

**MANITOBA RURAL IMMIGRATION
COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES**

Steinbach

RDI Working Paper #2005-7

April 2005

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University

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**Rural Development Institute
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Introduction to Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies

The information contained in this report is part of a series of four case studies of community/regional immigration initiatives in Manitoba. Sponsored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, these case studies were undertaken with the understanding that the findings from four diverse community/regional experiences with rural immigration in Manitoba can assist in exposing innovative practices, lessons learned and further considerations for communities wishing to develop strategies for immigrant attraction, settlement and retention.

It needs to be stressed that this and other case studies each offer a snapshot in time, a collection of impressions and commentary on immigration goals, challenges and responses at a particular point on the continuum of attraction, settlement, and retention. As such, findings are historical and impressionistic and meant to prove instructive for further research and policy considerations, facilitate collaboration between communities and government and initiate contact between communities and immigrants, all for the purposes of strengthening efforts directed towards regional immigration, settlement and retention.

Methodology and Project Developments

For the project, four communities/regions were chosen by Manitoba Labour and Immigration (LIM) on the basis of being instructive with regards to processes and initiatives relating to rural immigration. LIM provided contact information for appropriate stakeholders in each community, who via email, phone and/or in person contact offered input/perspective on community immigration processes. Interviews and/or focus groups were arranged with immigrants through local contacts.

The intent in speaking to immigrants was not to gain quantitative data, but rather seek impressions on their immigration experience that may be informative and instructive both to the communities they reside in and others hoping to develop immigration welcoming, settlement and retention strategies. Despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, vis-à-vis the overall immigrant population of each area, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weakness in attracting and retaining immigrants and strategies that may be employed for such initiatives.

An initial series of working papers of findings was developed in collaboration with personnel from LIM and the communities being studied. This material was then offered during two sessions in Brandon, Manitoba at the end of April:

- to participants at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation-Rural Development Institute (CRRF-RDI) National Rural Think Tank 2005 on the theme of rural immigration; and
- to Manitoba community representatives attending the “Developing a Community Immigration Strategy” seminar held by RDI and LIM at Manitoba’s Rural Forum.

At the latter, representatives from RDI, LIM and the communities involved also presented findings of the study. Further consultation with LIM and the communities in question was sought to develop the document into its present form.

Executive Summary

History and Context

Steinbach's immigration phenomenon emerged out of a climate of considerable growth in the latter half of the 1990s through a process driven largely by employers (who contacted the provincial government to determine how human resource needs could be met), and consultants (who recruited actively in Germany). Russian-Germans, Germans and Kanadier-returning Mennonites from Mexico and Central and South America - comprise the bulk of new arrivals. According to Manitoba Labour and Immigration (LIM), Steinbach officially witnessed the arrival of 1312 immigrants from 1999-2004.

Existing Supports and Initiatives

The trend in service provision for immigrants to Steinbach has been one of growth and formalization of services, a trend that has occurred as a response to vast numbers of previous landings. Some of the specific existing supports identified during the development of this case study include:

Settlement: Steinbach's City Council and Chamber of Commerce have been active in organizing and managing a settlement program, which is now entitled the *Steinbach and District Immigration Settlement Program (SISP)*. SISP offers key services for immigrant settlement and orientation needs, information packages, youth programming and programs for women. Some programs are offered in High German.

Language: High and Low German are both spoken in the community, though English remains critical in accessing necessary information and functioning in the wider community. South Eastman English and Literacy Services (SEELS) offers language classes and engages with workplaces and communities to address local language needs. Flexibility in programming, partnering, and tapping into community and volunteer resources remain essential to meet growing and often unpredictable language needs.

Education: Hanover School Division has registered over 1200 English as a Second Language (ESL) students since 1999, without which overall decline in enrollment would have occurred. Challenges facing the school division include: little knowledge of numbers to be received; when and where immigrants will settle (and where children attend school); a lag in funding to account for new arrivals; and additions to infrastructure, supports and programming.

Health: Immigrant arrivals have contributed to a rate of population growth greater than that witnessed by any other regional health authority in the province. Large, young families have increased demand for primary health care services, many of which remain unmet, and challenges surrounding language impact health care delivery (i.e., the RHA's funding formula makes no formal acknowledgement of increased numbers). Immigrants contribute to a steady demand for diverse range of services.

