

**Atlantic Metropolis Centre ~ Working Paper Series
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The Challenges of Integrating Newcomers: the Halifax case

**Working Paper for the
Atlantic Metropolis Centre**

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**Working Paper No.34 2011
Série de documents de recherche 34-2011**



Centre Métropolis Atlantique
Atlantic Metropolis Centre

**The Atlantic Metropolis Centre's Working Papers Series
Série de documents de recherche du Centre Métropolis Atlantique**

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Keywords/Mots-clefs: newcomers, Halifax, integration, immigration, host community, belonging

The Challenges of Integrating Newcomers: the Halifax case¹

Contemporary local economic development processes reflect the premise of the creative cities paradigm: talented and creative workers who drive innovation in the economy are attracted to places that are culturally diverse and tolerant (Florida 2002, 2005; Florida et al. 2008). Consequently, local governments typically seek to attract and retain groups they perceive as contributing to cultural diversity. In the wake of declining birth rates and population projections that forecast economic challenges ahead, most Canadian provinces and cities are targeting international migrants as a potential solution to their individual demographic crises, as contributors to talent pools, and as producers of cultural diversity.

Canada enjoys a reputation as a multicultural nation, and research has recently begun to quantify the economic value of our cultural diversity. A 2010 report by the Conference Board of Canada shows immigrants attain disproportionate recognition for research and the arts and are recognized by their employers as making greater contributions to innovation in the workplace than Canadian-born workers (Downie 2010, ii-10). Related research in the United States found a net positive effect of cultural diversity (measured by percentage of foreign-born residents) on the productivity of native-born workers (Ottaviano and Peri 2006). Immigrants may also stimulate urban economic growth as indirect agents; for instance, recent case studies from Turkey and Belgium show immigrants in those countries fill gaps in the economy as entrepreneurs or skilled labour (Eraydin et al. 2010). Such findings fuel ongoing inter-city competition for newcomers.

Immigrants come to Canada to find better opportunities in their lives or to escape situations elsewhere. While some come as provincial nominees, once they arrive in Canada they have the option to relocate to other city-regions. Researchers now look beyond the traditional push/pull economic explanations for migration decisions to understand the human ecology of location choices (Brown 2002). Some immigrants may move to regions where they can find larger communities of co-ethnics (people who share their ethnicity). Others may seek to integrate within the wider local community. As Bourne and Rose (2001, 110) observed, contemporary migrants tend “to remain in these cities rather than fanning out to smaller urban centres and other regions as many did in the past”. The authors attribute this trend to the availability of social networks as links to employment and housing, as well as the pleasure gained from living in a familiar environment. The 2006 Canadian census revealed that most recent immigrants (over two-thirds) move to one of three census areas: Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver. The most common reason for this choice was the social support networks provided by family and friends (Chui et al. 2007, 19-20).

Lacking major concentrations of immigrants from particular regions, smaller city-regions recognize the need to adopt measures encouraging newcomers to settle and integrate there. As Halliday (2006, 92) asked in discussing the fates of smaller cities increasingly dependent on immigration for development, “how are we to remain competitive if we are unable to see their integration?” Halifax is among many smaller Canadian cities asking this question, having been less successful than rival

¹ Funding for this research was provided by SSHRC under the Major Collaborative Research Initiatives grant number 412-2005-1001 under Dr D.A. Wolfe at the University of Toronto and by a pilot study grant from the Atlantic Metropolis Project. We are grateful to the research team in Halifax: R. Holme, A. Pettman, R. Butler, J. Haggett, and J. Morton. We also thank the participants in the study for their generosity of spirit.

second-tier destinations such as Edmonton and Winnipeg in attracting newcomers (Chui et al. 2007, 5).

