willing to work. They are willing to accept the challenge of the new. Most of them come in the middle part of their life. The midlife transition is hard for them and their families, but they still want to live here. I think we should develop some tool of assessment of their skills. The main thing is that we have no program to assess their skills and I think the focus should be on that. And I think if you focus on *retention*, keeping them in Nova Scotia, then bringing more immigrants will be less of an issue.”

The health professionals had the most problems with credential recognition. They included two males, both physicians, and two women: a midwife and a continuing care worker. Both physicians had to obtain Canadian medical credentials before they were allowed to practice, and this was time-consuming, expensive, and difficult. They had to take examinations similar to the ones they had taken in their home countries, but they had taken these exams years ago so this meant months of studying and the expenses of taking classes and paying for tutors and guided group study sessions. Not all exams could be taken locally so there were travel expenses, and the exams themselves were expensive. Once the physicians had passed the exams they had to go through the Clinical Assessment Practice Program (CAPP). Fortunately, as of June 2005, a branch of this program has been established in Nova Scotia so immigrating physicians no longer have to complete it out-of-province. The examination and assessment process could take a year or two and during this time the physician must find alternative employment to support his or her family. Once the process is completed, immigrant physicians must still find a position in a hospital residency program and a local physician willing to mentor them for a year.

² The issue of foreign credential recognition is dealt with extensively in the Spring 2007 edition of “Canadian Issues” published by the Association for Canadian Studies (see, for example, Guo 2007, Grant 2007).

“One of the things that most amazes me is that I know people from third world countries with no professional skills who came through with far less trouble with the paperwork. But you have well-educated and trained people with specialized skills that are in demand here and it is only *their* persistence to get in that makes the difference. Whereas really, as a country, you should be interested in people like us.”

The female health professionals, the midwife and the continuing care worker, were unable to find work in their professions even though their skills are in high demand in Nova Scotia. This was because their credentials and training did not match up exactly to the credentials and training that their counterparts in Nova Scotia receive.

“If I could have worked as a midwife I might have tried, but there are no real qualifications for a midwife here. There are “alternative” midwives. They do home delivery but they aren’t integrated into the health system, which means that when there are complications the risks are much higher. I am used to a system where I can do deliveries at home or in the hospital. I am not entirely sold on the “alternative” health system. Without the support of the mainstream system I don’t want to do it. I’ve been in situations where you really needed that support. So that’s disappointing, but I have been doing other things ,,,”

“I was a nurse. I worked in an old age home. I went to school for five years, I did an apprenticeship and I received a diploma and certification qualifying me for nursing duties, administration work, and also childcare and institutional cooking. It’s hard to explain. It’s something you don’t have here.”

Finding work was not quite as hard for the two engineers I spoke with, though one was a civil engineer who found it quite difficult to obtain the professional certification required for his job. Though he had twenty years experience in his native country, certification required one year of work experience in Canada in addition to a series of professional examinations. The problem is that it is almost impossible for an immigrant to find a civil engineering job in Canada without certification.

“I applied for my professional engineering license but in order to get it I needed a minimum of one year Canadian experience. And that became the real stumbling block – what they call supervised training. I must have applied to 80 or 90 consulting engineers but it was a chicken and egg problem because they said I needed the license to work for them, but I needed experience to get the license! So that was a sort of dead end for me.”

It was this dilemma that brought this engineer from Ontario to Nova Scotia. He had relatives in Halifax with friends in the engineering profession, and these friends were

willing and able to recommend him for a job opportunity they knew of in Colchester County.

The other engineer had also landed in Ontario and had quickly found a job as an industrial engineer, but not in his specific area of expertise. After a year of applying for jobs all over Canada he was finally offered the kind of job he was looking for in Truro. “I came to Truro because of the job. That’s the only reason an immigrant would think of moving here.”

Difficulties related to language, cultural difference, and visible minority status

As in most rural regions of Canada, cultural and ethnic diversity is low in Colchester County. Ninety-eight percent of the population learned English as a mother tongue, and only 2.2% of the population is classified as “visible minority”. In areas where there is little cultural diversity, employers may be reluctant to hire someone who is “different”. Several reports have also indicated that immigrants with obvious cultural differences may have more difficulty finding employment in Canada’s rural areas than in its more cosmopolitan urban centres (Baldacchino 2006, House of Commons 2005, Silvius 2005). It might, therefore, be expected that white, Anglophone immigrants would have the easiest time finding work in Colchester County. Unfortunately this hypothesis cannot be tested here. Eight of the thirty respondents were indeed white Anglophones, but only one of them had looked for employment in Colchester County. The rest had established business enterprises of their own.

