Canada: Managing Diversity and Social Cohesion Under Bill C-50 and Beyond

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Abstract

The recent changes in the Canadian immigration system have led to the development of other programs designed to attract highly skilled immigrants. Bill C-50 was implemented in order to reduce the immigration backlog and match supply with demand on the labour market. Whatever the scheme, there’s one particular group of immigrants whose entry into the country has been encouraged via numerous parallel initiatives – the one of international students. Their retention is strategic because they could be just what Canada needs – young people proficient in the official languages, with Canadian credentials and work experience.

Résumé

Les récents changements dans le système d’immigration canadien ont amené le développement d’autres programmes désignés à attirer des immigrants hautement qualifiés. Bill C-50 a été mis en œuvre dans le but de réduire le nombre de demandes d’immigration en attente et de faire correspondre l’offre et la demande du marché de l’emploi. Peu importe le schéma, il y a un groupe particulier d’immigrants dont l’entrée au Canada a été encouragée via nombreuses initiatives parallèles – celui des étudiants étrangers. Leur rétention est stratégique parce qu’ils pourraient être ce dont le Canada a besoin – des jeunes parlant les langues officielles couramment, avec des diplômes et expériences canadiens.

I acknowledge the help of Michael Devine for proofreading the article. All errors are mine alone, addenda and corrigenda are included in the present paper, but not in the print publication.

The first version of the paper was submitted in December 2009; the last version in the spring of 2010, following a presentation at the triennial meeting of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies held in October 2009 in Sofia. The paper was published in the autumn of 2010 in the proceedings of the conference (pp.377-386): “Managing Diversity and Social Cohesion: the Canadian Experience”, Proceedings of the 5th International Conference of Central European Canadianists, Sofia (16-18 October 2009). Brno: Masaryk University.

The abstract in English is not included in the book; the pictures in the paper are published in black and white; the quotations and references follow MLA style as per CEACS template. The occupations lists discussed in the paper refer to the List of 38, as per April 2010, and not the List of 29 occupations introduced in July 2010.
Major Challenges in Canada’s Diversity and Social Cohesion

Canada’s diversity is not just a hollow concept but a social phenomenon visible in many ways. According to the 2006 Population Census, more than 200 different ethnic origins were reported vs. only 21 in 1901; 11 ethnic origins had populations of over one million people and 41% of respondents vs. 36% in 1996 said they have several ethnic origins. Five million out of the 32 million reported they belong to “visible minorities” 1, which is 16% of all Canadians, and it’s estimated that in 2012 they’ll reach 20% (Statistics Canada 2008). Among the visible minorities, South Asians 2 (1.27 M) and Chinese (1.21 M) were most represented and for the first time the former outnumber the latter – one-fourth of all visible migrants are South Asians. Finally 3, in terms of languages the Census pointed that Chinese is the third language spoken after English and French, and allophones 4 make up one-fifth of the population. In short, diversity has had significant impacts on the Canadian society, and if not well managed it might pose challenges to successful and meaningful social cohesion.

Not only is Canada the country with the highest per habitant rate of immigration, but it is also the only country in the world where multiculturalism was adopted in 1971 as official policy. Nevertheless, the concept has been an object of interpretations, i.e. no less controversial than elsewhere. While recognized by Canada’s Multiculturalism Act (1988) as

…the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society… designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada,

researchers regard multiculturalism either as a policy aiming at destabilizing national unity: “Multiculturalism is a means to avoid recognizing the history of Canadian diversity… It marks a shift from the modern nation-state, which simulated a unity and dissimulated multiplicity, to the post-modern nations-state, which dissimulates its unity and simulates multiplicity” (Day, 205); as a product of French-English conflict (Reitz 2003, 5); or as a policy that should make Canada different from the USA: “Tellingly, the Canadians who support multiculturalism are those who are more interested in asserting a Canadian difference from the United States” (Reitz 2006, 9).

Social cohesion being a dynamic process, its impact on local society should be verified over time. When surveyed in 2009 on national support for immigration, only 50% of Canadians said immigration had a very positive or somewhat positive impact on their community, compared to 39% in 2007. Similarly, fewer think that diversity strengthens Canadian culture: 55% vs. 61% in 2004 (Toronto Sun 2009). While in the short run these attitudes can be justified by the financial crisis, a more pertinent explanation is that diversity is no longer appealing to Canadians who, unlike other developed countries, traditionally favour immigration. More efforts are needed, therefore, on behalf of immigrants, the state and the society so that positive attitudes are regained.