If newcomers are to contribute effectively to local economic development, then communities must find ways to integrate them into social, political, and economic networks. The research reported here flows from an investigation into the social dynamics of economic performance in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As part of a national study (Wolfe 2009), we examined the ways in which civic governance might encourage social inclusion to create better conditions for local economic growth. In the process, we discovered that integrating newcomers presented significant challenges. This working paper suggests that Halifax experiences difficulty in accommodating, and hence retaining, new immigrants. Thick social networks that link locals and that absorb newcomers coming from within Canada may prove somewhat exclusionary to international migrants. Consequently, Halifax struggles to attract and retain international migrants who may contribute to economic growth.

What is Integration?

Integration in the broad sense is an acculturation strategy used by plural societies to accommodate differences between the dominant group (host society) and newcomers (non-dominant groups or individuals). As a multicultural nation, Canada promotes integration over such strategies as marginalization or assimilation. Integration supposes that newcomers will maintain some degree of contact with their native culture while “seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network” (Berry 1997, 9).

Berry’s intercultural model primarily addresses the social challenges of cross-cultural migration. From a policy perspective, an integrated immigrant has access to and can participate in the economic, political, and civic spheres. The success of integration depends on actively engaging both the immigrant and the host society. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2002, 28) defines integration as “a two-way process that encourages adjustments on the part of both newcomers and the receiving society”, rather than conventional practices that have defined successful integration “in terms of the degree to which immigrants converge to the average performance of native-born Canadians and their normative and behavioural standards” (Li 2003, 1).

Where economic goals underlie national and local immigration objectives, immigrants’ economic performance becomes the primary means by which integration is measured. The deteriorating economic status of those who arrived in Canada during the past two decades has resulted in a growing wage gap between recent immigrants and native-born residents that concerns governments and settlement workers, particularly as impacts carry over into the second generation. While the number of Canadian-born residents in the low-income bracket fell during the 1990s, it increased for immigrants of all education and age groups. Newcomers from non-traditional countries of origin were more likely to be low-income earners than those from countries with a longer connection to Canada (Bonikowska et al. 2008; Picot 2004).

Why Study Host Community Attitudes? The Halifax Case

Social connectedness matters in integration and retention. In many cases, social integration serves as the path to critical aspects of economic integration such as finding employment. Understanding the social dynamics of a city clarifies the challenges and opportunities available to outsiders or newcomers. As Wulff and Dharmalingam (2008) note, immigrants become socially connected by joining groups and interacting with community members. Immigrants' ability to access local networks is critical to successful long-term settlement. The openness of communities to newcomers "provides a window on more fundamental social processes, structures, and changes" in the host community (Brown 2002, 7-8).

While previous social ties may bring immigrants, other factors make them want to stay. In a survey of recent immigrants to Edmonton (95% had resided in Canada fewer than 3.5 years) nearly one-third mentioned the presence of family and friends among their reasons for their initial choice of location; however, few respondents (2%) cited family and friends as among the best things about living in their city (Derwing et al., 2005). The research team concluded that "while friends and family attract new immigrants, the quality of life and the work and education opportunities within the host city play a large part in retaining them" (Derwing and Krahn 2008, 192).

To what extent can Halifax integrate newcomers? Our research suggests that the community is superficially friendly but somewhat difficult for newcomers to penetrate at a deeper level. In presenting our findings here, we draw on data from two sets of interviews. During the summer of 2006, we interviewed 27 civic officials working for government and other development agencies in the Halifax Region. Fourteen respondents worked for economic development agencies, seven for cultural development agencies, and four for social development agencies. Another respondent served as an elected official in the Halifax region. The study examined the conditions creating effective leadership and collaboration among agencies working in local development with the aim to discover any linkages between community engagement and economic growth. Some questions focussed on the integration of newcomers in the region.

Findings from the study pointed to the importance to the local economy of collaboration and networking and revealed respondents' perceptions that Halifax is a difficult place to be a newcomer (Grant and Kronstal 2010). In a follow-up to this research during the summer of 2009 focussing on service providers, we interviewed 27 respondents who worked on behalf of, or directly with, immigrants to the Halifax Regional Municipality. Two-thirds (15) of these respondents worked for non-governmental organizations providing immigration settlement services; some specifically served international students or refugees. Seven respondents were government employees working with immigration services, three served as elected officials, and two were private citizens operating in volunteer roles. We asked civic officials whether newcomers integrate easily into the region; questions posed to service providers focused on the integration experiences of immigrants.

