The changing face of Canada: The uneven geographies of population and social change

Byline: Bourne, Larry S; Rose, Damaris
Volume: 45
Number: 1
ISSN: 00083658
Publication Date: 04-01-2001
Page: 105
Type: Periodical
Language: English

This paper attempts to convey a sense of the increasing importance of the population question for the future of Canada and its social geographies. This future will be shaped as much by changes in population processes and living conditions as by economic and political factors. Specifically, four transformations are rippling through the country's social fabric and urban landscapes: slow growth and the demographic transition modifications to family forms and living arrangements; increasing ethnocultural diversity; and the shifting relationships among households, labour markets and the welfare state. There is increasing unevenness of population growth, juxtaposing localized growth and widespread decline, massive social changes, the concentration of immigration and new sources of diversity in metropolitan areas, and fundamental shifts in social attitudes concerning family work and gender relations. Deepening contrasts in living environments and economic wellbeing flow from these trends, and the varied challenges they pose for private actors, governments and service-providers. Questions relating to the country's future population geographies and social structures are complex, analytically difficult, and politically charged, but are too important to ignore.

Key words: Canada, metropolitan areas, population change, demography, uneven urban development, social diversity

Setting the agenda

Viewed from a satellite, Canada represents a vast and colourful slice of territory almost ten million square kilometres in size. At an average density of only three persons per km$^2$, however, much of that territory, depending on the season, is green, brown, or white, and very thinly populated. Most of the 30.1 million residents live on a small segment of the country (roughly 15%),
and over 84 percent now live in cities, towns and metropolitan areas (Figure 1) that combined represent only 5 percent of the country's surface area.1 The population face of the country obviously differs from the physical map face, and increasingly from the political face. Viewing Canada as a social entity, therefore, effectively requires the use of different lenses and spatial scales of analysis.

Table not reproduced: Figure 1

This paper focuses on Canada as a social space, and specifically on changes in Canadian population characteristics and living conditions. We offer a broad-brush picture of the changing face and place of the Canadian population and the implications of those changes for individuals, social groups and regions, as well as for markets, governments, and service-providers. We review the transformations that have swept over the social fabric and landscapes of the country in the last half century, and identify some of the key issues that flow from those transformations. We do not attempt, in the limited space available, to provide detailed information on any of these transformations, or on any specific places or groups. Several of these special themes and groups, such as language issues, or Aboriginal populations, are addressed in the companion papers. Instead, we seek to convey a sense of the increasing centrality of the 'population question' writ large, and to provide a summary of principal trends in the character, living conditions and social well-being of the population. The paper concludes with a look ahead, to evolving population patterns, and emerging social issues and policy problems, over the next two decades and beyond.

This paper emphasizes several parallel themes: the combination of rapid social change with social continuity; the changing environments, especially metropolitan environments, in which Canadians live and work; the 'downstream' consequences of the demographic transition, population redistribution and the increasing unevenness of growth and change; the tensions, challenges and opportunities associated with increasing social and ethnic diversity; and the uncertainty of both future population trajectories and the macro-social geographies that emerge from these trajectories.

Few readers would question the assertion that population questions are a fundamental element in defining the future of the country and the quality of life it provides to its residents. The processes of social and demographic change set in motion after WWII are historically unique, but of course build on trends inherited from earlier periods. In combination, these have reshaped the country's societal structure and will continue to do so for another half century or more. We also know that the outcomes of those processes are highly variable over space and time. They affect certain regions and localities, and certain individuals and segments of society, more profoundly than others. These outcomes, in turn, are influenced by parallel shifts in the economy and labour market conditions, in social needs and consumer preferences, in political attitudes and institutions, and in the relative distribution of wealth and power.

Waves of social transformation

The last half of the last century has been characterized by the intersection of a series of linked and often dramatic social transformations. Four such transformations are reviewed here: first, the demographic transition and the changing components of population growth; second, changes in family structure, domestic relations and household composition; third, immigration and the increasing level of social and cultural diversity; and fourth, shifts in the linkages between the domestic or household sphere, the sphere of work and production (e.g. local labour markets), and the changing nature of the state and civil society. Although all of these trends, as individual processes, are reasonably well-known and documented in an extensive literature (Miron 1988; Beaujot 1991; Bourne and Ley 1993; Kobayashi 1994; Trovato and Grindstaff 1994; Canadian Journal of Regional Science 1997; Peron et al. 1999), we know much less about how they come together, in particular places at particular times, with what impacts and for whom.

Population and spatial demography

The first of these critical transformations is demographic. Although Foot and Stoffman's (1996) view that demography explains roughly three-quarters of everything is somewhat exaggerated, it is clear that demographic change is one of the key underlying dynamics reshaping the country's social system. Canada, like most other western countries, but to an even greater extent, underwent a fundamental demographic 'transition' in the immediate post-war period. This period, the 'baby-
boom’, lasted until about 1963. It was characterized by high fertility levels (birth rates), declining death rates, earlier marriages, higher marriage rates, and increased levels of family and household formation. This period was followed (with the notable exception of Aboriginal communities) by the ‘babybust’, a period of rapidly declining birth rates, higher divorce rates and increased longevity, that coincided with a stabilization of marriage rates and family formation. A modest ‘echo-boom’ followed in the 1980s as the baby-boomers reached childbearing ages, but there was no return to the higher fertility rates of the 1950s and 1960s. Fertility levels are now well below the traditional demographic ‘replacement’ rate.