Two very worrisome trends appear when trying to understand what hinders integration in Canada. First, immigrants integrate at different speeds, some fare better than others in the labour market. At the upper end are Asians – with the highest educational and occupational qualifications of all immigrants - while immigrants of Arab origin face obstacles, such as lack of financial resources and settlement services. As a consequence, they faced prejudice and developed negative attitudes towards Canadians (Helly, 15). On the other hand, organizational difficulties may have been caused by human agency from ‘inside’, i.e. their federations already established in Canada. To that adds the Arab-Israeli conflict transposed in Canada and Canadian official support for Israel, as well as reduced financial aid to Arab associations.

Second, and this is from a macro perspective concerning all immigrants alike, all researchers point out that the most common obstacles to efficient social cohesion are non-recognition of foreign credentials and lack of Canadian

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1 People belonging to races other than the Caucasian white race
2 48% of them were originally from India
3 These are not all aspects of diversity but the others won’t be discussed in the paper
4 People whose mother tongue is neither English nor French
labour experience, soft skills and proficiency in the official languages. It is worth noting that the points system, despite being a Canadian specificity, screens only principal applicants to the federal worker scheme, the remaining entering as their dependants or through temporary work programs, family migration, refugees, or business immigrants.

On the positive side, there is evidence that immigrants manage to integrate, judged by their self-selection - their choice to remain in the country and become citizens – which is facilitated by the state policy to grant citizenship faster than elsewhere. Citizenship rates in Canada are higher than in Australia and USA: respectively 84 % vs. 75% and 40 % of all eligible immigrants were naturalized in 2001 (Chui et al., 10). Finally, although Canada has always depended on immigrants, their importance in the near future will be even bigger – Statistics Canada estimated that for 2010-2020 all the net labour growth will come from immigration. Therefore, the Canadian government is increasingly concerned with immigrants’ selection and successful integration.

The Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSW) under Bill C-50

In April 2008 changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act were proposed by the Canadian government. Known as ‘Bill C-50 Ministerial instructions’ they authorize the Minister of Immigration to fast-track certain categories rather than verifying every application in the order of receiving, as was the procedure before. Such a change in processing applications reportedly aims at reducing backlogs and getting immigrants into the country in a timely manner - within six to twelve months. In the beginning of 2008 the backlog was estimated to have reached 900,000 people; and the processing times in some embassies and consulates were over five years, especially in Asia.

The economic boom in Alberta, fueled by the oil industry is a perfect example of another argument advanced – that the Instructions would permit certain businesses to fill their labour shortages faster since they depend to a large extent on immigration workforce.

In October 2008, Jason Kenney replaced Diane Finley as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and whether or not it was a coincidence, he was elected to the Canadian House of Commons representing namely the Alberta riding of Calgary Southeast. The new Minister brought with himself another change: he took responsibility for Multiculturalism – the program was transferred from Canadian Heritage to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. This structural change suggests that there are ongoing efforts for a clearer link to be made between immigration and multiculturalism.

Meanwhile, the List of 38 occupations became known in November 2008 and was retroactive to 27.02.2008, which means that people who filed an application after that date won’t be considered unless it conforms to the new rules. Via the FSW, the Instructions changed the meaning of imported human capital in Canada. On one hand, the new approach is very practical because labour market shortages change frequently within and across sectors. On the other hand, the points system is downgraded because professionals will be screened at the second stage of the process. Moreover, there is a contradiction between the FSW program and the points system - the former giving priority to occupations and the latter on education and language proficiency, based on points’ weight (see the Table below).

As for the List of 38, it is not uniform - shortages are registered in low-skilled (plumbers, construction) but also in middle-skilled (nurses; teachers) and high-skilled positions (engineers; physicians; university professors). Overall, three major trends are quite visible - the focus is on oil and gas-related professions – at least one-fourth of all 38

5 For example, lack of knowledge of the Canadian workplace
6 They represent only one-fifth of all immigrants; and 40 % of those in the FSW, their dependants are not screened.
7 USA Census refers to foreign-born rather than to permanent residents, i.e. the comparison might be incorrect
8 The Bill’s implementation was delayed to October, until the new minister is elected
9 Alberta recorded the fastest economic growth in Canada in early 2008.
occupations; shortages for managers are pressing in various fields (IT, finance, healthcare, mining); and occupations in healthcare and education are still in demand.

With occupations lists being established, there are reasons to believe that the Government seeks to provide workforce from across Canada also. While workforce for low-skilled jobs can be provided by temporary workers, putting more emphasis on STEM and graduate degrees in the educational system can be a way of attracting high-skilled people, as many of the occupations in demand require engineering or PhD degrees.