When we conducted the first set of interviews in 2006, immigration was high on the local agenda. The province of Nova Scotia had opened an Office of Immigration, and Halifax had a new immigration strategy (Greater Halifax Partnership 2005) and Immigration Action Plan (Halifax Regional Municipality 2005). By 2009, government was preoccupied with scandal surrounding some immigration programs, and service providers were reorganizing as priorities changed. Despite the differences in context, however, the messages from respondents suggested common understandings of the challenges of integration.

Hometown Advantage

All respondents described Halifax as a conservative city where newcomers find fitting in a challenge. Civic officials lamented how poorly newcomers are received: “As much as we say we’re friendly and open and so on, the facts are we aren’t, we’re closed, we’re very conservative here in the province,” said a manager of an economic development association in 2006). Another respondent suggested, “New ideas are thought of negatively here. The first reaction is, ‘No, we can’t do that’. The second reaction is, ‘I don’t think we should do that.’ New ideas, new anything here, faces an uphill battle,” said a federal economic development staff member in 2006. Though some officials characterized Haligonians as friendly, they often mitigated positive comments with uncertain or negative statements about the city. For instance, a manager of a provincial economic development organization oscillated between praise and criticism: “As much as we’re welcoming, we’re not as welcoming to strangers as we could be. Not that we’re not friendly, but we just kind of stick to our own a little bit.” Some civic officials, such as a manager of a social development organization, switched to the third person when expressing negative views: “Nova Scotians don’t jump on the bandwagon” (2006).

While all respondents recognized that newcomers are frequently excluded from social and profession circles, civic officials identified close working relationships as a major advantage of the city. One staff member for an economic development association called his professional network “a blessing in the sense that you can pick up the phone and call people who work in different organizations who all know each other,” though he recognized it could be “very daunting for people who do come from other places” (2006). High levels of collaboration facilitated by close social networks prove attractive to those working in the city (Grant et al. 2008; Grant and Kronstal 2010).

Service providers described Nova Scotians as conservative and closed, an attitude that protects social privilege. One NGO manager and staff service provider speculated that the military background of the city contributed to developing a social hierarchy where many are “very keen on keeping things in the manner to which they have become accustomed” (2009). Service providers expressed scepticism about Halifax’s reputation as a friendly place. Said a municipal settlement services staff member, “We’re very friendly as long as you’re visiting. If you’re staying, there tends to be a lack of open arms” (2009). Respondents did not see tight social bonds in Halifax as benefitting newcomers; many interpreted in-group favouritism as reluctance to mix with immigrants. As one settlement worker who had moved to Halifax from overseas noted, “People here are friendly but never want to be your friend.” Many attributed the perceived insularity of Nova Scotians to discomfort with racial or ethnic difference; one federal official used the term “xenophobic”.

Officials saw city leaders as valuing liberal multicultural ideals, though they thought motivations might be less than altruistic. As one manager of an economic development association put it, “Civic leaders are embracing diversity because they’re told that’s what we need to do” (2006). Another economic development manager thought politicians embrace diversity “because they learned that they need to in order for this community to grow and for us to attract the right types of companies that we want here” (2006).

Service providers saw civic officials trying to attract newcomers but felt frustrated that immigrants were perceived as a source of revenue rather than as people with distinct needs. “We want immigration, we want newcomers – is there leadership? I don’t see it. I see it on the side of, ‘Okay, we want to be nice to immigrants so they’ll stay because we need people.’ But are we looking at the bigger picture?” said an NGO staff member (2009). The respondent noted that while the city celebrates diversity on its website, such messages only appeared on pages geared towards immigrants. Some respondents believed the city should focus on better serving the people already here rather than trying to bring more newcomers to the region.

Markers of Belonging

In describing the specific challenges newcomers faced during integration, respondents described three common markers of belonging in Nova Scotia: place of origin, race, and language. Civic officials discussed their own integration experiences and those of others relative to these markers. Service providers raised the same topics but explored more explicitly how such differences manifest themselves in unequal relations between immigrants and the host society.