Most of the respondents of both sexes who did not come from English-speaking countries - or who could otherwise be perceived as “different” – reported difficulties finding work in Canada. However within this group most of the males had arrived in Colchester County with a job in hand. Only two men from this group had been obliged to look for work after they had arrived, but seven women had either searched for a job or were still searching.³ Of the nine individuals who had looked for work, six felt that either their own difficulties with English or their “foreign” accents had been a barrier to finding employment. Several also reported what they saw as the reluctance of employers to hire them based on the fact that they were perceived as racially or ethnically “different”.

Among the people I talked with, married women from non-English-speaking countries with perceptible ethnic or racial differences had the greatest difficulty finding work in Colchester County. If they found jobs at all, they were “entry-level” positions that did not reflect the women’s educational or work experiences. About half of these women had immigrated with their husbands to Canada, and had located in Colchester County because their husbands had found work there. Most of the rest had married Canadians who already lived and worked in the area.

“I graduated from a technical university with a degree in programming, but I didn’t like programming so I worked as an office manager. But with office management you need very, very excellent language, and when I go

³ The difficulties experienced by recent women immigrants to Nova Scotia are well-documented (Nova Scotia Advisory Council on Women 2004).

to apply for a job, people don't like my language... I'm busy at home, but I miss work, I miss communication with people because my work was always with people..."

"When we arrived in Truro there were quite a few jobs available, but I didn't get hired. My husband [a native Canadian] found a job right away, so that encouraged us to stay here. I finally looked in the Halifax paper and I applied for a job there and got it. They probably hired me because I could speak [her native language]. It's part-time work. I go in when they call me. It's a long commute!"

"I graduated from university and got a diploma in computer design. It took me three years to find a job here. It was even hard to find a job as a volunteer! I worked as a volunteer receptionist for three months so I could get that kind of job, but nobody was willing to give me a job like that. Now I am working as a cashier in a supermarket. I would like to go to college to get a better job, but I don't know what to do or what to take. Things are different here than they are in our country so we don't know what to take, and there is no guidance or counseling available for us."

A welcoming community?

"The Colchester Regional Development Agency recognizes that in order to be able to attract skills and investment we need to attract, embrace and welcome newcomers. We also recognize that we need to become a *Welcoming Community* that is able to create a welcome environment for new residents." (quoted from "The Colchester Immigration Partnership Initiative").

When asked if they had felt they had been welcomed into the community, about half (14) of the respondents responded positively. Eleven of the positive respondents had some important things in common: they had settled in a rural area, and they had started their own businesses or farms. This group of eleven included seven of the total of eight white Anglophones interviewed plus three immigrants from northern Europe and one from the Middle East. The three remaining positive respondents lived in Truro: one was a physician, one had recently married a Canadian, and one had come to join family in Truro.

"In the first couple of weeks we were here we had people turn up on the doorstep with comfort, with cakes, baked things. When my wife had a car accident and was in hospital we got about three weeks of full three-course meals left here on the table by different people we hardly knew!"

"We feel like that, yeah. People out here are always polite, and they make you feel welcome. Of course we don't know what they say behind our backs... But I think they are very open, curious, inquisitive. But slower to really connect."

“The day we moved here they came over with pies, cakes. And when Hurricane Juan cut the power the neighbours gave us lunch, and one neighbour came down to show us how to run the furnace without power. And all the farmers here have plows, and anytime there’s any snow they come down and plow our drive. They think they’ve got to keep an eye on us!”

The people who did not feel they had really been welcomed into the community tended to be those with greater cultural differences. Most of them qualified their statements by saying that Colchester County residents had certainly been “friendly”, but not really “welcoming”.

“When we first arrived, a neighbour brought over cookies. That was nice. And generally we have very good neighbours. I will go over for coffee. But they only go so far, and that’s the point.”

“Well, it seems here that people are very friendly. Whenever we meet they sense I am a foreigner, immigrant, whatever, and they are patient, they are smiling, always saying ‘yes’. But they don’t try to communicate.”

Some of the negative responses were more critical:

“I didn’t particularly feel I was welcomed when we moved here. When we got a house and started living here and started going to local stores and offices to get things, I started realizing, ‘I am really a stranger in this town!’ People were not particularly helpful.”