One obvious result of this transition has been significant differences in the relative size of each generation or age cohort. The sharpest contrast is between the generation of boomers (those aged 35 to 55 in 2000), those in the older cohort (over 55) and those in the youngest cohort (aged 24 and under). As each cohort passes through the life cycle it sends variable wave-like effects through the social order and the economy. These immense cohort size differences alter labour market dynamics, influence the demand for commodities ranging from the ‘starter home’ to running shoes to the ‘recreational vehicle’, and modify the structures of need for public goods and services such as school classrooms and health services. They will also continue to shape and reshape the policy agenda for decades to come.

These demand shifts also have a direct spatial expression. For example, in the context of the increased affluence that characterized the post-war period, the parents of baby-boomers led the initial explosion of the suburbs. Their children, when they reached young adulthood, fueled the high-rise apartment boom in Canadian cities in the 1960s and early 1970s before founding their own families, typically in newer, more far-flung suburbs. Some members of both ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ generations, however, eschewed ‘suburban lifestyles’ and contributed to the ‘upgrading’ of selected parts of the inner city. Increasing numbers of ‘emptynesters’ also began to move during the 1980s and 1990s, leading to a growth in the demand for lowmaintenance condominium housing arrangements. Meanwhile, the ‘echo-boom’ cohort provided some of the ‘greying’ suburbs with a reinfusion of young families.

The other major implication of this boom-bust transition, and of increasing longevity, is that the Canadian population is rapidly becoming older. The average age of the population in the 1940s was 27.5 years, and it declined gradually through the 1960s before reversing in the 1970s. The average age is now 40.5 years, and rising steadily. The proportion of the population over 65 was only 9 percent in the 1960s, but increased to 13 percent by the mid-1990s. In the two decades after 2010, when the front-end of the baby-boom population reaches retirement age, the proportion will reach 22 percent. That population will also live longer thanks to extended health care and improved diets - with a current average life span of 78.5 years and rising. The increasing size of the cohorts of elderly Canadians has already led to the growth of ‘retirement areas’ with high concentrations of elderly residents, a trend that seems set to continue. This trend has major implications for public and commercial infrastructure and service delivery in those regions and communities. Although the initial demographic transition is now ended, its effects will continue to change not only the marketplace, but our images of ourselves, our group identities, and our national social order.

Lifestyles, families and living arrangements

The second and related transformation is reflected in the changing nature and increasing diversification of Canadian households, including the processes by which individuals choose their partners and their living arrangements, and in major shifts in the roles of women in Canadian society. In 1960, 8.9 percent of all households were non-family households. In 1998, in contrast, 24.7 percent were non-families. Much of the increased rate of household formation noted above was due to the greater propensity of both the young and the elderly to live alone. In fact, in the second half of the twentieth century these were the two most rapidly growing types of households. Average household size has also decreased - in part as a result of lower fertility and higher divorce rates - from over four persons in 1950 to 2.8 persons in 1998, an overall decline of more than 30 percent.

Canadian families have also changed dramatically over this period. The traditional multi-family household and extended family living together under one roof have almost disappeared, except among certain immigrant and ethnocultural groups and in Aboriginal communities. Nevertheless, intergenerational ties remain strong. For example, a considerable amount of time is devoted to unpaid caregiving for elderly parents or young grandchildren. Family forms have also diversified. For instance, lesbian and gay families have always existed, but only at the turn of the 21st century did
they begin to be formally recognized as such in Canada, with modifications to a wide range of legislation so as to develop a more inclusive definition of the 'couple' and the 'family'. The incidence of lone-parent families (the vast majority of whom are female-led), after dipping to an historic low in mid-century, rose sharply in the 1970s and 1980s. This trend was mainly due to changes in the divorce laws and to increasing social acceptance of women rearing children alone.

More broadly, Canada's social fabric has become one of increasingly fluid conjugal relationships. For example, whereas only one quarter of women aged in their 60s in 1995 had experienced relationship break-ups in their lifetimes, the corresponding figure for those in their 30s was 43 percent. Almost three out of five women aged in their 20s in 1995 had lived in at least one common-law union, and couples who began their conjugal life in a common-law union were twice as likely to separate as those whose first union started with marriage (Le Bourdais et al. 2000). As couples move in and out of relationships more frequently, shared custody arrangements and 'blended' families have become more common. These are trends that may once again increase the demand for larger family housing units and for day care.

Moreover, women's increased control over their fertility, as well as the greatly expanded labour market opportunities to which they have gained access since mid-century, have much to do with these trends. That is, women who are in a stronger economic position are less dependent on the institution of marriage (Le Bourdais et al. 2000), and as wives/partners today their direct financial contribution to the household is much greater than that of their peers in the 1950s and 1960s. Between 1961 and 1996, among couples with dependent children, the proportion in which the wife as well as the husband held paid employment jumped from less than 20 percent to 71 percent. In 1996, married women with children under six years old had much higher labour force participation rates than did women with no children at home. This gap reflects the scale of the generational shift that has taken place in families and in women's lives.

These transformations in living arrangements reflect several parallel social processes that include rising levels of affluence and improved health care, as well as changes in how we view social relationships, including family ties and gender responsibilities. Whatever the specific sources, the overall effects have already been substantial, notably on the demand for housing and services, and also - as we shall discuss below - for the changing distribution of income and well-being across household types.