Place of Origin

Being born in Nova Scotia played a significant role in respondents’ perception of the region; for example, civic officials from outside the province generally referred to themselves as Come-from-Away or CFAs. Many spoke of feeling like outsiders even after many years in the city. A staff member at a provincial social development agency found people unreceptive to her ideas even after living 20 years in the region. In 2009, one NGO manager referred to the CFA phenomenon as a “strange, invisible barrier,” recalling how in a previous teaching position, “students would reveal that they weren’t from here as though it was some sort of failing”. Half the respondents who talked about coming from away saw this as a barrier faced by all newcomers to the region. Others distinguished between the challenges faced by CFAs and those encountered by immigrants from overseas. A manager of economic development said

If you are a newcomer from the Maritimes, the answer is yes [it is easy to integrate]. If you are a newcomer from somewhere outside the Maritimes, it is somewhat more difficult. If you are an immigrant in the true sense of the word, it’s not easy at all. I’m not proud to say that, but it’s not easy (2006).

In 2006, a federal economic development agency staff member contrasted his home town with Halifax, noting “I come from a different paradigm, which is the West, where everybody is new. Everybody is from away; there is no establishment; there’s no view that ‘this is the way we always do it.’ There is a bit of an island mentality here”. Coming from away can limit professional opportunities, even for Anglophones: as a manager of a social development association said, “I only came here from Chicago and I found it really difficult being from away, just in terms of job hunting. All my job references were all a long distance phone call away. It was quite problematic” (2006).

While not always critical of the term CFA, civic officials distanced themselves from perceived parochial attitudes. They expressed a strong desire to see more newcomers arrive in the province and

some anxiety that Halifax would fail to attract its share of immigrants because people do not feel welcome. One manager of economic development said, “We always have that saying around here: CFA. Come-from-Away. I think there’s a rising awareness that we need to become more diverse and that our births aren’t keeping up with the population needs; but there is still some hesitancy” (2006). Demographic pressures drive the desire to change public perceptions.

Service providers who moved to the region from within Canada also reported being treated like foreigners during their initial years in the region. A provincially elected official, who called Nova Scotia a “somewhat insular society,” remembered when a relative was so bothered by feeling socially excluded that she returned to Western Canada after only two years in Halifax. The respondent observed that the fact her relative did not face any of the traditional barriers yet felt unwelcome “shows there is a little culture divide with Nova Scotia” (2009). Providers emphasized that while everyone from outside the region may be a CFA, belonging to the majority ethnic and linguistic groups goes a long way toward transcending this status. A federal elected official recalled that when she first arrived, everyone she spoke to knew she was from elsewhere, “but it doesn’t come up in conversation now.” She contrasted her own experience with that of other newcomers who do not “fit the mould” (2009).

Those service providers who had immigrated to Nova Scotia suggested that race and language played more significant roles in their settlement experience than their place of origin. These respondents reported still being treated as foreigners after years in the region, although the issue of birthplace mattered less than problems of racial and/or linguistic discrimination. Some questioned whether in linguistic practice, the term CFA applied to people obviously from another country or primarily distinguished born-and-bred Nova Scotians from those who resemble them. Either way, service providers viewed CFA as a derogatory term showing close-minded attitudes on the part of some Nova Scotians.

Race/Ethnicity

Civic officials and service providers’ perspectives differed on the racial profile of the city. Most officials described Nova Scotia as racially, and therefore culturally, homogenous. Few saw Halifax as cosmopolitan except in relation to other parts of the Atlantic region. The manager of a provincial cultural development organization (2006) referred to Nova Scotia as “a one-dimensional society in many ways...it’s uni-cultural, right? white European”. Another noted while “we [Halifax] have some Black, Lebanese and Asian communities, I don’t think they’re large. I don’t think the province is very diverse” (2006). Many expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of exposure to different cultures afforded in the city and favoured increasing the numbers of immigrants in the region. In addition to the economic gains immigrants bring, respondents thought having more immigrants in the city would provide a more stimulating social environment. As one economic development association staff member noted, “The great advantages of having lots of immigrants is the different culture that they are able to bring with them, and the different food and the different music and all the different dress, that sort of thing” (2006).