“They are friendly, but they don’t mix with you very freely. That’s difficult for me. Maybe they think our culture is different, our thinking is different, maybe that’s why they don’t want to meet foreign people. They are friendly, but not to invite you over for dinner. When nobody opens up to you, you feel shy about opening to them. In our country, people want to know *everything* about you (laughs)! Here, nobody really cares what you are doing. They don’t want to interfere with your privacy. We’ve lived in this apartment for almost two years, and we don’t know anyone in this building!”

“People in this region are very enclosed. They tend to judge you, to classify you. As a foreigner you are an invader and have no right of any kind here. I think that people tend to just see your appearance, the way you look, and they form their idea of who you might be. So people just acquire this level of thinking: ‘I don’t really want to make so much connection with this person.’ Canadians are hard to make friends with. You say “hi” or whatever, and that’s about it.”

One of the respondents summed up “welcoming” as a two-way process:

“I would say that when I initially came here, it was just okay, but I think the acceptance level is better now. If, as an immigrant, I start expecting that the day I come here there will be people waiting for me with open arms, I am living in a fool’s paradise. But if I come with an open mind I will find people with an open mind who are ready to experiment with me. And if I’m ready to experiment with them, if we’re both ready to accept each other...”

But for immigrants who are unfamiliar with North American culture and who may have language difficulties, making friends with local people is not enough. The region’s institutions, political, economic, legal, educational and religious must be welcoming as well. And this was the major problem for many of the people I talked to. When they arrived they simply didn’t know how to find a decent job, how to get a driver’s license, where to go to improve their English skills, how to enroll themselves or their children in an educational program and so forth. They didn’t understand how the political and legal systems worked, or how the health system worked. In Canada’s urban centres there is usually a number to call, a central switchboard for new immigrants, a settlement house or welcome centre that will answer their questions or direct them to someone who can. But in Colchester County immigrants must deal directly with each of these institutions – assuming they are even aware of their existence or location – and few if any of these institutions are equipped to respond to the questions that immigrants have, particularly if there are language difficulties.

Integration: Becoming part of the community

Cultural adjustment and culture shock

For most of the North Americans and Western Europeans interviewed, cultural adjustment was a positive experience. Many had moved to Colchester County to get away from the hustle and bustle of urban areas and they were charmed by the slower pace of life in Colchester County, the friendliness of strangers on the street, the neighbourliness that they had experienced in their communities and the low incidence of crime. Some mentioned frustrations when searching for goods and services they had taken for granted when living in more urban areas and a few noted problems navigating the local and regional bureaucratic structures, but overall, “cultural adaptation” was more a case of easing into a lifestyle that was simpler and less chaotic.

Immigrants from more distant countries found the cultural adaptation process more challenging. The most commonly cited challenge, discussed in the previous section, was getting used to the “stand-offishness” of Colchester Country residents, who were described as polite and friendly enough, but also as emotionally cool and not really interested in getting to know people with different cultural legacies.

“The idea I have had to get used to is that people don’t just come over to your house and ‘erupt’. They announce themselves [before they come]. In my country people are very expressive and they will just show up at your door. But after I’ve been here for a while – I guess you just get used to things!”

A few respondents seemed distressed by North American cultural norms in general. They found children to be disrespectful, disobedient, and sexually precocious and they found young women to be immodest. One couple was dismayed by what they saw as an addiction to comfort and convenience:

“They drive to their mailboxes to pick up the mail. And everything is packaged for convenience – like microwave popcorn. Convenience will be the death of us all!”

I expected that people would complain about the unavailability of traditional “ethnic” foods, but this didn’t seem to be a problem. Most people seemed very happy with the wide variety of food available, particularly the fresh meat and produce from local farmers. Those who missed foods from “home” had found convenient sources in Halifax or other urban areas.

When I asked people how they were adapting to the local culture, several jokingly responded with “What culture?” They were referring to “high culture”, symphony orchestras, art museums, live theatre and so forth, very little of which is available in Colchester County. This was something they had not expected to find in the immediate area, and most satisfied their needs with occasional trips to Halifax.

Integration into the community

There are many ways to measure the extent to which newcomers have become members of the community. For instance, have they made friends? Have they become part of a social network? Have they established a satisfactory livelihood? Are they members of local civic, voluntary, social or recreational associations? If they are religious, have they found a suitable place to worship? Are their children well established and comfortable in the local schools?

