



- How can we make our communities more attractive and welcoming?
- I will address this question from the point of view of rural communities
  - Those that are more remote, less dense, and often reflect important identity differences from urban centres
- When thinking of policy implications – I will be addressing local municipal governments as well as provincial or federal ones.

•FCM Municipal Workshops (Toronto 2010)

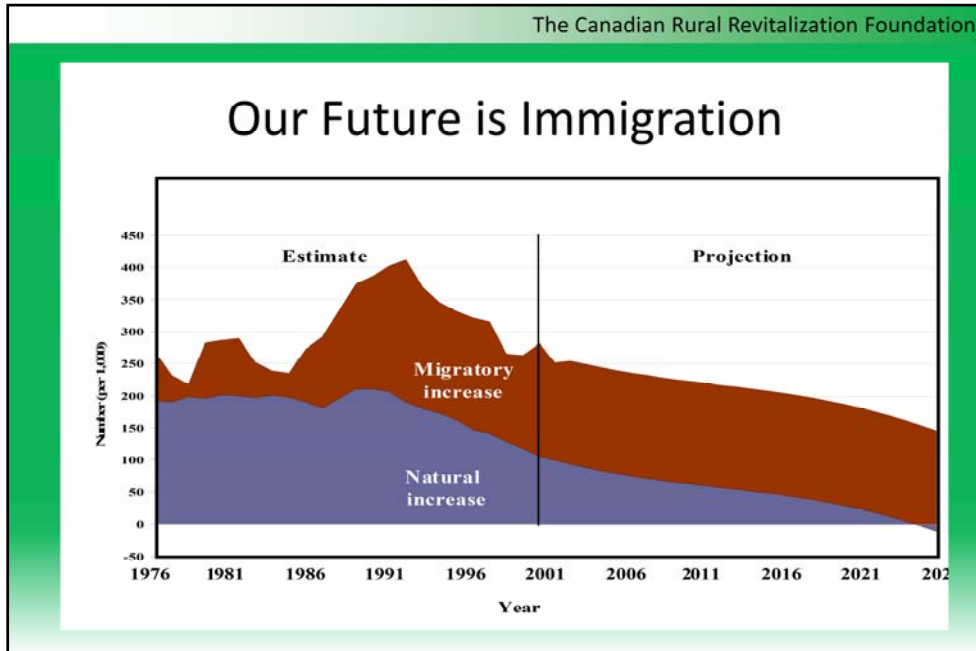
•Vibrant communities in a changing country: How to attract new Canadians to your region

•Dominion Ballroom North

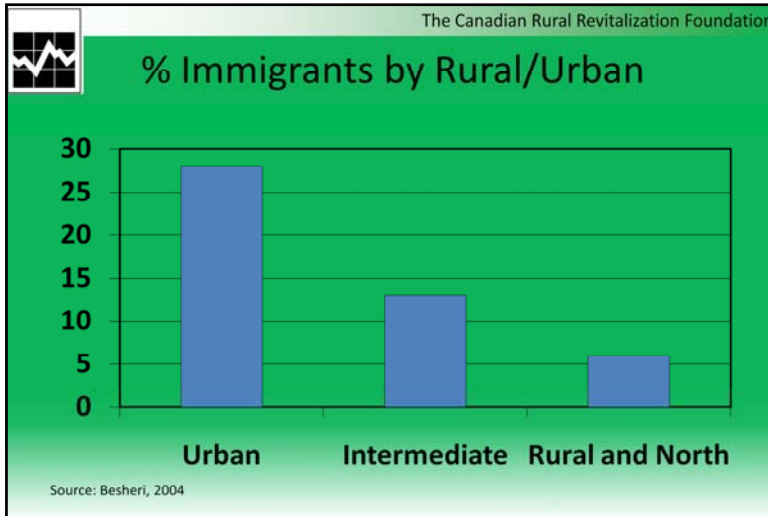
•**Speakers:** Ratna Omidvar, Executive Director, Maytree Foundation; Reeve Art Petkau, Rural Municipality of Stanley, MB; representative of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (invited); Bill Reimer, Professor, Concordia University

**Moderator:** Councillor Leonore Foster, City of Kingston, ON

•Since 2000, Canada has welcomed more than 200,000 new permanent residents each year. While Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver continue to account for the vast majority of these new Canadians, most smaller, rural and remote communities from across the country are vying for a bigger share of the immigration pie. These communities are developing local partnerships and innovating with new collaborative strategies not only to attract, but also to retain and integrate newcomers. This session will highlight successful settlement practices employed by local governments, the unique challenges facing smaller and rural communities in attracting and retaining new Canadians, and the essential role of all sectors of society—including community agencies, businesses, schools, and police—in successful immigration settlement.