While they critiqued Halifax as too “white,” civic officials rarely mentioned race or ethnicity when discussing the cultural differences of immigrants coming to Halifax. A few suggested newcomers of diverse ethnic backgrounds faced greater challenges in rural Nova Scotia than in Halifax. The

manager of a federal economic development organization thought immigrants coming from outside Western Europe might face difficulties in rural Nova Scotia but saw Halifax as a welcoming city where “we don't have discrimination” (2006). Several referenced the African Nova Scotia community yet steered away from discussing race relations in a historical context. One exception, an officer from a cultural development organization (2006), criticized the lack of discussion around racism at the official level. “The city is still divided by a racial line...They talk about multiculturalism in this city and they haven't even resolved the pervasive issues. It's one of the things I find very displeasing about this city”.

Service providers challenged the view that Halifax's small proportion of immigrants renders the city culturally homogenous. They identified racial prejudice as an issue of deep concern affecting African Nova Scotians and some immigrants. One municipal service employee talked about the perception that Halifax is not a diverse city. She saw this dismissal of the African Nova Scotian community and new immigrant communities as part of a deliberate effort to maintain the status quo. “We're still like that. We very much want people to assimilate, to melt. We're not multicultural; we in Nova Scotia very much aim for the melting pot. 'Look, everybody's the same, we treat everybody the same and there is no colour, race, ability, or anything.' Well, that's just not the reality” (2009).

Service providers showed greater concern about *assumptions* of Nova Scotia's racial and cultural homogeneity than about the skin colour of the population. They noted that governments sometimes perpetuate stereotypes by under-representing racial and ethnic minorities in public recreation guides, in public art, at travel gateways, and in promotional materials. Service providers criticized what they saw as a lack of initiative by most residents to learn about unfamiliar cultures. Many characterized the general response to immigrants by the local population as fearful, defensive, or shy. One NGO service provider described the city's current approach to welcoming immigrants as similar to “a doctor who is identifying a sickness or illness,” except the disease is the dis-ease the immigrant generates in others (2009). Several identified the need for public education to overcome deep-seated fear toward any type of difference, including religion, race, and ethnic background.

Language

When asked to describe cultural differences in specific terms, almost all civic officials mentioned language first. Respondents cited fluency in English as *the* key to integration, both in terms of obtaining employment and, in the words of one respondent who works for a cultural development organization, “accessing culture” (2006). One provincial social development staff member described his neighbour as the ideal immigrant: a Mexican who learned English through locally sponsored ESL courses. “We did everything we could to accommodate him, to help him feel welcome and to sort of get him up on his feet. Now he's on his feet and he's a contributor. That's the value of just helping them through the integration process and allowing them to come in and celebrate their culture, not oppress it” (2006).

Some respondents mentioned the potential to accommodate other languages, noting the value of having a multilingual population. Officials were uncertain about what it meant to promote a multilingual city, given the predominantly English population. As a manager of a social development association said, “I'm not sure we have to change our structure to accommodate their languages. We have to create structures that can help them evolve into the common language, but

we'd be silly to push their language out. We should foster their language and let them speak it because it just makes us more diverse" (2006). The respondent privileged English (the language of the public domain) while simultaneously valuing the diversity represented in other languages (of the private domain).

Some service providers interviewed were non-native English speakers, many of whom worked with agencies offering English as a Second Language services. Few believed ability to speak functional English posed the greatest challenge for most immigrants. Rather, respondents said that the *perception* of language difficulty created barriers, particularly when it comes to getting employment. One municipal government respondent who worked closely with businesses saw some define immigrants as people who cannot speak English (2006). A civic official with a cultural development association observed "resistance or trepidation on the part of employers to bring somebody new into the office or an organization where language skills may present a challenge. The business community generally has a lack of cultural understanding what the means of newcomers are and what they can offer to the region" (2006). An NGO volunteer (2009) expressed frustration that newcomers who speak accented English are often considered less employable. "If someone has an accent, it doesn't mean that their English is bad; it means that they know another language". Service providers found the municipal government reinforced Anglo-centrism by failing to provide resources for newcomers in any other languages, including French.