Making friends

Eight of the respondents said they had made many friends in their new community. All of them had immigrated from northern Europe or North America, all lived in rural areas, and all but one had started their own businesses. Only one spoke English as a second language, but he spoke it very well. The rest of the respondents said they had not made many friends. Some said they were too busy trying to establish a livelihood, some blamed language or cultural differences, some said they were “shy”, and of course some cited the aloofness of the natives. There were differences of opinion as to what constituted a “friend”, and some of the respondents who claimed few friends made a careful distinction between “real friends” and “acquaintances”.

Business networks

Becoming integrated into a community means becoming part of a social network, and those respondents who claimed the most friends were typically involved in multiple formal and informal social networks. This was particularly the case for those who had started businesses. One such couple said they were members of “eight or ten” business-

related civic organizations, and that the husband had been immediately asked to preside over one of them because of his expertise:

“[In our small business community] we just try to network to help each other. I think that has helped a lot to get to know people, and the area, and the politics. And we knew that, and that’s why we did it right off. Jump in, get to know people, and you will enjoy your area much more.”

The professionals and farmers I talked to also found many of their social contacts in the context of work, through collegial friendship networks and professional organizations.

Religious networks

Most of the respondents were members of religious congregations, and this gave many of them access to valuable social networks. As one professional put it,

“One thing I have learned is that this society works through the churches. You are situated in a church structure. I find my colleagues, unless they work closely together, know each other through the church.”

The people I spoke with represented at least eight different religious denominations, including a variety of Christian denominations, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Most had found congregations in the Colchester area, though a few were obliged to go to Halifax for services. Only one had not found a suitable place of worship within commuting distance.

“We’ve gotten very involved with the United Church. It’s a whole new thing for us. The church is very active here in a community way. Everybody here is more involved in teas, suppers, dinner, theatre.”

“We have a Hindu temple in Halifax. We don’t have enough people in Truro to have a temple, so we go there occasionally. You can meet most of the Indians in Halifax there because most of them are Hindus, and when there are festivals it is a good time to meet people.”

While most respondents were pleased with the social opportunities that membership in religious organizations provided, several Roman Catholics expressed disappointment. At home, the local parish had been the nexus of their social life, but this was not the case in Colchester County:

“I go to Catholic Church every Sunday. I have friends who go to the same church, but I met them outside of the church. So there is not a real social life around the church. Probably they have some groups, I’m sure, but the church is different here. [Back home] people would invite you to go with them. And they tried harder to involve young people in the church.”

Voluntary, charitable, social and sports organizations

Aside from professional, business, and civic organizations, most of the people I talked to were also affiliated with voluntary or social organizations, certainly a good strategy for connecting to and learning about a community as well as for making new friends. Several female respondents had also become volunteers with the hope of improving their English and office skills in order to find paid employment. At least four women attended meetings of the International Ladies Group of Colchester County, a social group that welcomes newcomers to the area, and several respondents of both sexes volunteered in other organizations dedicated to helping new arrivals, including the Multicultural Association, The Colchester Immigration Partnership, the Colchester Adult Learning Association (which offers ESL courses), the Truro and Area Newcomers Club, and the International Students Association at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. While voluntary and social organizations seemed to provide a valuable connection to the community mostly for women with language difficulties and cultural differences, men with these problems sometimes made the connection through sports. Several of the men I talked with were quite athletic and had been welcomed into local teams as players or coaches.

Integration of children into the community

The majority of the respondents had school-aged children, and most of these children were not born in Canada. Though a few parents reported that their children were occasionally homesick, all said that they had adapted well to their new home, often more easily than their parents.

“They miss their grandparents, but they’ve not really missed their old friends because they make friends quickly. They love the change. The high school has loads of opportunities, and there are things to do in the winter here that kids don’t do back home, skating and hockey.”

“My son has a lot of friends, he is very friendly. He didn’t speak English when we arrived here two years ago, but now he speaks very well. Of course he misses my mom and my family, but he never says he wants to go back. He plays soccer in the summer, basketball in the winter, and table tennis – he is on Team Nova Scotia! Back home it cost a lot to play a sport, but not here.”

A few parents were concerned that their children were not learning as much in school as they would have in their home country:

“The school system here is really slow. I’m not happy with it. Not tough enough. Our son was in the second class when we came over, but right away he was the best in math. We think that the kids here need more pressure to push them in the first and second years.”

