Attracting Immigrants to Non-Metropolitan Cities in Canada: Is Being "Welcoming" Enough?

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Summary (En)

This investigation intended to explore whether 'welcoming' attributes of non-metropolitan cities in Canada could be associated with increased immigrant settlement. 'Immigrant' is understood here as a foreign-born permanent resident or citizen. Statistical analysis of variables constructed from publicly available data between 2006 and 2011 on 131 smaller and mid-size cities could not validate this. However, economic and human capital factors were found to be strong predictors of variations in immigrant presence. This suggests that focusing solely on improving immigrant-friendly services and community attitudes without promoting economic development may be an insufficient strategy to attract immigrant residents.

Problem

Between 2009 and 2010, 88 census divisions—counties or regional municipalities—suffered demographic decline (Statistics Canada 2011). This highlights the essential role that immigration plays in Canadian population renewal and labour force growth. However, 75% of newcomers settle in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver (Carter, Margot and Amoyaw 2008). In 2011, the seven biggest metropolitan areas accounted for 77% of the immigrant population in the country, a 12% increase compared to 2006. On the other hand, smaller communities are facing significant challenges with attracting and retaining newcomers and resettlers. If not addressed properly this issue can have important economic and developmental consequences.

Table 1: 2006-2011 immigrant proportion losses and gains by city size range

City size range	Lost (%)	Gained (%)	Total (%)	Variation range
116k-233k	9 (11.1)	8 (16)	17 (13)	-1.7 to 2.9
60k-115k	15 (18.5)	4 (8)	19 (14.5)	-1.9 to 1.1
10k-59k	57 (70.4)	38 (76)	95 (72.5)	-4.0 to 5.5
Total	81 (100)	50 (100)	131 (100)	

→ Proportionally to city size, the immigrant presence has declined in 81 cases (N=131)
→ 80% of the higher gains (>2% variation) are among the lower-tier CAs

Research questions

Why some smaller cities succeed more than others in attracting immigrants? What factors contribute to immigrants' decision to settle or resettle in smaller and remote communities?

Hypothesis

This research hypothesized that welcoming determinants such as the presence of explicit settlement services and post-secondary institutions could have a positive effect on immigrant attraction. Based on the literature, this effect was believed to vary positively with various independent variables embodying the economic vibrancy of the community, the valorization of human capital, the presence of ethnic social networks, and the size of cities. In contrast, the effect was said to vary negatively with distance.

References

Carter, Tom, Morrish Margot, and Benjamin Amoyaw. 2008. "Attracting Immigrants to Smaller Urban and Rural Communities: Lessons Learned from the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program." *Journal of International Migration & Integration* 9: 161-183.

Statistics Canada. 2011. Annual Demographic Estimates: Subprovincial Areas. 2005 to 2010. Catalogue no. 91-214-X, Ottawa.

Methodology

Sample:
- All of the 2011 Statistics Canada denominated Census Agglomerations (CA): 114 communities (from 10,000 to 115,000).
- The smallest-tier of the Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA): 17 out of 33 (from 116,000 to 233,000).

Dep. Var.:
- Variation of the immigrant proportion between 2006 and 2011, in % points.

Ind. Var.:
- **Settlement services**: 0 = no service or partial and hidden; 1 = full but embedded services; 2 = full upfront services. Existing services prior to 2006 census. (Treated as continuous).
- **Post-secondary institutions**: 0 = None; 1 = college only; 2 = university only; 3 = both college and university. (Treated as continuous).
- **Immigrant networks**: 2006 adjusted immigrant number estimates.
- **Human capital valorization**: Proportion of university degree holders among population > 15 y.o. employed full-time during the year prior to 2006 census.
- **Median earnings**: Annual median earnings of the population > 15 y.o. employed full-time during the year prior to 2006 census.
- **Labour activity**: An index constructed with the proportion of >15 y.o. employed full-time during the year prior to 2006 census, divided by the annual unemployment rate (avoids the hidden unemployed numbers of the "active" population rates).
- **Size**: 2006 adjusted population counts.
- **Distance**: Shortest road-trip (kms) from the closest immigrant-magnet centre with preferred intra-provincial link (i.e., Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa-Gatineau, Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg).

Statistical tests:
- Pearson's R, ANOVA, Chi^2, OLS regression.

Results

The regression model shows statistical significance only for the socioeconomic variables. Among these, human capital valorization and labour activity appear as strong predictors of the immigrant proportion variations.

**Table 2: Immigrant attractiveness determinants of Canadian non-metropolitan agglomerations**

Independent variable	Coefficient estimate	(SE)	
(Intercept)	-1.1849	(0.8549)	
Settlement services	0.1568	(0.1638)	
Post-secondary institutions	0.0921	(0.1553)	
Immigrant networks	-0.0001	(0.0000)	*
Human capital valorization	0.1324	(0.0600)	*
Median earnings	-0.0001	(0.0000)	*
Labour activity	0.1329	(0.0289)	***
Size	0.0000	(0.0000)	
Distance	0.0004	(0.0003)	

Notes: The dependent variable is the 2006-2011 variation of the proportion of immigrant estimates in % points.
Two-tailed tests: *** = p < .001, ** = p < .01, * = p < .05.
Adjusted R^2 = .2349. N=131.