Service providers noted that accents can serve as markers of belonging as well as of difference. One NGO manager (2009) received regular compliments on a British accent: "I can guarantee you if you go to talk to the immigrants who are learning English, they won't get the same reaction".

Integration and Belonging

Civic officials and immigration service providers painted similar pictures of social relations between newcomers and the host society in Halifax. Everyone thought it difficult for newcomers to attain a sense of belonging in the Halifax region; in fact, many thought the challenge actually contributed to people leaving. Beyond this observation, however, the two groups offered divergent views on the barriers immigrants face to gaining a sense of belonging. Civic officials characterized immigrants' cultural differences as adding to the richness of the city, creating a more attractive place with new opportunities for cultural consumption. When they spoke of differences such as language as a potential concern, officials sought ways to show these differences could be overcome. Service providers also held a positive view of the contributions immigrants make to the social fabric of the city; however, they provided a starker view of the challenges of integration. These respondents described the failure of local authorities and the host society to fully engage in integration processes with newcomers. They saw a sense of foreignness generated by regional stereotypes around race and language permeating the experience of non-Western newcomers in Halifax. Moreover, providers identified racism as an issue affecting the integration of Nova Scotian populations, as well as that of immigrants.

That officials so frequently characterized barriers as difficult but surmountable may reflect some of their own personal experiences coming from away. For these respondents, geographic markers of belonging did not keep them from gaining positions of authority so may have assumed that

newcomers from other parts of the world would have a comparable experience, providing they spoke sufficient English to find employment. Few officials engaged in reflective discussion of how their personal experiences may differ from those of newcomers belonging to a racial or ethnic minority. Officials saw newcomers' diverse cultural backgrounds as enhancing the city and their own experience of it but did not acknowledge how these differences may negatively affect newcomers' experiences.

Respondents' own sense of belonging and their personal stakes in seeing the social dynamic of the city change influenced their answers. As figures of authority, civic officials understood the demographic challenges facing the region. As the government feels pressure to attract people to maintain population growth, officials' discourse presented their positions on diversity as either government policy or personal preference. Yet as Berry (1997) pointed out, multiculturalism is not a belief but a set of social conditions. Officials understood the need for change even as they benefitted from the status quo.

Officials interviewed seemed unsure of what the host society could or should do to accommodate the diversity they desired. One respondent, a manager of an economic development agency, wasn't comfortable with the word integration: "Especially in all the things that come with it, 'Leave your culture at home.' I'm not into that at all. But if you take the more positive side of integration; you know, giving them a chance" (2006). Several described integration in the broadest terms possible: permitting others to celebrate their culture while not giving up one's own. Yet even in characterizing integration as an exchange of cultures, officials did not envision parties of equal standing. Describing the ideal cultural exchange, one respondent, a social development staff member, located the immigrant in a passive stance relative to the host society: "It isn't sufficient to just *teach them* about our culture, and *integrate them* into our culture –I think we need to *give them* a sense of belonging by *allowing them* to contribute to the community" (2006, emphasis added). In the absence of a discussion of what is meant by "their culture" and "our culture", officials relied on what Bannerji (2000, 51) called the "deployment of diversity," that is, they talked about a "value-free, power-neutral plurality, of cultural differences where modernity and tradition, so-called white and Black cultures, supposedly hold the same value." Rather than acknowledge the hegemony of particular cultural traditions and practices, local officials talked about embracing diversity.