- This graph is included to help us set the general context and importance of immigration.
- The graph examines the growth of population in Canada and compares the extent to which this growth is the result of us producing our own children (named “natural increase” by demographers) and to what extent it is the result of immigration (“Migratory increase”). At the left hand side of the graph, for example, we see that most of the population increase was due to births since the blue section is much larger than the red in 1976.
- Around 1986, there is a large increase due to migration, then at its maximum peak in 1991 the rate of natural increase starts to decline. This decline in the contribution of births continues today and is projected to continue into the future. In fact, demographers estimate that by 2021 we will no longer be contributing to our population growth by natural increase and it will all be due to immigration.
- There are two important implications that emerge from this scenario.
  - It means that employment growth (including the provision of services for our aging population) will depend on immigration more than Canadian births. You probably have already noticed this happening in your community. It will become more so in the future.
  - It means that in order to sustain our communities and thrive into the future we will have to find ways to welcome and support these newcomers in innovative ways.



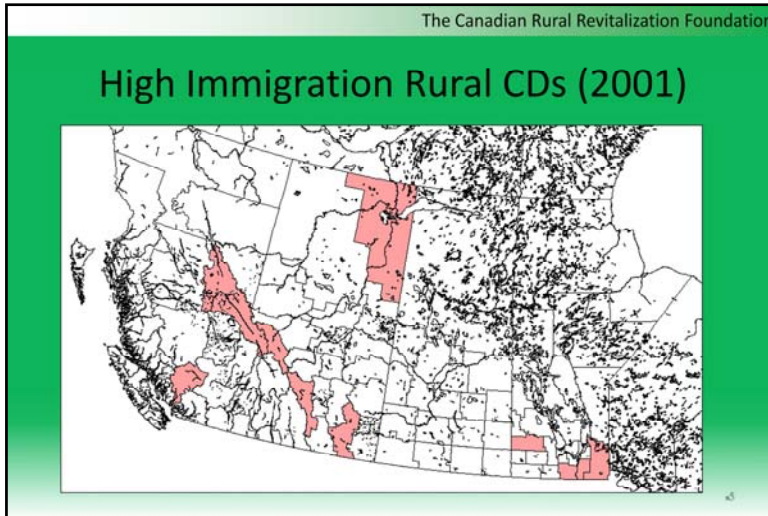
- There is a special problem for rural areas, however, since most immigrants settle in urban places
  - This slide shows the % of people who are immigrants by urban to rural and northern places
- Highest %s are found in predominantly urban regions, and second is in intermediate ones.
  - Only about 6% of the people in rural areas arrived there as international immigrants between the turn of the century and 2001
- Besheri, Roland (2004) "Immigrants in rural Canada: 2001 update" Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin" 5(4) June. Catalogue no. 21-006-XIE.

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## Rural challenges

- Fewer employment opportunities
- Lower human capital
- Lack of accurate information
- Lower institutional capacity
- Less critical mass

- Rural areas face considerable challenges for attracting immigrants
  - Employment opportunities lower
  - Human capital lower as reflected in education levels
  - Accurate information is missing
  - Institutional capacity is lower (fewer services, especially for new Canadians)
  - Critical mass to take advantage of migration flows is harder to find.



- But – the general statistics hide important variations within the categories
  - Some rural places have been highly successful at attracting and retaining immigrants
  - 9 of the top 30 census divisions for immigrants (% immigrants) were predominantly rural regions (Beshiri, 2004)
    - 4 in MB (Altona/Morden/Winkler; Steinbach; CD1 – NE of Wpg; Minnedosa/Neepawa)
    - 3 in AB (Lethbridge/Brooks; Fort McMurray; Canmore)
    - 2 in BC (Fraser-Fort George/Prince George; Squamish)
- What can we learn about attracting immigrants by looking at these places (and others)?



