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Community Partners Panel
Our needs and concerns regarding the Metropolis Project
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One year ago at the 2004 edition of this meeting, I suggested three areas where I had concerns. One year on, I want to look at these again, to update in an admittedly subjective way. Then I want to introduce four new topics.

Demography

My first point last year was about the need for current demographic projections in the light of a birth rate drop to 1.5, and annual immigration numbers relatively frozen in the 225,000 range. I noted that the US, with a birth rate of 2.1 and annual immigration around 1 million, appeared to me to be headed for an increase in its size-lead on us by another 100 million people by mid-century. I wondered whether anyone was looking at this, to assess the consequences of a Canada of 37 million and a US of 397 million? How should this inform future immigration policy?

When I checked the Statistics Canada web site this week, I found that their program to develop population projections has been “temporarily suspended” and will resume in August 2005. The most recent data, for 2000 to 2026, was released on March 13, 2001. Four years have passed. There may be gurus within the government that are current in these areas, but that isn’t apparent from my search. I have discovered that a great deal of fascinating information is available on the web site of the UN’s Population Division that now has world projections out to 2300. That’s 274 years longer than Canada’s published projections.

Why do I think this stuff is important? Since our last year’s meeting, Canada’s immigration ministers in their meeting in November have directed the development of what is now being called the “CIF” – Canada’s Immigration

Framework. The first draft is due in June. How can there be a framework without some demographic work? I know that the subcommittee working on the CIF has had a briefing on Canada's current demographic projections, and that's good. But without a general public understanding of the same parameters, the kind of consensus that will be necessary for the public to support a CIF won't have a chance to develop. Where are the demographers? Where are their writings, their questions, their analyses?

Migration

My second point last year was about "migration", and while it introduced the notion of "regionalization" of immigration and wondered at related research questions (a theme I'll return to later), my main point was a quizzical one, posed for sociologists and anthropologists. Why are there so few people living outside the borders of the country where they were born (less than 3 percent of the world's population)? In a globalizing world, why do most still stay close to home? I learned last fall at Metropolis in Geneva that one of the great fears about forming the EU was that there would be a big migration from the poorer to the better-off regions when borders opened. It didn't happen. Barely 10 percent of the initial alarmist projections came to pass. If we pay attention to this, and try to find out why, it could have implications for immigration policies that are now rooted in the fear that the world waits, bags packed, for the first chance to come to Canada. We don't have to go to Europe to study this phenomenon. There are oodles of singularly unattractive Canadian places with rooted populations, all with unexercised "mobility rights". My sense is that most Metropolis work, certainly the stuff with the profile, now centres around economic themes. It's time to ring in the sociologists and anthropologists.

Economic Models

My perennial frustration with published economic research boiled over last year. I was on about research that shows recent immigrants not doing so well financially, and about our immigration policies' preoccupation with "skilled workers". Two weeks ago in Winnipeg I was encouraged by Derek Hum's presentation at a

Metropolis “Brown bag lunch” event. Derek’s work with Wayne Simpson is providing some refreshing clarity about earnings differentials among immigrants, but more particularly, Derek is now launching into some new work on what he is calling “intergenerational” results. He seems to be tending to the wise position that the economic performance of the arriving generation (that has been studied to death), has *less* long-term significance than the economic performance of its children. Right on Derek!

On the “skilled worker” front, thankfully there is beginning to be some public challenging of this most favoured of all Canadian immigration shibboleths. I recall that Quebec’s Minister of Immigration was one of the latest challengers. I think there needs to be less of the knee-jerk response to this priority, and more thought on a wider and longer plain about where immigration is taking us. In this context, Derek Hum’s intergenerational approach has validity, and is forward-looking.

But as I said last year, there is still an unchallenged logical fallacy in the economic models being pursued, measured, prodded and poked. The measuring of one’s value to our economic system is always based on earnings rather than on units of work. Admittedly the former is easy and the latter may be impossible, but the result of always doing this is to create a false impression of the way a complex economy functions, and to lose sight of the fact that *all* work is important, irrespective of what gets paid for it. In the light of the latter, and what I would maintain is the more compelling reality, the role of immigrants is manifestly and relatively more important. I shall continue to wish for an economist who works in this milieu.

Those were my three topics for last year, and now I would like to introduce briefly four topics for this year:

Visioning

The planned development of a Canadian Immigration Framework (mentioned earlier) should be an opportunity for some *visioning*. There is currently no Canadian population strategy that could serve as a context for an immigration strategy. No political figure has enunciated a size-vision of a future Canada for a very long time. In 1910, Sir Wilfred Laurier envisioned a population of 100 million by the century's end. The pre-First World War immigration strategy appeared directed toward that goal, with over 400,000 immigrants arriving in 1913. Our population was about 6 million.

Two years ago when the Canadian Council for Refugees met in Saskatoon, I conducted a workshop on population strategy. I asked the audience of sixty or so, during the break to write and pass in on a piece of paper the population size they would like Canada to have by 2050. I added them up and took an average, and the number I recall was 67 million. A very naïve number; for it's obvious that with current population projections peaking at 37 or 38 million by mid-century, based on what we see happening now, achieving a number of 67 million would entail a vastly expanded immigration strategy, even an impossible one.

But isn't that the exercise we should do? Shouldn't there be a goal and a plan to achieve it? All we have now is an "annual drift". The Minister announces the "targets" for the year ahead. These are really based on processing capacity that is in turn defined by a rigid budget. There is no larger vision. If we had that vision, and put a number on it, then our demographers could calculate what that would mean in terms of an annual immigrant intake, and we could plan and budget accordingly. It seems obvious and logical. Why do our leaders avoid this? So the tail keeps wagging the dog.