In contrast to officials, immigration service providers held little interest in maintaining the current social order, seeing it as exclusionary and conservative. Rather than speaking about cultural differences, respondents discussed issues of systematic injustice. For instance, service providers found that in hiring practices, those who fit regional stereotypes (white, English-speaking) enjoyed a distinct advantage over immigrants. A volunteer for an NGO emphasized the challenges newcomers face when looking for employment in Halifax, a city where "People have their network and their Rolodex. Looking for employment is more a matter of tapping your own contacts" (2009). Some suggested getting a job depends on having a familiar face or name. The manager of an NGO used the image of three piles of resumes: one of young graduates from Halifax universities; a second from people who graduated then moved to Alberta and now want to come home; a third from new immigrants. Even when immigrants are the most qualified, the respondent said, "Only if employers haven't filled the jobs from the first two piles will they look at the last pile" (2009). Strong local social networks may effectively exclude immigrant newcomers. Most service providers saw the current system as requiring newcomers to adapt through personal transformation while demanding

little or no accommodation by the host community.

Conclusion: Consuming Difference

The Halifax interviews suggested that those developing and implementing public policy defined cultural diversity – as embodied by people speaking different languages, cooking different foods, and practicing different activities -- as beneficial to the community and economy. They accepted the creative cities discourse that linked diversity to both tolerance and innovation. Moreover, they described immigration as a solution to potential population decline and brain drain. In that context, welcoming and integrating immigrants was seen as both necessary and potentially fruitful for the region. Cultural diversity was desirable also for its utility in contributing to the labour pool and to entertainment options. At the same time, development authorities put the onus for integration largely on newcomers, identifying the programs available to help them develop the skills and connections to fit within the local economy and society.

Those working with immigrant groups presented another perspective on the issue. As advocates for newcomers, they recognized the challenges faced by those who come speaking other languages, practicing other religions, and presenting new faces to the region. Service providers exposed systemic barriers to welcoming newcomers on their own terms and integrating them effectively into the local economy. Differences in power relations have profound consequences for newcomers. The inability of the local economy to effectively absorb immigrant workers and the opacity of local social networks create conditions that limit retention of immigrant households. Until Halifax adopts strategies that accommodate the immediate needs of immigrants it will likely continue to fail to meet its immigration targets.²

In sum, the interviews suggest that Halifax's greatest strength is simultaneously its Achilles' heel. The tight and overlapping social networks that facilitate trust and collective action, and also effectively absorb Canadian-raised newcomers into the region, may limit the ability of immigrant and visible minority newcomers to integrate easily. Immigrant and visible minority newcomers are defined as "culturally diverse" others, valued in an abstract way for their potential economic and social utility but often set apart by their difference. The inability to consistently make social space for immigrants may account for the challenges Halifax faces in retaining international migrants. While the city has enjoyed economic growth and prosperity based on interprovincial migration over the last several decades, its long-term prospects may depend increasingly on finding ways to make international migrants feel accommodated within a socially inclusive and welcoming community. This will require that governments adopt appropriate policies and practices to more effectively engage those outside existing power networks to participate in social, economic and governance processes.

Halifax welcomes immigrant newcomers in a utilitarian way. That is, public policy and business leaders suggest immigrants can solve local demographic and economic needs, yet local governance and social networks remain relatively impermeable. As Derwing and Krahn (2008, 198) note, "Most

² To address this challenge, the Greater Halifax Partnership developed a Connector Program to assist immigrants to make social connections in Halifax business networks. Pier 21 also has a program, called Welcome Home to Canada, designed to give immigrants Canadian work experience and job hunting skills and also introduce them to potential employers.

of the policies that provinces and municipalities have developed in the last few years talk about ‘welcoming communities’, but there is very little evidence that political leaders have any tangible plans for addressing this issue”. Halifax has been slow to develop meaningful mechanisms to engage immigrant newcomers. The concept of welcoming communities remains shallow without critical reflection on the part of the host society. Our research reveals some assumptions officials make about community identity in Halifax and points to the ways in which particular social constructions may alienate immigrant newcomers with the potential to contribute to innovation and economic development in the city-region. Illuminating such barriers constitutes a step toward opening the gates to welcoming newcomers into our communities.

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