Social diversity in the urban system: impacts of immigration and migration

The third transformation is succinctly labelled 'increasing diversity'. While the trends described above clearly suggest that the Canadian population has become more diverse along many dimensions, diversity is a term commonly restricted to ethnic, cultural, linguistic and 'racial' heterogeneity. Increasing diversity in this sense may result from differences in the fertility rates of individual ethnocultural groups, or more likely, from new and distinctive immigration flows. By conventional diversity indices, the Canadian population was more ethnically diverse in the early decades of the last century than it has been until recently, due to the heavy in-migration of populations from what were then seen as non-traditional sources, especially eastern and, later, southern Europe.

International immigration has always been the most variable component of Canada's population growth, exhibiting a strongly cyclical profile over time as government policy has responded to changes in the demand for labour, in social attitudes and in conditions abroad (Beaujot 1991; Halli and Driedger 1999; Beaujot and Mathews 2000). In the last two decades, however, the country has increasingly come to rely on immigration to ensure a supply of skilled workers and continued population growth. These pressures are likely to increase in future decades as the effects of the decline in fertility ripple through the age pyramid, and in response to emigration to the United States. Between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, annual immigration flows increased from only about 85,000 (a figure representing a dramatic dip from the high levels of most post-war years) to an average of 200,000. While even this figure falls far short in absolute numbers and even further short in relative terms of those of the early 1900s and the 1950s when Canada's population was much smaller than it is now (Figure 2), immigration nonetheless now accounts for just over 50 percent of population growth and close to 70 percent of labour force growth in Canada (Figure 3).

At the same time, fundamental shifts have taken place in the sources of immigration flows to Canada. In the immediate post-war period, roughly 80 percent of all immigrants came from
traditional European source countries. As these flows began to wane after the 1960s with rising prosperity in Europe, immigration and refugee policy changes increasingly opened the door to those from nontraditional source countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. These countries were often experiencing economic and/or political upheavals. By the 1990s these regions were furnishing almost 80 percent of Canada's new immigrants, who are drawn from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds.

The changed composition of contemporary immigration flows has profound implications for the regional and urban geographies of Canada. For some regions and urban areas, where domestic net out-migration exceeds levels of natural population increase, immigration is the only source of growth, yet most parts of the country receive few immigrants. Recent flows of immigrants have become increasingly focused on a few larger metropolitan areas. In 1996, 73 percent of immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1991 and 1996 resided in the metropolitan areas of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, 42 percent of these in the Toronto region alone. Although these cities have historically been 'gateway cities' for immigration to Canada, the evidence available to date (from the National Immigration Data Base) suggests that a distinguishing feature of contemporary immigrants is their propensity to remain in these cities rather than fanning out to smaller urban centres and other regions as many did in the past. This is perhaps not surprising in view of changes in the country's economy, and given the well-known role of linked or chain migrations in encouraging spatial concentration as immigrants use their social networks to obtain jobs and housing. Moreover, because immigrant groups are still often defined by the established population as being 'different' or 'Other' in terms of their visible minority status, their religion or their cultural traditions, it is to be expected that today's new immigrants would seek to make their homes in the most cosmopolitan and socially diverse urban regions of the country.

Is this extreme geographical concentration a transitional condition likely to diminish over time as the recent immigrant cohorts become more established? No one really knows, but indeed, the reverse may be happening. Regions of the country with lower incomes and limited employment opportunities are experiencing increased difficulties in retaining the immigrants they do receive, and those who remain tend to be poorer than those who leave. Immigrant retention rates tend to be especially low in the eastern provinces, Quebec, the prairies and the northern resource-based periphery. In this sense, immigrants as migrants behave much like their native-born counterparts, but with even more selectivity in their choices of destinations. Thus, immigration seems to be driving the process of a continued concentration of population in Canada's large metropolitan areas.

Overall, these trends have the net effect of creating a dichotomous urban system. Many places, indeed most smaller towns and cities, remain remarkably homogeneous in ethno-cultural terms (e.g. St. John's, Chicoutimi-Jonquiere). The major metropolitan areas, in contrast, have become distinctly more heterogeneous, to the extent that the very definition of terms such as 'host society' or 'dominant cultural group' becomes a moot point. How this partitioning of the social fabric of the Canadian urban system will influence the country's fragile social contract and volatile political landscape remains to be seen, but it is clear that the face of the country, and its cultural and political character, are being redrawn in numerous and fundamental ways.

The regional impacts of immigration cannot, however, be assessed independently of other processes of population redistribution, notably domestic migration. As fertility levels have declined, and then became relatively uniform across the country, the role of redistribution processes - internal (domestic) migration and especially immigration - in accounting for differential population growth and decline, has increased. We know that internal migration, at various geographical scales, is the primary means by which the supply of labour adjusts to demand, and vice versa; and it is the dominant mechanism by which people adapt to changes in life course needs and lifestyle choices. Internal migration, in other words, measures the degree to which the population is undergoing selective redistribution; and thus it mirrors the potential for change in the country's macrosocial geography. Fully 45 percent of the population moves every five years (11.5 million persons, or 43% of the nation's population over the age of five during the 1991-96 period), and half of those (21%) move across municipal boundaries, while under four percent change provinces. Interprovincial moves during the same five-year period numbered some 900,000 people, roughly the same number as were admitted through immigration.
Although the numbers are similar, the temporal and spatial dimensions of immigration and domestic migration differ. While the overall rate of internal migration has remained much the same for the last 50 years, excluding minor fluctuations due to the business cycle, the specific urban destinations - the macro-geography of domestic migration have not remained constant. The reverse is true for immigration; it has exhibited a more variable rate over time and a more constant and focused geography. Migration and immigration are also more important as social processes than is indicated by the simple numbers of people involved. They also shift the location of wealth, income, skills, and labour, as well as voters, and the future generation.

