

FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION IN OTTAWA

Introduction – context

As a minority group, Francophone communities across Canada are presently struggling to maintain their demographic importance and identity. Francophone immigration to Canada has become of significant interest because it presents the potential to help preserve and even revive existing Francophone minority communities (Farmer, Nguem, Madibbo, Gallant & et al. , 2010). Concomitantly, Francophone immigration plays a major role in the transformation and diversification of established Francophone minority communities. At a more local scale, recent research shows that Ottawa is becoming an increasingly popular destination for settlement among Francophone immigrants (Paquette and Veronis, 2013; Gilbert et al. forthcoming). It is therefore important to study the experiences of Francophone immigrants in Ottawa, including the availability of services and resources to assist them in the settlement process as well as in their interactions with the already established Francophone community. Examination of Francophone immigration is also useful to advance the understanding of its social and cultural impacts on the established Francophone community. Our research will concentrate on the processes and impacts of Francophone immigration to the Ottawa neighborhood of Lowertown as this area has experienced significant social change associated with Francophone immigration.

Services for Francophone newcomers in Ottawa

In Ottawa, we found that the majority of the services are located in the city center. Specifically, the geography of the services and organizations are located where pockets of Francophone populations are identified. It was also discovered that there are several local organizations that are dedicated to offering diverse services to Francophone immigrants. These services range from settlement services to health services, social services, recreational activities and language courses. In addition to these findings, we found that there are four different categories of organizations at various scales that provide a range of services to Francophone communities.

- 1) Local settlement agencies provide essential services to Francophone immigrants. These are services that newcomers would seek immediately upon arrival to Canada such as housing, workforce integration, citizenship documentation recovery, financial support and language courses.
- 2) Local (mostly municipal) community and recreation centers offer a broad range of services. These organizations generally provide services to the population at large that newcomers would seek once they are settled such as recreation activities, integrated health services and social services. Community and recreation based organizations aim to offer services that appeal to the wide range of interests and needs of a diverse demographic while some adapt to the needs of specific groups based on age, gender, culture and language among other things.
- 3) Small immigrant organizations created by members of the community are driven to preserve their culture, language, traditions and identity. These organizations aim to unify Francophone newcomers by planning small events and by hosting meetings where individuals can become acquainted with their community.
- 4) A number of national organizations provide services on a more macro scale, including legal procedures, the development of regional and national policies, though they do not always offer direct aid to Francophone immigrants in Ottawa.

We found that settlement agencies as well as community and recreation centres are important because they provide direct support to Francophone immigrants. These organizations provide a variety of opportunities and “spaces” that encourage interactions between Francophone newcomers and the established Francophone community.

References

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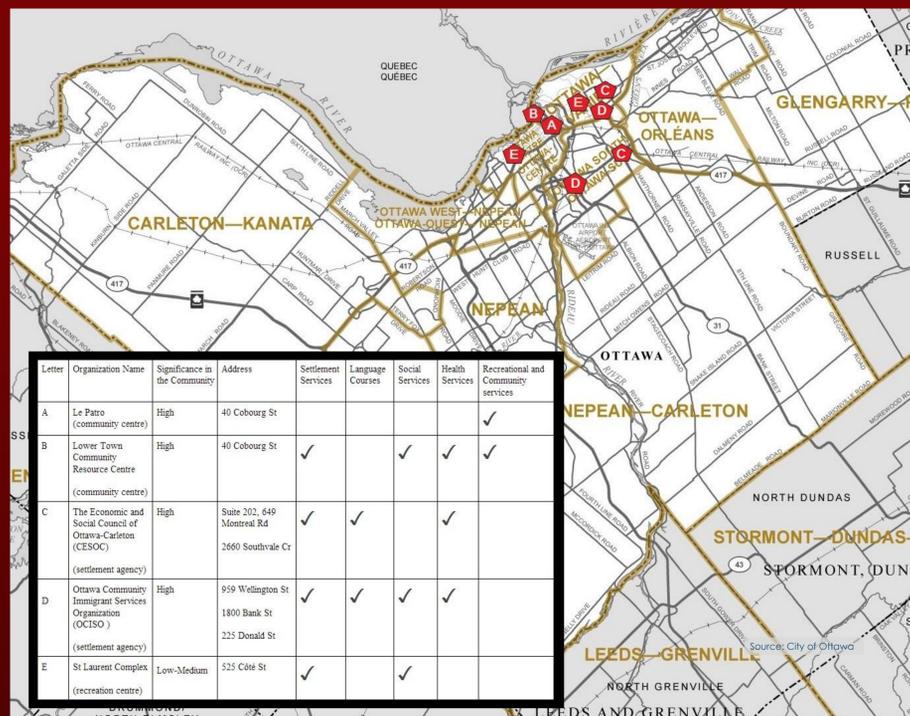
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Objectives