Other parents preferred the Canadian approach to education:

“When he came here, he found school easier. Here they are behind. But I think the schools here are okay. He has lots of projects and he has to learn to do research by himself. [Back home] the teachers just come and read, and the students just take notes.”

Several parents noted that having children had helped them make friends in the community by connecting them with a network of parents in the context of school and recreational activities.

Why we like it here

Despite the difficulties of adjusting to life in Colchester County, the majority of the respondents (16) said they were “very satisfied” with their new life. Ten respondents said they were “content” with life in Colchester County, and only four were clearly “not satisfied”. These four were definitely considering leaving the area, though none of them had made concrete plans to do so. Seven respondents said they had either considered leaving at one time or another or would consider leaving if they found a better livelihood opportunity elsewhere, but the remaining nineteen said they had no intention of ever leaving the area.

When I asked the respondents what they liked most about Colchester County, all but one praised one or more of the county’s rural aspects. The most common response was that on the one hand Colchester County gave them the feeling of being surrounded by open space with access to the natural environment, but on the other hand they did not feel completely isolated from the amenities of civilization.

“We really like the space. We have a big yard, a big garden. We even have deer in the yard! You can go outdoors. We like to go hiking, we like the wildflowers. We like the sense of ruralness, but that you can still go to Halifax.”

Respondents also stressed the many advantages of living in a village or small-town community. Life was quiet and safe. There was less crime, less pollution, and life could be lived at a slower pace.

“A lovely, clean place to live, a lot of open space, closeness to family, closeness to work. It’s the lifestyle, the kind of relaxed atmosphere that sort of grows on you. I can come home from work at lunchtime. In Toronto it’s going to take me an hour and a half to get to work!”

Though many of the people I talked with had not found Colchester natives to be especially “welcoming”, they nevertheless appreciated their values, ethics, and decency toward others.

“I love the people - that’s number one - and the simple life style. I mean, they’re busy, but they care about relationships, about what’s going on. They’re not glued to a television set, or worried about traffic, or having a

siege mentality like you have in the city where you just try to get home every day.”

People with younger children characterized the region as an ideal place to bring up a family, partly because of the natural environment, but also because of the social environment:

“When we first came I had a newborn baby, and the first thing I noticed was that drivers were aware of this when I was walking on the road with the stroller. They would pull over to the side, or at least slow down. That would never happen in [her home country]. And I guess from that was the idea that this was a place I would like my children to grow up in. Rather than in the rat race.”

Some other advantages mentioned by more than one respondent were low real estate prices (especially for farm land), access to higher education and quality adult education courses, and the availability of farm-fresh produce.

When I asked the respondents whether other people from their home country would be attracted to Colchester County, all but two responded positively. Furthermore thirteen of them said that relatives, close friends, or former business associates had in fact expressed a serious interest in coming to join them in the region - though some of these friends and relatives had been discouraged by the difficulties the respondents themselves had faced during the immigration process.

A typology of immigrants

According to the Nova Scotia Immigration Strategy, retention of immigrants is a key issue, and the Province’s goal is to double the retention rate to seventy percent in the next five years (Nova Scotia Office of Immigration 2005). A major premise of my research is that if retention is the goal, attention should be paid to the characteristics of those immigrants who *have* remained, as well as to the problems that have led to the departure of others. A further premise is that immigrants who have been attracted to and have remained in Colchester County will have special characteristics that suit them to life in the region, but that this group will contain different *types* of successful immigrants with different sets of characteristics. It follows that if Colchester County wishes to recruit and retain immigrants it would be helpful to know what types of immigrants are most likely to settle permanently in the region. For this reason I have developed a typology of recent immigrants based on characteristics of the people I interviewed.

The German sociologist Max Weber developed the concept of “ideal types” as a way of grappling with the infinite variability of human subjects in the course of social analysis. An ideal typology is a set of categories sociologists can use to sort out people into different “types”. These types are “ideal” rather than “real” because no real human being would fit perfectly into any of them. In most cases people will have characteristics tying them to several of the types, but they usually fit best into one category. In the following analysis I assign each respondent to one type only, but I note the considerable overlap.

The “Visionaries”: realizing the dream (14 respondents)

The “visionary” immigrants came to Colchester County to realize a dream. Most of the people I talked to were hoping to realize one dream or another, but the visionaries came to this area primarily because it seemed the very best place in the world to fulfill their vision. They were idealistic, but they were also practical. These were people who had searched carefully for the ideal spot and had planned their lives and saved their money in order to make their dream come true. Almost half (fourteen) of the respondents were primarily visionaries.