Contrary to popular perceptions, the country’s 25 metropolitan areas (CMAs) have had a net migration loss among domestic migrants for most of the last twenty years. Over the 1991-96 period alone the CMAs had a migration loss of some 156,000 persons in their exchanges with non-metropolitan areas (Bourne and Flowers 1999). The largest losses were recorded for Toronto (-87,000), Montreal (-47,900), Edmonton (-23,600) and Winnipeg (-17,000). Nevertheless, in total, foreign immigration more than made up for the loss in net domestic migrants.

What is unclear, however, is whether immigration and migration flows are related, and if so, how? Has increased immigration, given its concentration in four large metropolitan areas, become a factor in the relatively high levels of out-migration of the resident population to non-metropolitan areas? Is there a ‘displacement’ effect operating in terms of housing and labour markets? Is it the case, for example, that a proportion of the resident population takes this in-flow of new immigrants as an opportunity to cash in their increased housing equity by moving to less expensive places, including ‘exurbs’ not (yet) formally defined as part of the metropolitan realm? Or, are we seeing internal movements completely unrelated to the dynamics of international immigration, for instance, an increase in retirement or ‘amenity’-oriented migrations out of large urban areas, as well as - more speculatively - a decrease in geographic ties to metropolitan labour markets, linked to the growth of self-employment and an increase in the number of people working from home among the nation’s increasingly more professionalized labour force?

The labour market nexus

The fourth transformation involves the changing relationships between population and demography, family and household composition and the country’s labour markets, both local and national. In the research and policy literature, this complex intersection is acknowledged but its implications are typically ignored or downplayed. It is true that social well-being - as well as access to full ‘social citizenship’ in Canada (see Bakker and Scott 1997) - is primarily a function of the individual’s position with respect to the world of paid work. This position, in turn, is influenced by the changing structure of the economy, in terms of sectors of employment, occupation, skills requirements, and the demand for full- and part-time workers, and by differences in levels of education and training, i.e. individual human capital, as well as by location.

Yet, changes in demography, household structure and lifestyle choices also play a significant role in enhancing or ameliorating inequalities attributable to differences in earnings (wages and salaries) and working conditions. Individuals perform unpaid and paid work, and earn monetary income from the latter. Yet it is usually the household or family that serves as the unit that ‘collects’ these monetary resources, negotiates their allocation, and then spends them. Households and families are, in effect, the basic units of consumption, social reproduction and collective decision-making. Consequently, changes in the size and composition of the household, including the relations among individuals within those collective units, have substantially redefined the distribution of income and social capital. Smaller household sizes, for example, tend to both offset and reinforce the advantages of higher labour force participation rates, depending on household composition. Indeed, the faster growing household types are those with no one in the labour force and those with two or more income-earners. The latter are largely, but not exclusively, a reflection of the increasing participation rate of married women referred to earlier. One significant result of household fragmentation, and of the feminization of paid work, is an increase in disparities in employment income and accumulated wealth between two-earner households and those with one earner or none (Peron et al. 1999). Perhaps the most seriously affected groups, other than the unemployed, are unattached individuals, the elderly, especially women living alone (Brotman 1999), those with major disabilities, and single-parent families. Substantial proportions of each of these groups fall below the ‘low-income cut-offs’ as defined by Statistics Canada. These differences between two-earner
households on the one hand, and one- or no-- earner households on the other hand, are likely to reinforce the polarization between rich and poor neighbourhoods of major metropolitan areas that has been documented with respect to individual employment earnings (see Myles et al. 2000).

Table not reproduced: Table 1

The uneven geographies of social change

It is the uneven geographies of these social transformations that are of particular interest here. Of course, population change is almost always geographically uneven, and there is no reason in theory, no evidence in the historical record, to expect it to be otherwise. The history of Canada mirrors a number of processes of population redistribution and social change that in combination underlie the country’s changing face. From the beginnings of European colonization, population has shifted from east to west, from the Atlantic region to Quebec and Ontario, from Quebec to Ontario and the west, and later from Ontario to the far west and from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Alberta and British Columbia. Ontario, then as now, serves as the migration lynchpin or 'swing' region, attracting migrants from the east and sending others to the west.

Since 1951, all provinces east of the Ottawa River, as well as Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have witnessed net out-migration. Ontario and Alberta have swung between positive and negative migration balances depending on their relative economic performance. Only British Columbia has had consistently positive domestic migration balances through the half-century (Table 1). In an abstract sense these internal migration flows can be seen as a 'structural correction' for the initial decisions to settle the east first.

Other forms of population redistribution in Canada, in addition to the traditional east-west flow, are also well-known (Bunting and Filion 2000). The population has shifted from being 30 percent urban in the early 1900s to over 84 percent urban today. Rural residence, moreover, has been largely dissociated from agricultural-based livelihood. The net effect is that less than 3 percent of the population is now classed as rural farm. Within the country’s extended urban system, population has continued to move upward through the size hierarchy to the larger cities and metropolitan areas, and in the process has become more geographically concentrated, despite the role of net domestic out-migration. In 1930, for example, no Canadians lived in large metropolitan environments (i.e. those with over 1 million population); by 2000 over 12.5 million did.