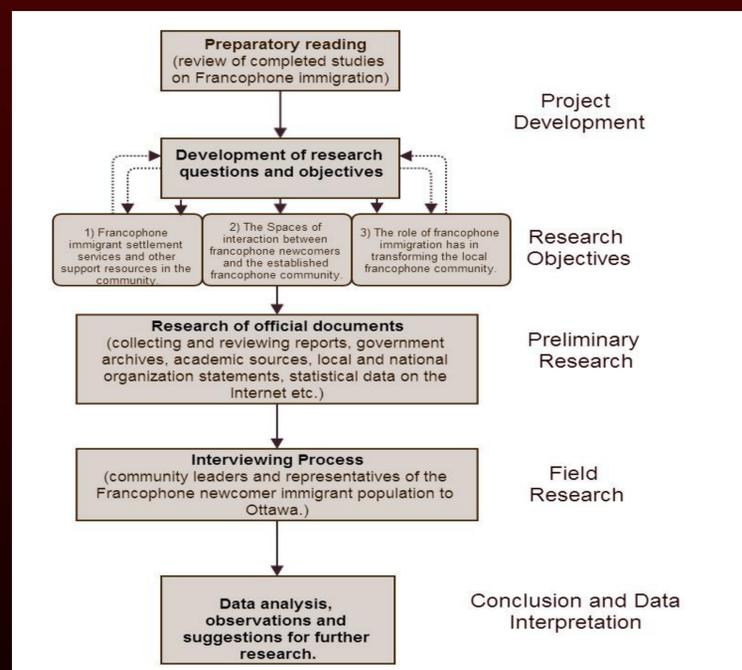
This research project has three main aims:

- 1) To identify the settlement services and other support resources in the community that are available to Francophone newcomers in Ottawa.
- 2) To investigate the social and material spaces where Francophone newcomers and the established Francophone community may come together and interact, as well as the nature of these interactions.
- 3) To examine the role of Francophone immigration in transforming and diversifying the local Francophone community, culture and identity.



Methodology

To achieve the project's objectives, we relied on a mix of qualitative methods including research for primary data on local service provision for Francophone newcomers as well as semi-structured personal interviews with representatives of local community organizations.



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The demographics of LTCRC and Le Patro clients and the services utilized

The information gathered from two interviews with representatives from the Lowertown Community Resource Centre (LTCRC) and Le Patro contributed important insights to our knowledge concerning Francophone immigration in Ottawa. First, the representatives explained that a diverse demographic utilizes the services offered. As reported, families and individuals of all ages and origins profit from the offered services but it was emphasised that women with children and the area's homeless population use the center's services most frequently. Second, we learned that primarily recreation and social services were offered by these organizations. Furthermore, childcare services and afterschool children and youth programs are the most heavily used by Francophone individuals in the Community. It was mentioned that Francophone newcomers who are older adults and elders used the centers' services less frequently as they have financial limitations and family responsibilities, which makes it difficult to seek recreational services. In addition, a representative specified that many francophone newcomers in Lowertown originate from Somalia and sub-Saharan Africa and that the majority of immigrants are either permanent residents or refugees; only a small number are illegal/ undocumented migrants.

Spaces of interaction between newcomers and established Francophone communities

One of the representatives reported that interactions between individuals of different social classes and origins in the area are lacking and that some improvement is needed. Culture and education, rather than income, were major sources of social segregation in the area. Nevertheless, it must be noted that interactions between different Francophone groups do occur. According to the representative from the LTCRC, interaction is dependent on location and time (interactions not beyond scheduled times). For example, it was documented that there were many interactions among individuals of all ages that attend recreational activities, childcare services, seasonal events and festivities (e.g. Winterfest, Basse Ville en Fête). The majority of interactions were reported to be observed at the local food bank during times of distribution. As expected, French elementary schools are also important physical spaces of interaction as children from diverse Francophone communities and neighborhoods attend the same schools. Along with the interactions that take place at French elementary schools, one of the representatives noted that a large amount of interactions between Francophone groups occur among children who participate in activities offered by the organizations. These natural communications are important as they facilitate and encourage interactions among the parents of these families. Moreover, one of the representatives recounted that the interactions between adults of different Francophone groups are limited and are even scarcer among the elderly of diverse Francophone groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research reveals that Francophone immigration plays a significant role in shaping the local social and cultural landscape and preserving the French language in the city of Ottawa. Throughout the project, many of our research objectives have been met and have led to several principal findings. First, we found that there are several types of organizations that provide different services on either small or large scales. Small scale organizations are principally located in Centertown and provide the most aid to Francophone newcomers in the area. Second, we found that local organizations play an essential role in the community as they provide aid to Francophone immigrants and also create spaces of interaction between Francophone newcomers and the existing Francophone community. Next, we realized the importance of public spaces and community events in Lowertown (e.g. schools, parks, food banks) as many interactions between individuals from different Francophone groups occur in these spaces. Finally, we learned that interactions between Francophone newcomers and the established Francophone community are scarce due to cultural and social differences. While a great deal was learned about Francophone immigration in Lowertown and the broader Ottawa area, additional research is required to fully understand the complexity associated with the process of Francophone immigration.