- What is needed to attract immigrants?
- > Jobs – but the basis for these jobs can be very diverse
  - Winkler/Steinbach/Altona – based in agriculture and small manufacturing
  - > Brooks – meat processing (oil and gas)
  - > Fort McMurray – oil and gas
  - Prince George – forestry and services
  - > Squamish – forestry and natural amenities
- Note
  - Attraction of highly skilled immigrants also generates jobs since they will establish local businesses (IMF)
  - Impetus for immigration often came from the loss of replacements for running existing businesses in several of these areas.
  - Manufacturing has maintained its relative position for employment in rural areas – competing favourably with urban regions
    - Considerable success with niche marketing – on an international level [e.g. Book binding in Altona]
- > Improved information and communication
  - It is important that new Canadians understand the conditions to which they are coming
  - > Internet is confusing to potential immigrants
    - There are 1700 immigration brokers officially recognized by the Canadian government (and many unofficial ones).
      - They are difficult to distinguish from official government links and their representations of the Canadian situation and opportunities is distorted
        - To promises of employment success
        - To urban-biased perspectives and interests.
  - In order to overcome these misrepresentations, the town of Winkler strategically targeted potential immigrants with whom they were familiar – Mennonites in Central and South America
  - They took advantage of the way in which immigration typically works – through migration streams (Successful immigration from a particular place of origin encourages others in the region of origin to come. More familiar and comfortable.)

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## Attracting Immigrants

- Jobs
- Information
- Social capital
- Quality of life



- These and other initiatives reinforce the value of the social networks – formal and informal that operate to inform and support immigrants.
- > What we sociologists refer to as social capital
  - All of these success stories include the active collaboration with local governments, businesses, volunteer groups, and families both at a formal and informal level
    - It is not just an economic issue but implicates the full range of health, education, recreation, culture, and social support dimensions of local regions
    - Includes paying attention to social infrastructure as much as physical infrastructure
  - Needs proactive initiatives for public education and local initiatives to deal with cultural diversity
    - Strangers are always a cause for stress but there are many ways in which this stress can be reduced through imaginative programs and activities.
      - [E.g. Cap-St-Ignace]
  - Needs collaboration at the regional level
- > Ultimately the goal is to improve the quality of life in your region
  - Not only will this serve as a strong attractor for immigrants but it is an excellent strategy for dealing with sustainability under conditions of boom and bust.

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## Strategic Policies

- Communities
  - Start where you are
  - Focus regionally – think globally
  - Learn about others
- Governments
  - Strengthen local and regional capacities
  - Work with existing networks and organizations
  - Link local, regional, and national groups and individuals

•What can communities and government do to encourage and facilitate immigration?

•Local communities

•Start where you are now

- Identify your assets (including the social ones)
- Where do you currently meet, discuss, and decide? (at the coffee shop or curling rink?)
- Who's excluded and how can they be included?

•Focus regionally – think globally

- Who is nearby?
- Where do you meet them?
- What are their assets and where do you have interests in common?

•Take initiative to learn about others

- Locally, regionally, and globally
- Create events and venues to do so if they are not already available.
  - [e.g. Japan]

•Governments

•Strengthen local and regional capacities

- Venues – places where people meet
- Transportation and communication (a major obstacle for rural areas)
- Training – especially with respect to social organization.
  - It takes skill to organize a meeting, gather information, manage conflict, get to a group decision, and learn how to compromise.
  - It also requires a relatively stable policy context.

•Work with existing networks and organizations rather than duplicate the services.

- Requires innovative governance to meet representativeness, fairness, and accountability objectives
- It also means bearing the extra costs incurred by NGOs when they collaborate with governments

•Link local, regional and national groups and individuals

- Information
- Meeting venues
- Training
- Mentorship



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## Attracting Immigrants in the New Rural Economy

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- Rural areas have an uphill battle to find, attract, and retain immigrants.
- It also means that they have to work extra hard to ensure that the differences in culture, religion, and customs that accompany many of these newcomers are seen as assets rather than liabilities.
- Our own history of rural settlement has demonstrated the value of this approach – and should give us inspiration for how we might do it under current conditions.
- Our future depends on it.