The visionaries believed they had found a relatively unspoiled rural or small-town environment surrounded by natural beauty and a small population of natives with the traditional rural values of the work ethic, self-sufficiency, thrift, and community spirit. They were prepared – and often eager – to sacrifice luxury and convenience for a simpler life. The visionaries I talked to were all white, and they were all from northern Europe or the United States. The lifestyle they envisioned would at one time have been possible for them in their native countries, but increasing land costs and cultural changes in these countries had led them to look for a less-developed region that bore some resemblance to their own country in previous times. Nearly all of the visionaries had integrated quickly and comfortably into their adopted communities, though it was more difficult for those who spoke English as a second language. All were small businesspersons, farmers, or professionals, and as such they were viewed by the natives as contributors to the local economy.

The “Relatives”: family ties (7 respondents)

The majority of the people I interviewed (eighteen altogether) had family ties in the region. Some had relatives living in or near Colchester County while others had come to the area to join fiancés who lived there. All of them had learned about Colchester County from their relatives, and none would have otherwise had the occasion to consider living in the area. But for seven respondents (six women and one man), the *primary* reason for coming was to be with a family member, in all but one case a future spouse or partner. As a rule, the people who came primarily to be with a family member had difficulty finding a place for themselves in the community. They reported feeling isolated, they had difficulty finding work or making intimate friendships, and their social circle was often limited to the friends of the person they had come to join. All seven had the additional problem of English as a second language.

The “Professionals”: professional opportunities (6 respondents)

Six of the respondents were employed as professionals: two physicians, two engineers, and two academics. Five of them (a single woman and four men with families) had settled in Colchester County primarily because of an employment opportunity. None of these five had planned to live in the Truro area when they immigrated. In each case they had searched across Canada for work in their field and had found the best opportunity in Truro. Typically this was because employers in Colchester County, faced with a shortage of professionals, were more open to hiring people with minimal Canadian experience. Unlike the “visionaries”, these five professionals had not come to the area specifically for

the natural or social environment, but on the whole they were pleased with what they found. They liked the rural setting and the slower pace of life. While their social networks were smaller than those of the visionaries, they had been able to make connections with the community through associations with professional colleagues. However the immigrant wives of male professionals were likely to experience some degree of social isolation. They had difficulty finding work themselves, and the work they found was typically “entry level” and did not reflect their prior training or experience. Without a job, and speaking English as a second language, they found it hard to forge friendships in their new community.

The “Entrepreneurs”: business opportunities (1 respondent)

Nearly half (14) of the respondents were self-employed and could be regarded as “entrepreneurs”, but I placed only one respondent in this category because he was the only one who had chosen to locate in the area specifically because it offered the most attractive entrepreneurial opportunity. An experienced businessman, this respondent had decided to come to Nova Scotia because some of his relatives had already settled in the Halifax area. After searching throughout the province for a retail business he could afford to buy, he found the best opportunity in one of Colchester County’s small villages. He expressed satisfaction with life in his new community, but said he would readily move if a better business opportunity came up elsewhere in the future.

Skilled workers (no respondents)

Aside from the professionals and farmers, ten of the immigrants I talked to could be classified as “skilled workers”, people with training and experience in office work, the trades, or the service occupations. All of them were women, and all but one was married. None had come to the region specifically to find work in their area of expertise, and so I have not “typed” any of them into the “skilled workers” category. Research has shown that there is a great need for skilled workers in Colchester County (Canmac 2003) so it is significant that none of the people I talked to (aside from the professionals and one farmer) had been landed on the basis of their skills. This may reflect Canada’s immigration policy, which tends to favour people with higher levels of education over people with practical skills. It is also significant that only two of the women I talked to were able to find employment commensurate with their training and experience. In most cases this was a reflection of language difficulties or the lack of recognition for credentials and experience obtained abroad, but some women also cited discrimination as a factor.