The research question here is perhaps for historians, or geographers, or even philosophers. Why not study the past to search for immigration visions and experiences that could inform our goal-setting, and hence our future planning?

Ethics

Last year, at the National Metropolis Conference in Montreal, I organized a workshop on “Ethics and Immigration”. I did so because I think the world of immigration cries out for some ethical analysis. Every single day I read stories from somewhere of the horrific things that are happening to people because of what I term the “systemic cruelty” that reposes in the world’s immigration systems. These days, ethical issues are on every hand. The political arena is full of them as this week has so amply illustrated. So is the corporate world. I maintain that “so is the immigration world”. This week it is the case of Mohamed Zeki Mahjoub.

Laws have been defined as the “ethical minimum”. Canada’s immigration laws and rules in their application of the “ethical minimum” have become the frequent source of human tragedies. Sometimes their application even seems to defy common sense. I am frequently embarrassed and ashamed as a Canadian and as a Christian about the things my country is doing to people. It is appallingly obvious that the “humanitarian and compassionate” safety valve embedded in our legislation is applied only in perverted ways. Our immigration policy and practice is reposing in a system crying out for ethical review.

Where are the ethicists? Where are the philosophers? They don’t seem to be a part of Metropolis. In my Montreal workshop we had a very good audience, but it seemed to me they were all NGO types – just like the presenters. I don’t recall any academics. After the workshop, and ever since, no one within Metropolis has asked me for a report or for any papers from the five presenters. I guess there is some sort of a message there. The only stakeholders interested are the NGOs.

When I look beyond Canada at the international world of human migration, and see the increasing propensity to raise the drawbridges, I cannot understand why Metropolis seems to have failed to bring aboard philosophers and ethicists. As the title of the play about Noah and the ark has it, maybe they’re “Not Wanted on the Voyage”. I think that this topic should be on the agenda next fall in Toronto at the 10th International Metropolis event.

Regionalization

I've been living with the "regionalization" topic for nearly four years, writing and speaking about it. Now the National Working Group's "Tool Box" on the topic, that I have written, is about to be published and launched – into what is essentially a policy vacuum. Let me quote from a recent draft of the Preface:

"The 'regionalization' of immigration is a current topic of interest in Canada. At a time when some parts of Canada are experiencing a population decline or are unsatisfied with stagnation or minimal growth, other places are experiencing remarkable growth rates and attracting most of Canada's immigrants. It has become apparent that it would be desirable if the benefits of immigration could be spread more evenly across Canada. This sentiment has been voiced unanimously by Canada's ministers of immigration, Federal, Provincial and Territorial.

"This is of course more easily said than done, for moving within Canada is unrestricted, and there is a natural tendency for people from abroad to settle where they have friends and compatriots, or where they believe there are job and career options. There is also a century-old population trend in this country, away from rural and small places and toward larger urban ones. We see this trend across the world as people migrate to its cities.

"At the same time, Canada's largest metropolitan centres still see the desirability of continuing the growth that has been fueling their prosperity and quality of life, and although they are undoubtedly large in the Canadian context, they are not so large on the world stage. Their civic agendas are focused upon gaining more financial resources to meet the expanding demands upon them as they continue to welcome newcomers.

"Thus there are and will be competing population goals and strategies in Canada. The Federal government's immigration strategy is an even-handed one for the whole country. This leaves the regions to consider what their own population strategies should be....."

There is a buzz across this country, right now, about regionalization. Provinces and places that never thought about immigration before are starting to do so. I had an e-mail last week from consultants in Newfoundland looking for relevant research. I submit that the regionalization area is going to be important in future Metropolis research.

Democracy and Power- sharing

Another e-mail this week came from UNESCO's Chief of its International Migration Section. He wants to publish papers. Here is part of his apologia:

“In the many multi-national democracies around the world today, there is increasing evidence for a potential trade-off between democracy and power-sharing. Political participation threatens the fragile power-sharing arrangements between elites that make democracy possible and maintain social peace in divided societies, a point illustrated by the outcome of the 2004 referendum in Cyprus. What is therefore needed is, first of all, empirical research that explicitly addresses the tension between power-sharing and democracy and examines in comparative perspective the conditions under which public participation, whether in the form of popular mobilization, direct democracy, or deliberative democracy, threatens elite power-sharing arrangements in multi-national democracies.”

This piece from the UNESCO man had me scratching my head, and this in turn reminded me of a column I read in the National Post last month by Martin Collacott. He was on about overseas immigration processing, how the Canadian staff abroad were competent and committed, and how they could do their job much better if they didn't have to respond to the constant questions and interference from Canadian Members of Parliament and Canadian immigration lawyers – who should of course butt out. Next day Andrew Coyne's column was about how Mrs. Sgro and other ministers shouldn't intrude in the workings of their departments, and should also butt out. They both left me also scratching my head and wondering about the nature of a democracy and how it best functions. It seemed to me that Messrs. Collacott and Coyne were implicitly arguing for *autocracy*. Personally I think that democracy requires some chaos, and ineptitude may be the fuel. Perhaps we should celebrate our various ministers' not-infrequent clumsiness as a contribution to the good health of the system. Perhaps we need a wider debate on what democracy means and how it best functions. Order may be the great enemy of democracy, and disorder its friend. In any event, the man from UNESCO and Messrs. Collacott and Coyne demonstrate for me that there are immigration-related topics that can challenge the best thinking of our political scientists allied with Metropolis.