Within those metropolitan areas, the imprints of the social transformations sketched out above tend to be magnified. Populations have continued to decentralize to suburban and exurban locations, often creating 'ruralized' landscapes but without cutting the umbilical cord to the metropolitan job market. As a result of the reduced number of children per family, the increased proportion of nonfamily households, and an aging population, almost all older, established neighbourhoods have seen a dramatic 'thinning' of their population. Intra-urban contrasts in age structure have increased: inner city neighbourhoods tend to be dominated by young non-family households; the older suburbs by 'greying' households. The new suburbs, in contrast, continue to be dominated by younger families, but with an increasing mix of housing and household types (Evenden and Walker 1993).

Perhaps even more striking, as noted above, has been the ethnocultural transformation of the larger cities through immigration. Whereas the process of inner-city neighbourhood revitalization in Canada was in large part initiated by the post-war waves of European immigrants, today - especially in the Toronto and Vancouver regions - many new immigrants go directly to middle-class suburbs without passing through traditional 'reception areas'. In suburban municipalities such as Richmond and Surrey (Vancouver CMA), and Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham (Toronto CMA), the proportion of immigrants has reached 25 to 40 percent, and is likely to go much higher. Older suburban areas with a large stock of low-to-modest income rental housing also draw large numbers of low-income immigrants, Toronto's Scarborough being the most telling example. While Canadian suburbs have never been as homogeneous as conventional wisdom portrayed them to be, these suburbs, and our images of suburban life and culture, will never be the same. Diversity has suburbanized.

Social concerns and policy issues
The changing character, growth and distribution of the Canadian population raise numerous issues of immediate and long-term interest and concern to residents, business, researchers, and governments. While trying to avoid restating the obvious, this section attempts to highlight some of the challenges, and opportunities, that flow from these trends. The first is the country's slower rate of population growth, in combination with continued redistribution through internal migration and immigration, processes that are regionally selective. Although still relatively high by western European standards, the overall rate of growth is now only 0.9 percent annually, and will be near zero by 2030, even if levels of immigration increase to 300,000 per year.

Forecasts of future population, while fraught with difficulty, suggest that Canada will likely have a population somewhere between 34 and 37 million by 2020, with the range determined by differing assumptions regarding fertility and net immigration levels (see e.g. Statistics Canada 1994; 1996; Strategic Projections Inc. 2000). Beyond that date, population is expected to stabilize and then decline. This trend is part of a universal shift to population implosion in developed societies, which is likely to be most marked in Europe unless immigration is greatly increased (Hall and White 1995; INED 2000).

This declining population growth rate is also coincident with a markedly uneven geography of growth. Although not new, that unevenness is also likely to increase since the veneer of high fertility levels has been removed. Immigration, as argued above, is almost certain to compound the spatial concentration of growth, as well as to increase the degree of uncertainty in the broader spatial demography, irrespective of policy targets. Both the levels of immigration and the socio-economic trajectories of immigrants are inherently unpredictable.

Slower population growth is, of course, not necessarily a problem. In some instances, it may allow for regions and local municipalities to catch up with the demands for new infrastructure and social services, and to address the need for environmental sustainability. In other and less economically favoured regions, however, a decrease in national population growth will result in zero regional growth, or even sharper population declines than in the past. For these regions it will be an increasingly difficult struggle to maintain a basic level of public services, jobs and infrastructure, and thus to retain their younger and more mobile populations. Population decline, therefore, is a problem if it limits opportunities, increases unmet expectations, reduces public services and depreciates the quality of everyday life. These conditions, in turn, may rekindle the tensions between the 'have' and 'have-not' regions, provinces and municipalities that have dominated policy debates for decades. The ongoing decline in the relative weight of the French-Canadian population, and specifically that of Quebec, within Canada, is a telling example of how demographic issues can pose fundamental challenges to a country's political fabric. At the same time, the rapid increase in the Aboriginal population will pose a completely different set of policy challenges in the coming decades.

In Canada, as in Europe, areas of continued rapid growth will stand in sharp contrast to areas of decline. Almost 80 percent of the country's ecumene (excluding Aboriginal areas) will have the same or probably fewer residents in the next two decades. Even under the highest growth scenario, two provinces (Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island), and most rural areas and small towns, will have lower populations in 2020 than in 2000. Under the low-growth scenario, two additional provinces (Manitoba and Saskatchewan), several smaller metropolitan areas, most small towns and rural areas will witness absolute declines in populations. How will these places cope with this decline?

Population loss in the more peripheral regions of Canada is fundamentally linked to the relative decline and/or restructuring of traditional primary resource-based industries (logging, grain-farming, fishing and mining). This decline is taking place in the context of technological change and the economic and political pressures deriving from trade liberalization and globalization, all of which pose major challenges to the long tradition of regional policies that have helped to sustain population numbers, for better or worse, in peripheral areas (Brodie 1997). For example, do Canadians, whose individual mobility rights are enshrined in the Constitution, also have the collective right to immobility, that is, to remain in place rather than permanently moving away from those peripherally-located communities undergoing economic decline (Blomley 1992)? The dual challenge will be to maintain a social fabric and social service base over vast territories that are remote, sparsely inhabited, and consequently difficult to service, and where it is difficult to find appropriate ways of diversifying local and regional economies so as to make such regions economically and environmentally sustainable once again (see Preston and Villeneuve this issue) -
or perhaps, where such policies prove impossible, to find humane ways of managing population decline.