Refugees (2 respondents)

Very few refugees find their way to Colchester County. I was only able to find two people in this category to interview. They had left an extremely difficult and dangerous situation in their home country and were very grateful to have escaped to a situation where their lives were not in danger and there was a roof over their heads and food to eat. They were sponsored by a local church which provided them with a friendship network and practical advice. The Canadian government had provided financial support for a year while they settled in. Nevertheless, life in Colchester County was difficult for them. There were no other people from their home country in the area, and cultural and

language differences and lack of appropriate skills or recognized credentials made it difficult to find work that paid a living wage. One respondent was determined to finish university and it was not possible to do this locally.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research supports the hypothesis that immigrants are attracted to rural and small-town regions for different reasons, and that these differences are related to the relative success they will have in adapting to their new environment. These findings have implications for immigrant attraction and retention. The typology developed reflects the various reasons that the immigrants interviewed were attracted to Colchester County. Some came to realize a holistic lifestyle vision, others to join with family members, or to pursue professional careers, to take advantage of business opportunities, or, as refugees, to escape intolerable conditions in their home countries. It is significant that none came to Colchester County specifically to take advantage of the region's need for skilled workers. Those who came to realize a vision or to pursue professional careers seemed to have had the easiest time adapting to conditions in Colchester County and were most strongly committed to staying in the region. This is related to the fact that the livelihoods they chose and the lifestyles they pursued connected them with multiple social networks. The single entrepreneur I talked to who had come primarily because of a business opportunity had adjusted well to life in the region but was not particularly committed to staying in the area if a better business opportunity arose.

Those coming primarily to join family members and those who came as refugees had the most difficulty adapting to conditions in Colchester County. The majority of the members of this group were skilled workers but because of language difficulties, and perhaps in some cases because of ethnic discrimination, they had difficulty finding work that reflected their skills. They had limited access to social networks, and in many cases they felt isolated from the community.

A major premise of this research is that certain types of immigrants will be attracted to and will remain in Colchester County specifically for the unique social, environmental, and economic opportunities the County has to offer. I have endeavoured to specify these immigrant types and to enumerate the attributes of the County that appeal to them. While Colchester County is "not for everyone", it has special attractions for a range of immigrant types. Still the rate of immigration into Colchester County has fallen over the years, and retention of immigrants is problematic. The question therefore is twofold: how to recruit the types of immigrants most likely to adapt to conditions in the region, and how to alleviate the problems that immigrants encounter once they have arrived.

In terms of recruitment, the typology provides a means of assessing the adaptability of immigrants to existing conditions in Colchester County based on their reasons for coming. A most important finding is that virtually all the respondents learned about and were attracted to Colchester County through relationships with friends or family members already living in the region. This finding suggests that immigrants themselves may be a valuable resource for recruiting future immigrants, an idea that is supported by the fact that almost half the people I talked to mentioned relatives or friends who were

interested in coming to the area. The research also indicates that while skilled, non-professional workers are needed in Colchester County, this type of immigrant has not been attracted to the region. It appears that skilled workers could be recruited readily through contacts with the County's existing immigrant community, provided that skilled employment opportunities were offered and the necessary work visas were available.

In terms of retention, the different types of immigrants have different needs to be met if they are to adapt to conditions in Colchester County. Visionaries, professionals, and entrepreneurs appear to have the easiest time adapting. This is likely because they have greater financial resources, because their livelihood activities involve them in more social networks, and because they are perceived as contributing palpable economic and social benefits and valuable skill sets to the community. The main obstacles for these types of immigrants are bureaucratic. The visionaries and entrepreneurs I talked to had taken substantial financial risks in setting up businesses in Colchester County and they were well accepted in their communities but the Department of Citizenship and Immigration appeared to regard them with suspicion without appreciating the contributions they were making. Clearly, visionaries and entrepreneurs should be targeted in Colchester County's expanded Provincial Nominee program. Visionaries and entrepreneurs would also benefit from a business mentoring program involving established County businesspersons willing to show newcomers "the ropes". Immigrants of the professional type have problems establishing credentials in Canada. Colchester County could take advantage of this situation by recruiting recently arrived immigrant professionals from Canada's urban centres, where they may be having difficulty finding work without prior Canadian experience.