Sommaire (Fr)

Cette recherche exploratoire visait à vérifier si certains attributs 'accueillants' d'une communauté urbaine non-métropolitaine pouvaient être associés à un accroissement de l'établissement de personnes immigrantes— 'immigrante' est considéré ici comme une personne née à l'extérieur du pays et possédant un statut de résidente permanente ou de citoyenne. L'analyse statistique sur une série de variables construites à partir de données publiques des recensements de 2006 et 2011, pour un échantillon de 131 petites et moyennes villes, n'a pu valider cela. Les facteurs économiques et ceux reliés au capital humain sont cependant apparus comme de solides prédicteurs de la présence immigrante. Ceci indiquerait qu'une stratégie misant uniquement sur des services dédiés aux immigrants et sur l'attitude de réceptivité des communautés, sans égard au développement économique, serait insuffisant pour attirer des résidents immigrants.

Figure 1: Immigrant variation by distance & labour activity, CAs of 10,000-59,000. N=95
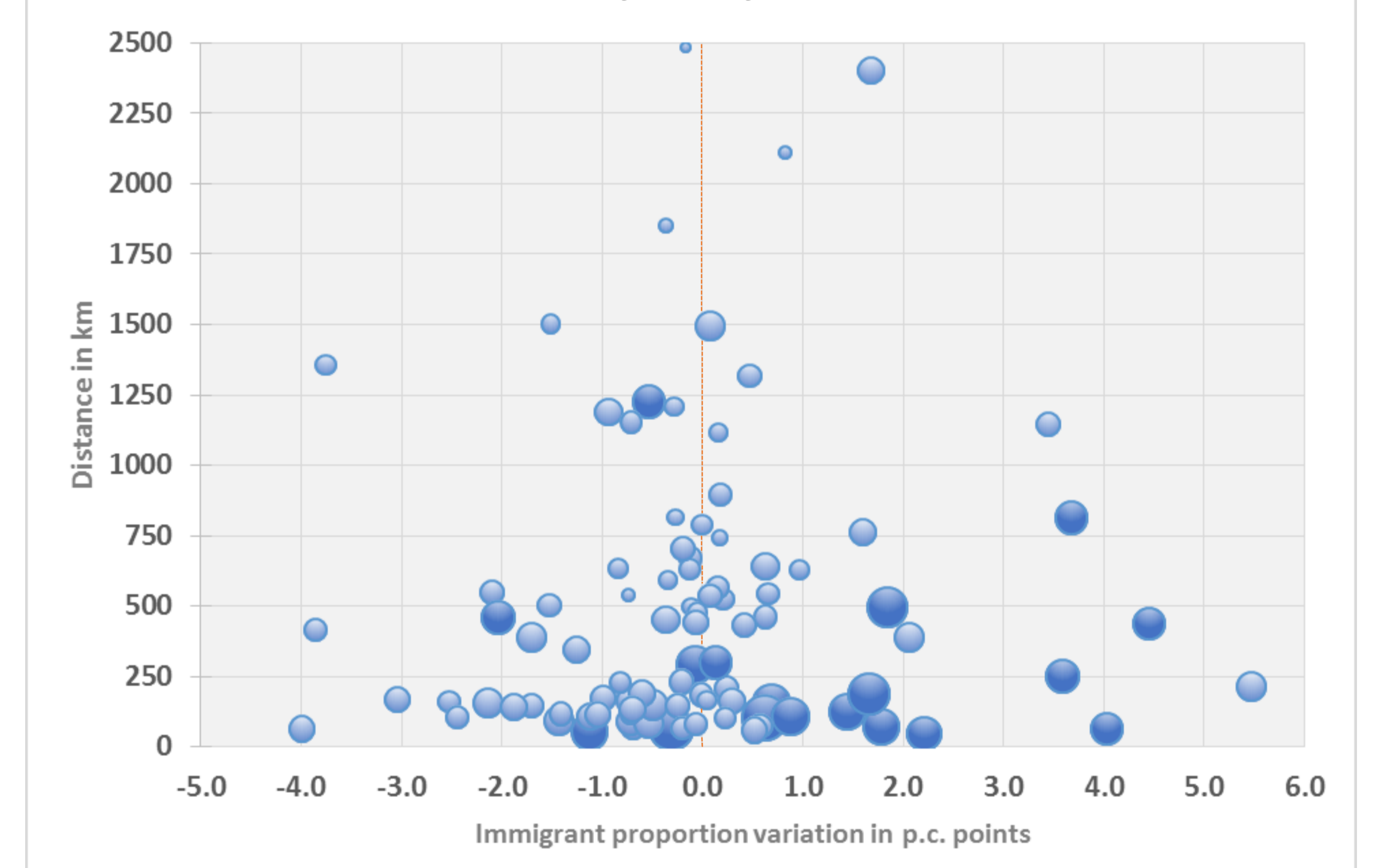
Note: Spheres represent labour activity frequencies, proportionally sized according to the index values, ranging from 2.3 to 31.0. The darker spheres highlight the upper area of the index, from 15.0 to 31.0. There are 20 cases pertaining to this upper-end group in the sample, 18 of which in this subgroup and two in the middle-range CA group.

Other findings

- 18/20 of the highest quoted labour activity were located in the West (Prairies), with 14 in Alberta, and none in the Maritimes. 12 of those had neither settlement nor post-secondary institutions. These results may be attributable to the oil boom in that period.
- 54/81 communities of which immigrant proportion declined were in Ontario and British Columbia. During the same period, Toronto and Vancouver gained 8.5 % and 9 %. These results suggest an increase in the concentration of immigrants in the major CMAs at the expense of smaller and mid-size cities.

Limitations

- The variables do not capture the longitudinal behaviour of immigrant residents along the geography.
- The 2011 immigrant estimates are based on National Household Survey which does not publish standard errors and suffers from bigger non-response biases than the 2006 long-form census.