A BMRC RESEARCH DIGEST
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BMRC IRMU

Enabling engagement within Francophone minority communities -FMCs

The role of francophone minority community spaces

Source: TFO

What you need to know

Since the early 2000s, immigration to Francophone minority communities (FMCs) has been a priority for the Canadian government. Despite official bilingualism, French-speaking immigrants (FSIs) are often a linguistic minority who face language barriers that hinder their integration. FMCs can therefore play an essential role in facilitating the social and cultural integration of FSIs. This research provides a much-needed examination of the diverse experiences of FSIs – many of who are racialized – within FMCs. The findings will serve to identify FSIs' main needs and point to areas for improvement.

What is this research about?

Our study uncovers the complex relationships between FSIs and FMCs by examining the roles of francophone community spaces (e.g., community centres, schools, cultural events, religious spaces, etc.) in the social participation of FSIs. We investigate French-speaking immigrants' access to, use of, and participation in community spaces to engage with Francophone minority communities in Ottawa and London (ON). The study is especially attentive to the impacts of immigrants' intersecting identity markers (gender, race, class, language) on this community involvement.

How was the research carried out?

As an instrumental case study, we relied on 8 focus groups (4 in Ottawa and 4 in London) with a total of 56 French-speaking migrants: 13 participants (9 women, 4 men) in London and 43 in Ottawa (18 women, 25 men) to learn about their experiences with a variety of community spaces and activities in the two FMCs. Efforts were made to recruit newcomers from diverse cultural backgrounds and with various demographic characteristics. The transcripts of the French-language focus groups were coded and analysed to identify similarities and differences between the two cities.

What have we learned from the research?

1) Anglophone dominance despite official bilingualism: In both cities, participants found living in an anglophone-dominant society was isolating. Participants lacked opportunities to engage in everyday activities in French, making it hard to resist assimilation into anglophone society. Francophone minority communities could provide opportunities for FSIs to be in touch with their francophone identities; however, francophone communities ' minority status often limits the success of these initiatives.

2) The paradoxical role of FMCs for French-speaking immigrants and refugees: Most participants were hesitant to identify solely as Francophone, which they viewed as potentially limiting in an anglophone-majority context. This was exacerbated by the fact that FMCs were seen as unwelcoming towards newcomers. In both cities, FMCs and their activities lacked visibility and were difficult to access for FSIs. Racial divisions often added to feelings of exclusion. Though hindered by these tensions, opportunities to access services in French, such as education and community activities, were deemed vital by French-speaking immigrants who underlined the importance of francophone spaces for their successful integration.

3) Community spaces as supporting participation and identities in minority contexts: In London and Ottawa, participants identified a variety of spaces that helped their integration, including community centres, churches, ethno-cultural spaces, libraries and schools. These spaces enabled FSIs to participate in activities, gather information, expand their social circle, and fulfill other needs, such as childcare and spiritual needs. FMCs provided them with opportunities to express their diverse identities and develop a sense of belonging. These processes provide a range of opportunities for linguistic minority immigrants to engage in a range of meaningful activities.

How can you use this research?

Government and community institutions can use this study to aid the integration of FSIs in FMCs, especially those who are racialized by:

- Increasing collaboration between francophone organizations to optimize resources and provide a range of services that respond to diverse needs. Likewise, increase cooperation between FMCs and government institutions;
- Improving the dissemination of information for FSIs making use of different tools (radio, social media, anglophone partners);
- Investing in francophone community spaces so they can provide a wide variety of needed services that are affordable and scheduled frequently, including employment-related events and information.

Who is leading this research?

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Learn more

Veronis, L. et Huot, S. (2019). Imaginaires géographiques de la francophonie minoritaire canadienne et négociation des appartenances chez des immigrants et réfugiés d ' expression française. Diversité Urbaine, 19 : 115-137. DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1065123ar