Persons with English language deficiencies, people with marked ethnic or racial differences, refugees, skilled non-professional workers and women have the most difficulties adapting to life in Colchester County. They face different problems than the entrepreneurial and professional types discussed in the previous paragraph. They have problems finding work commensurate with their skills and experience, problems becoming members of social networks, and problems adjusting to cultural differences. These problems underline Colchester County's need to become a more "welcoming community", a community that is not only friendly but also equipped to be helpful. Toward this end I would like to make several suggestions:

- There is a need for the kind of central switchboard for immigrants that exists in Canada's urban centres. There should be a local number for immigrants to call for referrals to the agencies, organizations or individuals who can help them solve these problems.
- Skilled, non-professional immigrants have great difficulty finding work, despite the fact that their skills are in demand in the region. There is a need for an employment counseling and referral service specifically designed for immigrants, matching them with appropriate jobs and providing references for employers.
- English language deficiency is a major problem and the County's ESL resources are limited. The excellent ESL program at the Colchester Adult Learning Association should be expanded and extended to areas outside of Truro. The

- CALA program not only teaches English. It also introduces immigrants to a social network and provides practical and emotional support.
- Women immigrants have greater difficulty adjusting to conditions in Colchester County than men. The International Ladies Group of Colchester County was established to address this problem but it is a voluntary organization and so its resources and scope of activity are limited. Greater efforts must be made to reach out to immigrant women, particularly those in more remote areas of the County.
 - The value of immigrants themselves as consultants and advisors on the immigration and settlement processes should be recognized and utilized more effectively. The Colchester Immigration Partnership includes many representatives from the immigrant community, but most are well-established in the community. More recent immigrants, particularly those who are currently encountering problems, should be invited into this committee. Many of the people I spoke with expressed a willingness to become involved in the welcoming community project but they would be more likely to become involved if they were formally invited.

Colchester County is justly renowned as a leader in the development of progressive policies and programs to attract immigrants and to assist them in adjusting to rural and small-town life in Nova Scotia. These recommendations are therefore meant as suggestions for the further expansion and enhancement of these policies and programs rather than as a critique of them.

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AMC Working Papers Series - Guidelines

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The AMC's Working Papers Series is related to the broad mandate of the Metropolis Project. The Working Papers produced by the Atlantic Metropolis Centre are designed to: (1) speed up the dissemination of research results relevant to the interests and concerns of Metropolis researchers, policy-makers, NGOs; (2) allow for an avenue where Metropolis researchers in the Atlantic region can disseminate research and information specific to immigration, migration, integration and diversity in Atlantic Canada.

• Will these be considered "official" publications?

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The Working Paper Series welcomes research reports and theoretical discussions relevant to the mandate of the Metropolis Project, providing insight into the policy concerns not only of immigration and integration, but also ethnocultural diversity.

Examples of areas of research include: economic, political, cultural, and educational integration of immigrants, migrants and refugees; language; transnationalism; gender and/or immigrant women; ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity; multiculturalism; social and family networks; social discourses, attitudes and values; youth; identity; citizenship; temporary migration; justice and security; settlement programs and policy; health and well-being; and human rights.

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Centre Métropolis Atlantique - Série de documents de recherche Protocoles de sélection et de présentation

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La publication de la *Série de documents de recherche* répond en fait aux objectifs généraux du Centre Métropolis Atlantique, en ce qu'elle favorise (1) la dissémination rapide de la recherche pertinente aux intérêts et aux besoins des intervenants académiques, gouvernementaux et communautaires affiliés au Centre, (2) et la création d'un espace de diffusion où les chercheurs rattachés au projet en Atlantique peuvent faire connaître leurs travaux et toute autre information pertinente à l'immigration et à la diversité culturelle en Atlantique.

• Ces textes peuvent-ils être considérés comme une publication finale et officielle?

L'inclusion d'un manuscrit dans la *Série de documents de recherche* ne remplace, ni n'exclut la publication d'une version finale de ce même manuscrit dans une revue à comité de lecture. D'ailleurs, la direction du Centre encourage tous les auteurs à soumettre les résultats de leurs recherches à des revues scientifiques, ou bien à les publier sous forme de monographie.

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Parmi les domaines de recherche, soulignons entre autres: l'intégration économique, politique, culturelle et formative (éducation) des immigrants; les diverses problématiques migrantes; la question des réfugiés; celle de la langue et du transnationalisme; les problématiques touchant les genres et plus particulièrement les questions concernant la condition des femmes immigrantes; la diversité ethnique, culturelle, religieuse, le multiculturalisme; les réseaux sociaux et familiaux; les discours, les valeurs et les attitudes à l'égard des immigrants; les rapports entre la jeunesse, l'identité, la citoyenneté, la justice et l'immigration; les politiques et les programmes affectant l'intégration des immigrants, leur santé, leur bien-être, ainsi que leurs droits fondamentaux.

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*****Pour toute question relative à la *Série de documents de recherche*, vous êtes priés de vous adresser à:**

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