What’s new in the revised FSW program, which in a way confirms the above argument, is that Federal Skilled Workers may also apply either by having secured a job offer or as temporary workers or students who have been in Canada for at least a year. They’ll also have to pass the threshold of the points system. (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Federal Skilled Worker Program before and after 27.02.2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FSW Scheme Applicable before 27.02.2008</th>
<th>FSW Scheme Applicable after 27.02.2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal Skilled Workers evaluated through:</td>
<td>Federal Skilled Workers may apply either through:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Points-based system; current pass-mark is 67/100;</td>
<td>• Job offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Temporary workers or students who have worked/studied in Canada for a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1-year experience in one of the 38 occupations (the List of 38) published at CIC site. Then, they should satisfy these conditions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1-year work experience within the last 10 years/ skill type 0/A/B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Evaluated by the Points-based system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Proof of funds/except for arranged employment/ - $10,833 per person, and 2,000 for additional member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Backlog: 5 years +</th>
<th>Backlog should be 6 to 12 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every application is verified in the order of receiving</td>
<td>The Minister of Immigration can fast-track certain categories through occupations lists published at CIC site.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The current points-based system (in force since 2003):</th>
<th>Among the 38 Occupations: Financial Managers; Computer and Information Systems Managers; Managers in Health Care; Mining engineers; Geological Engineers; Petroleum Engineers; Specialist Physicians; Registered Nurses; University Professors; Contractors and Supervisors, Heavy Construction Equipment Crews; Plumbers; Supervisors, Oil and Gas Drilling and Service;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Education /25p. for PhD or MA and 17 years of education/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of the official languages /max. 24 for the two 16 + 8/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work experience/ at least 1 year - 15p.; max. 21p. for 4 years or more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Age; adaptability; arranged employment – each 10 p. max.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 Which proves that Alberta’s needs were prioritised
International Students in Canada

If the inclusion of temporary workers is not surprising, the appearance of a students’ stream in the federal system can be regarded as a bold though strategic move. The off-campus work permits endorsed in April 2006 set the stage for this new thinking. In 21 April 2008, three-year postgraduate open work permits were established – designed to provide students with the opportunity to work in Canada without having secured a job position in advance.

Another program along the same lines is the Canadian Experience Class, effective September 2008, which is directed towards temporary workers as well as students graduated from Canadian universities. In order to be eligible, students have to have studied at least two years at a Canadian institution, and worked for at least a year full-time for a Canadian employer. This is another path for students, with criteria that differ from the FSW stream – work experience but no evaluation by the points system is required. Nevertheless, some knowledge of the official languages is necessary to qualify.

While some occupations are on the list of 38, others are not. The FSW scheme implicitly means looking for other pathways. Citizenship and Immigration states: “There are many ways to immigrate to Canada. If you don’t meet the criteria to apply under the Federal Skilled Worker Program, you may qualify under another category” (CIC 2009).

Business and family migration left aside, it can be argued that people are encouraged to apply through Quebec-selected skilled workers\(^{11}\) or Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs).

Through the regional Provincial Nominee Programs, the Canadian provinces are trying to attract those workers and students who would meet their unique regional needs. In most cases there’s a students’ stream and the intent to settle in the province is demanded. Nevertheless, criteria are set at regional level and can vary across the country. In New Brunswick, for example, there is no students’ stream but all applicants are evaluated by a points system\(^{12}\). In British Columbia not all students qualify but only those in STEM\(^ {13}\). While there is no skills shortages list in Nova Scotia, the province accepts applicants with educational credentials uniquely from the province, a criterion which is not applied in the provincial program of Ontario. Both Ontario and Nova Scotia have in addition extended the period within which graduates can apply to the program to two years after graduation, in contrast to ninety days - deadline set by most of the other provincial programs. PNP$s are very dynamic and changes can occur at any time, such as establishing lists with occupations in high demand, accepting certain credentials or languages as an asset, introducing or revising existing points-based systems.

The recent changes in the federal scheme and the opening of all these regional or federal paths for retaining students strongly indicate their importance to the future Canadian workforce. What’s more, these programs can even enhance the impact of the message that reads: “Canada welcomes international students”.

Home Away From Home

From the perspective of international students who want to study in Canada, one would like to know which university would be best for them. The easiest way would be to check universities profiles via internet. To clients – their future students – universities expose themselves as a ‘product’ in a qualitative as well as in a quantitative aspect. In their effort to attract students from abroad, they must represent Canada, and from a micro perspective - their respective community and what the particular university has to offer. Often, in their effort to look friendly, universities pride themselves on hosting a number of students’ cultural organizations and international students, i.e. they strive to promote diversity.