Growth will also continue to be geographically concentrated in a large few urban regions. Aside from a relatively small set of amenity-rich retirement and recreational areas, over 80 percent of population growth over the next two or three decades will be in five regions surrounding highly urbanized cores. Those five regions - Toronto-- Oshawa-Barrie-Hamilton-Niagara-Kitchener (currently 6.7 million), greater Montreal (3.6 million), greater Vancouver (2.1 million), the Calgary--Edmonton corridor (2 million), Ottawa-Hull (1.2 million), together with the slower-growing CMAs of Quebec (0.7 million) and Winnipeg (0.7 million) now contain over 17.1 million people, or 57 percent of the total Canadian population. By 2025, the greater Toronto region is projected to have over 9.0 million people, greater Montreal 4.5 million, the Vancouver-Fraser Valley agglomeration over 3.5 million, and the Edmonton-Calgary corridor almost 3 million. Although levels of metropolitan concentration in Canada will remain much lower than those in comparable countries (e.g. Australia, Sweden), the process of adjusting structures of government and modes of governance to these new urban realities will be difficult and painful (Polese and Stren 2000).

The third trend is the increasing average age of the population. This process (see Moore and Rosenberg this issue) will likely continue until the middle of this century. Increased longevity, a sign of social (or at least medical) success, and a rapidly aging population base, will pose a series of fundamental challenges to public policy and to the social order. The dependency ratio, measuring essentially the number of tax-paying workers divided by the number not in the labour force, will increase markedly, even with proportionately fewer children; nevertheless, it is unlikely to reach the high levels attained during the baby-boom years (Denton et al. 1998). Although there are intense debates regarding the costs of this transformation, notably in terms of the potential drain on social services and the health budget (and although society seems to have been reasonably successful at reducing the high level of poverty among the elderly), there is little doubt that the relationship between the population and production spheres, and the welfare state, will need to be rewritten. The already-substantial burden of unpaid caring work assumed by working-age Canadians for their elderly and ailing relatives is set to increase, posing major challenges to which both employers and governments will need to respond. This adjustment will be complicated by the uncertainty regarding the geography of migration in a society growing older, a society that - in theory - will also be less mobile.

The fourth trend is primarily linked here to increasing immigration from non-traditional sources. While most aspects of the increasing diversity of the Canadian population have implications for the range of demands placed on the market and the public sector for goods and services, there is no doubt that ethnocultural diversification poses particular new challenges, but it also creates new opportunities. In many ‘gateway’ cities, social service agencies, service-providers and municipal administrators are indeed struggling with the challenges posed by - and the claims for recognition of diversity made by - so many newcomers from so many different ethnic, cultural-linguistic and 'racial' backgrounds (Canadian Journal of Regional Science 1997; Isajiw 1999). In a context of inadequate government funding for settlement assistance programs and fiscal 'downloading' from provinces to municipalities, these pressures are adding to the usual tensions and conflicts over the funding and allocation of scarce collective resources. Such tensions are aggravated in periods of fiscal restraint and in times when senior governments seem to be retreating from their social obligations and responsibilities.

Moreover, visible minorities make up a major and growing share of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada 1996), especially in large cities. By 1996 40 percent of young people aged under 25 in Toronto and 37 percent of those in Vancouver were members of visible minority groups. The challenge of overcoming exclusionary practices, including those based on racism in all its forms, and in particular the impact of these practices on labour market opportunities for youth, becomes all the more urgent. Immigrants and ethnic minorities add substantially to the stock of human capital in Canada, as measured by new cultures, knowledge, experience, skills and work experience. Those social resources, if properly nurtured, will make the country richer in more senses than one.

Other demographic trends have tended to make portions of the country's territory and population poorer, or at least more vulnerable to economic and social turbulence. The shrinkage of average household size and the revolution in living arrangements - entailing the fragmentation of families and households into smaller and smaller units of domestic production and consumption - as well as the feminization of the labour force, now seem to be largely complete. Their impacts will
nevertheless continue to be felt for decades to come. Average household size, currently 2.7, is
expected to decline but only marginally so, to 2.5 by 2016 (Statistics Canada 1994). Smaller
household sizes, and the ability of many individuals to live alone, even if paying high proportions of
their income on rent, may be seen, to a degree, as a sign of social success. For others, it is clearly
not.

Households, moreover, are 'elastic' in that when conditions are good their size shrinks and numbers
increase, and vice versa when conditions are not so good. This is true of all household types, but is
especially evident among the population over 65, and was also the case for those under 25 until the
early 1990s. Many of these small households live alone by choice, their incomes having increased to
the point that they can afford their own dwelling unit. This is no doubt one reason why there are
(roughly) 50 percent more households now than most forecasters had expected in 1950. Others,
however, are not living as they do by choice, and often do not have the resources to sustain a
reasonable level of existence. Where demography, lifestyle and bad luck coincide, living conditions
are at best precarious and at worst demoralizing for those involved.

A wide range of household types, social groups and individuals are thus left in a precarious situation
by economic restructuring, demographic change, and shifts in living arrangements, and for recent
immigrants, by obstacles to a successful immigrant settlement experience. The face of poverty, of
social disadvantage, in Canada has changed. Although there is intense and on-going debate as to
whether, and by how much, inequalities in income have increased (Beach and Slotsve 1996;
Yalnizyan 1998; Canadian Council on Social Development 2000), there is little doubt that certain
types of households, individuals and places have suffered more than others as a result of these
trends. The most obvious perhaps is the Aboriginal population, which continues to grow at above-
average rates, and, though internally diverse in terms of socio-economic conditions (Armstrong
1999), has yet to gain full access to the country's resources. Other vulnerable groups include
certain segments of the immigrant population; notably, those who begin their life in Canada as
refugee claimants awaiting the decision as to their status, those whose professional credentials are
not recognized, and those with limited job skills, have found it particularly difficult to gain a foothold
in Canada's increasingly post-industrial labour market (Kazemipur and Halli 2000). Still other
vulnerable groups include unattached individuals, and single parent families, especially those
headed by a female (Peron et al. 1999).

In those situations where increased income inequalities among population groups can be
documented, three explanatory factors seem to be relevant. One, of course, is economic
restructuring and the loss of significant numbers of blue-collar jobs beginning in the 1980s, followed
by the loss of public sector jobs in the 1990s. A second source is the truncation of social assistance
benefits, (un)employment insurance and transfer payments to individuals and families in the mid-
1990s. The third relates to the transformations in demographic structure and life styles, the effects
of aging and the proliferation of smaller, non-traditional households. It is possible to argue that
demographic and lifestyle components are now of roughly equal importance in accounting for
income inequalities as are workplace restructuring and revisions to the welfare net, although all four
are inextricably interwoven.

The 'good news' is that the fragmentation of the household as a collective revenue and expenditure
unit, and as the basic unit of social reproduction, seems to have largely ceased. The 'bad news' is
that truncation of the welfare state and lower income transfers from governments to individuals, are
likely to continue for some time. In the past two decades, the increasing polarization of wages and
salaries was largely offset by a progressive tax system and by social assistance and transfer
payments. In other words, the state largely made up for increasing inequalities deriving from the
job market. As a result, overall income inequalities, although still very high, remained constant for
most of the period from 1970 to 1996. The same political will and policy conditions no longer apply,
however, and inequalities in income are therefore likely to increase. In parallel, demographic
unevenness will ensure that inter-gene rational inequalities and conflicts will grow.

Our uncertain population future

We have argued that the country's future will be shaped more by population processes and
conditions than by economic and political forces. Most significant are the continually unfolding
consequences of the demographic transition, the fragmentation of families and households, and the
large and increasingly selective impacts of immigration. We have shown how a series of linked
social transformations have swept over the country's social fabric, altering patterns and images as
they have evolved. The face of Canada has been redefined, in most instances in an irreversible fashion. The impacts of these transformations are complex; many, if not most, are positive, some clearly are negative, but almost all pose challenges for public policy and governments. Moreover, these same factors have also contributed to an increasingly uneven geography of population growth and social change. This unevenness is likely to be all the more obvious, and more politically-charged, in the slow-growth scenarios that we anticipate in the future.

To a certain degree our demographic future is here now. One obvious example is that most senior citizens of 2020 are here now, aged 45 and older. This group will be an economically and politically potent force as the baby boom cohort moves into the retirement years. Given that fertility levels are likely to remain constant, and at historically low levels, the major instrument of social change in the future, yet the most uncertain, is migration, especially foreign immigration. The latter component is uncertain precisely because it is subject to the whims of politics, to pressures from established socio-cultural and immigrant groups, and to shifting economic, political and environmental conditions in the rest of the world. At the same time, tighter labour markets in the United States and in some of the traditional immigrant source countries, notably in Europe and Asia, could lead to much higher levels of emigration and return migration. Competition for skilled immigrants will be particularly intense. Moreover, estimates also suggest that even an age-selective (i.e. youth-oriented) immigration policy will not change the aging process or the labour market situation very much (Denton et al. 1998).

Equally uncertain is where, and how well, these people will live. We know that immigration levels of at least 250,000 a year are considered necessary to prevent population decline after 2020. But, is this high level of immigration, on a sustained basis, especially given its non-traditional origins and geographic concentration, administratively practical, economically necessary, socially acceptable and politically feasible? There is presently a broader social consensus in Quebec about the need for further increases in immigration than in the rest of Canada, but will this level be sustained if the pool of potential French-speaking immigrants and those thought to be ‘francisable’ shrinks? How will the rest of the country view Toronto and Vancouver when the new ethnocultural minorities in those cities and their suburbs become the majorities, which is set to happen in the near future? The social face of these places will indeed be different; a rainbow of diversity. Can we guarantee that the resources and opportunities will be available to accommodate and retain these populations, and to take full advantage of the new cultures and skills that they bring?

Footnotes:

Notes

1 The figure of 84 percent urban, in this case, represents the proportion of the national population that lives within the boundaries of census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs), and all other populations living in urban municipalities with populations over 1,000 or more. It should be noted that, due to space limitations that prohibit us from detailing all our sources, all statistical data cited have been drawn (either by ourselves or by other scholars) from Statistics Canada censuses and surveys, or, in the case of immigration data, from Citizenship and Immigration Canada statistics.

2 Birth rates reached a peak of 26/1000 in 1962-3, dropped to 15/1000 by 1982 and then stabilized at 12.5/1000 after 1986.