\(^{11}\) Quebec program won’t be discussed here

\(^{12}\)5 points are granted for having visited the province or for knowledge of nonofficial languages; having studied two years in the province is worth 10 p.; and two years work is worth 15 p. - these last two criteria equal 50% of the points required.

\(^{13}\) Science Technology Engineering Mathematics
An appropriate example of selling such an image is Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. On the institution’s website, one can read that “more than 100 cultural and ethnic student clubs and organizations foster diversity and cultural engagement on campus” (Diversity on Campus, Queen’s University). However, pictures as the one below - from the University of Ottawa - where diversity is represented by various ethnic origins, can in reality rarely be seen.

![Students, University of Ottawa](image)

Instead, looking across Canadian universities web pages devoted to (international) students\(^\text{14}\), it can be argued that Asians are the most welcome among them. Here are some examples:

![Enrolment services, University of Calgary](image)

![Direction et services, HEC Montreal](image)

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\(^{14}\) I have reviewed a number of universities across Canada: University of Calgary in Alberta, Queen’s and Ottawa universities in Ontario, Dalhousie University and Sainte Anne in Nova Scotia, HEC Montréal in Québec.
Exceptions to this rule are francophone universities in Québec and the East Coast where, along with students of Asian origin, there is a strong presence of students from Africa, most probably because education in French gives these universities an edge when advertising to French speakers who would consider Canada. Universities in Québec traditionally aim at attracting French speakers while for bilingual institutions offering educational programs in French or in both languages becomes a strategic tool. The University of Ottawa promotes education in English, in French or in both. The University of Sainte Anne in Nova Scotia wants to reach black students by portraying a message from a friendly community. “You are a person, not a number”, states the university (Pourquoi choisir Sainte-Anne 2009):

‘A Saint Anne, vous êtes une personne, pas un numéro’

If diversity is also valued on the West Coast, where immigrants come traditionally from Asia, why would it matter to the University of Waterloo (UW) in Ontario? Most likely because of all Canadian universities, UW hosts the biggest proportion of students of Asian descent, and because it’s committed to fostering multiculturalism on campus: “The large number of international students contributes to the university’s unique and multicultural atmosphere...We have set ourselves an exciting and ambitious goal to be Canada’s most internationalized, and therefore, most internationally best-known university” (‘About Waterloo International’, UW). In fact, concrete steps were undertaken in this direction in 2009: the university opened a campus in Dubai, offering programs in Engineering, IT and Finance.

Diversity, Cohesion and Students from Asia: the Linkage

Although Canada is not among the top five destinations for international students, their number is on the rise. Out of the 80,000 foreign students enrolled in Canada in 2006, half came from Asia, and half of those were from China, i.e.
one-fourth of all were Chinese. At the same time, numbers for students from Japan, Korea and India had increased (Gill 2008).

Growing student numbers means increased funding for educational institutions, as foreign students, especially undergraduates, pay two to three times more than Canadians. In terms of scientific contribution, foreign students are instrumental to Canadian research: in 2003/04 they received 46% of Canadian PhDs in engineering, 37 % of those in the physical sciences and 16 % in the life sciences (Crane 2007). There is also concentration in terms of origin - 60 % of all foreign students in 2006 came from China, USA, France, India, South Korea, Iran, Japan, Morocco and Pakistan. When ethnic and field concentrations are matched, the link becomes striking.

Indeed, it is no wonder why Asian students are more numerous at Waterloo University than elsewhere - it has the world's largest faculty in the mathematical, statistical, and computer sciences, while the city hosts several IT firms among which Research in Motion.

To sum up, why is it so that students from Asia are more important to Canada than others?

First, they certainly contribute to diversity at campuses and in local communities by representing their relatively distant cultures. Second, regarding students as potential citizens can be a successful strategy since upon graduation they will have Canadian credentials and, supposedly, adequate language skills. While the latter is valuable for all students, students from China and India have a certain advantage in the educational aspect, their educational systems favouring technical and engineering degrees. Since students make up higher share of the overall population in Asia than in Europe, the Asians who get degrees from competitive universities are certainly more ambitious than their peers in Europe where competition is negligible. In addition, education abroad has always been valued in China and is encouraged in India because of the current educational system being unable to absorb all the students.

Third, even if Asian students decide to return home upon graduation, they can always play an important role in establishing business networks with their Canadian acquaintances as a way of giving back to the host community. Finally, students from China and India are attracted to Canada (and elsewhere) by the respective large communities already established there.