3 Usually the replacement figure is 2.1 children per couple.

4 One of the major reasons for increased longevity has been the decline in infant mortality rates - from 135/1000 in the early 1900s to less than 6/1000 today.

5 In Canadian census parlance, family households are those in which the individuals are related by blood, marriage or common-law arrangements, whether or not children are present. All other households, including those with only one person, are non-family.

6 Estimates of the size of recent emigration flows from Canada to the United States are inconsistent (due to definitional and measurement problems), but these flows are generally much smaller than those of the early decades of the twentieth century, and smaller than those of the 1950s and 1960s.
7 In the late 1990s well over half of immigrants arriving in Canada were in the 'economic immigrant' category; a little under 30 percent entered under family reunification schemes and the remainder were admitted as refugees or other humanitarian cases.

8 The flows also differ somewhat among these metropolitan areas. Montreal attracts proportionally more immigrants from countries where French is widely spoken (e.g. North African countries and Haiti); Vancouver draws a preponderance of Asians and Toronto has the most diversified range of source countries. Also, compared to the other cities, Montreal receives a higher proportion of refugees.

9 There has in fact been a modest decline in the proportion of movers who move across provincial boundaries since 1971, with the highest level of regional redistribution recorded in the 1970s.

10 Proportionally much higher rates of net out-migration were recorded for smaller places - Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Chicoutimi, St. John's, Regina. For the Toronto CMA the largest losses were to adjacent Oshawa, Hamilton-Burlington, Kitchener-Guelph, Barrie and Muskoka - and thus in part represent extended urbanization and retirement migrations.

11 The rise of part-time work in Canada is to some extent attributable to the strategies of firms to create a 'flexible' or 'contingent' workforce so as to facilitate adaptation to rapidly-changing market conditions (see Clement 1999). Nevertheless, part-time work has long been prevalent among married women not required by dint of necessity to take on full-time employment, this type of arrangement being a strategy for juggling family responsibilities, financial needs and personal aspirations in a labour market and civil society still based on fairly traditional gender divisions (Duffy and Pupo 1992).

12 In Montreal the ethnocultural diversification of newer suburbs off the Island of Montreal is as yet limited to a few 'pockets' on the South Shore and in Laval. Although Montreal's suburbs have become more diverse on a number of social scales, the dominant outflow from the Island to the outer suburbs has been of Francophone populations.

References


ARMSTRONG, R. 1999 'Profile of the situation of First Nations communities' Canadian Social Trends 55, 14-16 (Statistics Canada, cat. 11008)

BAKKER, i. and SCOTT, K. 1997 'From the post-war to the post-liberal Keynesian welfare state' in Understanding Canada: Building on the New Canadian Political Economy, ed. W. Clement (Montreal: McGill-- Queen's) 286-310

BEACH, c. and SLOTsve, G. 1996 Are We Becoming Two Societies? (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute)


BEAU)or, R. and mm-rtu:ws, D. 2000 Immigration and the Future of Canada's Population Population Studies Centre, DP no. 00-1 (London ON.: University of Western Ontario)


Migration and Immigration in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, Research Paper 193)


BROTMAN, S. 1999 'Incidence of poverty among seniors in Canada: exploring the impact of gender, ethnicity and race' Canadian Journal on Aging 17, 166-185


CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT 2000 Urban Poverty in Canada (Ottawa)

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF REGIONAL SCIENCE 1997 Special Issue on the Metropolis Project Immigration and Settlement XX, 1/2


HALLI, S. and DRIEDGER, L. eds 1999 Immigrant Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press)


ISAJIW, W. 1999 Understanding Diversity: Ethnicity and Race in the Canadian Context (Toronto: Thompson Educational)


LE BOURDAIS, C., NEILL, C. and TURCOTTE, P. with the collaboration of VACHON, N. and ARCHAMBAULT, I. 2000 'The changing face of conjugal relationships' Canadian Social Trends (Spring) cat. 11-008, 14-17 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada)

MIRON, J. 1988 Housing in Post-War Canada: Demographic Change, Household Formation and Housing Demand (Montreal: McGill-- Queen's University Press)

MYLEs, J., PICOT, G. and PYPER, W. 2000 Neighbourhood Inequality in Canadian Cities cat. 11FO019ME, no.160 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada)

PERON, Y., DESROSIIERS, H., JUBY, H., LAPIERRE-ADAMCYCK, T., LE BOURDAIS, C., MAR

CIL-GRATTON, N. and MONGEAU, J. 1999 Canadian Families at the Approach of the Year 2000 cat.

STATISTICS CANADA, DEMOGRAPHY DIVISION 1994 Population Projections for Canada and the Provinces and Territories cat. no. 91-520 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada)

1996 Projections of Visible Minority Groups, Canada, Provinces and Territories cat. no 91-541 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada)

1999 Annual Demographic Statistics 1998 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada and Industry Canada)

STRATEGIC PROJECTIONS ns iNc. 2000 Tomorrow) Markets Today: Canada's Metropolitan Areas, Prospects to 2021 (Toronto: mimeo)


Author Affiliation

LARRY S. BOURNE

Department of Geography and Program in Planning, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada MSS 3G3 (e-mail: BOURNE@cirque.geog.utoronto.ca)

EAMARIS ROSE

INRS-Urbanisation, Institut national de la recherche scientifique. Montreal, Quebec, Canada H2X 2C6 (e-mail: damaris_rose@inrs-urb.quebec.ca)

Copyright Canadian Association of Geographers Spring 2001