Universities and colleges are eager to accept Chinese for a number of reasons. However, their campaigns are often aggressive, as illustrated by “Confederation College targets Chinese” - a video made by the Ontario-based institution. The educational advisor specially invites the Chinese: “We are particularly warm, welcoming and engaging toward students from China” (YouTube 2008). Then a Chinese student in mechanical engineering promotes the college in Chinese, as if his compatriots need to make sure there are other Chinese there who can help them. On the other hand, it’s a message to those who don’t speak English. The most aggressive part comes when an advisor addressing students appropriately Ontario Minister of Immigration M. Chan’s words by adding “from China” to “International Students”, making thus his address sound Chinese-friendly:

“International students FROM CHINA are highly skilled, have Canadian credentials and bring international experience to help Canadian companies compete internationally. Our province will benefit from their talents for years to come”.

The presence of Indian students in Canada is disproportionate to the general share of Indians among immigrants – as of 2008, there were only about six thousand students from India. Not only is India the largest pool of English speaking professionals but it’s also ‘supplying’ talented students in IT and engineering. That’s why Canada is trying to lure them - in August 2008 fifteen universities visited India to meet students, among which were McGill, Toronto, Carleton and Ryerson (UTVI news 2008). The courses they strived to promote were biotechnology, computer

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15 Bearing in mind that Canada was founded as a European settlement.

16 Following the Australian example, many Canadian universities raised the bar of min. TOEFL/IELTS required.

17 Compared to over 40,000 Chinese students in Canada and 80,000 Indian students in the USA as of 2006
engineering, aerospace engineering, telecommunications, business management – strategic to Canada’s scientific potential and consistent with India’s educational strengths.

Meanwhile, the Indian lobby in Canada has already been instrumental in upgrading the Canadian educational quality. Thus, last year an agreement was signed between the University of Alberta and the IIT Bombay - the leading science and technology institution in India, where one-fourth of the students are engaged in PhD studies. In addition, in the energy and health fields research has been promoted through exchange of students and faculty members of both institutions. Indira Samarasekera - the institution’s president who is originally from Sri Lanka - was instrumental to the success of this initiative. Nevertheless, the historian Ryan Touhey deplores that Indian-Canadian relations are still underdeveloped: “India could be a huge education market for Canada which needs to combine its 'education diplomacy' with 'public diplomacy' to raise its profile in India” (ThaIndian 2009).

Conclusion

The increasing importance of international students can be seen in the appearance of a students’ stream in the Federal Skilled Worker and Provincial Programs, as well as in the forging of the Canadian Experience Class program. Among students Asians are more desired, and clearly they can supply Canada with human capital for years to come. Nevertheless, Canada should consider some of its failures in its export education, and find answers to the following questions: Why hasn’t it attracted as many Indian students as Indian citizens? Is the aggressive campaign a successful campaign? Are Asian students only international students? - as implied by visual marketing across Canadian universities.

One possible way to achieve even diversity would be to attract prospective foreign students via virtual educational fairs, while Canadian trade missions could contribute in the promotion of the event. As for social cohesion, a major problem has been spotted recently in Australia - graduates’ incapacity to communicate in English, which resulted from unreliable stakeholders in the immigration industry having lured students. This might urge Canadian universities to be vigilant when evaluating the language and credential proficiency of (foreign) students and be aware that the connection between post-secondary education and high-skilled markers is not always straightforward.

Works cited:

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“Culture and Diversity on Campus”, Undergraduate Admission, Queens University, http://www.queensu.ca/admission/international/culture.html, Web. 01 July 2009


ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA (the list doesn’t appear in the official publication)

- p. 4, table- C2, line 6: “published on the CIC site” instead of “at the CIC site”
- p. 5, line 3: “In April” or “On 21 April” instead of “In 21 April”
- p. 5, line 20: Rather than STEM, which normally includes also social sciences and humanities, the program applies to int’l post-graduate students in the applied, natural and health sciences only, in which case there is no condition of a job contract. It should have been noted that otherwise there is another stream in the BC pnp applied to all int’l graduate students with a degree from a BC-based institution, provided they have assured a job from an employer in the province.
- p. 6, p.8: The names of the universities are not written in full due to the words limit. Otherwise, it would be correct to refer to the full name – e.g. University of Sainte Anne, Ryerson University, etc.
- p. 6, Footnote 14: Actually, I have had a look at other university website pages as well, e.g. in British Columbia. Although the total number of the websites examined cannot be taken as a statistical average, it gives a general impression.
- p. 8, line 11: ‘the maker of BlackBerry’ should have been added to “Research in Motion”
- p. 8, line 13: “diversity on campuses” instead of “at campuses”
- p. 9, line 4: IIT – Indian Institute of Technology
- p.9, line 19: ‘contribute to the promotion” instead of “contribute in the promotion”