Employer/Employment: Many skilled workers are starting businesses. Credential recognition issues remain; some immigrants have wage expectations that exceed that which

is available. A trucking pilot program is being developed to assist immigrant truck drivers. Competitiveness of business environment means English is often required for work; lack of English therefore compromises integration in the workplace. Many businesses use the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) with varying degrees of success, though referrals and personal connection bring arrived immigrants to workplaces. Immigrants offer technical experience and abilities often difficult to find in local labour pool.

Additional Observations: Housing remains an issue, with immigrants being wrongly identified as the sole factor contributing to the housing shortage and increased prices. Small lots around Steinbach are becoming less available, leading to wider dispersal of immigrants in surrounding area, which creates challenges for service provision. Dispersal underscores concerns of social isolation, particularly for mothers. Immigration is deemed necessary for future growth in the community and the immigration phenomenon remains inextricably bound to growth processes and “growing pains”. This is often misidentified as the sole reason for the challenges surrounding growth. Leadership has come from the settlement committee to deal with issues of integration, as they seek to engage the wider community to combat misimpressions. Many Russian-Germans prefer to establish their own churches and reproduce social/religious practices, often outside of the wider community.

Immigrants’ Perspective

During a focus group and interviews conducted with a number of Steinbach immigrants, immigrants’ perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of community living were shared and discussed. The specific comments of these participants are summarized below:

German / Russian-German Population

Positive Aspects of Living in Community, Pull Factors: Quality of school system; availability of land; living on acreages (comparable to geography of former homes in Russia/Soviet Union); various amenities and proximity to Winnipeg; relatives and family in area; previous visits to area; immigrant church communities; German language in community; language training; plentiful work; outreach and further assistance from settlement, volunteers and community.

Negatives Aspects of Living in Community/Immigration Process: Issues surrounding credential recognition; being unable to work desired job; low wages; perception of less work in the community; increased cost of housing and living expenses coupled with stagnant wages; family reunification; language barrier.

Non-German

Employment is a draw factor for immigrants from diverse backgrounds, including those who settled originally in other parts of Canada. Proximity to Winnipeg helps lessen the impact of isolation for immigrants for whom no similar national/ linguistic critical mass exists. Settlement services are essential in easing transition. Steinbach is attractive after moving from urban Canadian centres because of safety concerns. Such individuals are facilitating transition/immigration of others from overseas and from elsewhere in Canada.

Conclusion

Steinbach offers a robust model of rural immigration. However, before assuming an easy transferal of Steinbach's model and experience, those seeking to encourage immigration elsewhere need to consider at length the extent to which Steinbach's unique cultural composition (factors of language and religion), continued growth and diverse economic base have all contributed to the numbers of immigrants received.

Strong leadership from and co-operation amongst government, business and social services to facilitate the successful arrival and settlement of immigrants and respond to the challenges are indeed apparent. The vast settlement experience of the community and challenges faced (credentials recognition, housing shortage, engaging wider community) may prove instructive to those seeking to develop immigration models for their communities. The diverse needs of immigrants, suggest that even with certain strengths of an area (e.g., capacity for German language) there is no simple fit for immigration, and immigration processes need consistent evaluation and public engagement to ensure success.

Recommendations and Lessons

Understand that immigrants bring with them complex, diverse and often unpredictable needs. Communities should be aware of the efforts required for settlement and retention, including volunteer and paid positions, prior to initiating immigration. Partnerships and involvement of stakeholders from throughout the community are key, especially where the capacity to deliver needed services is diminished.

Encourage exploratory visits and personal linkages. Personal linkages with family, friends, and/or church community facilitate immigration, settlement and retention, as does previous exposure to an area through visiting. Immigrants are as mobile as other Canadians and will continue to seek out a situation that satisfies their work, housing, schooling, linguistic and cultural/religious needs.

Provide outreach and be proactive in contacting immigrant families to determine their needs. Attempts to bridge all information gaps before and after arrival are required. Organized and visible services are absolutely critical for successful settlement. The flexible delivery of programs assists in meeting the immigrant population's needs. For example, offering ESL classes at a work site after work may increase attendance, as efficiencies of travel and time can be utilized. Also, immigrants desire more programs to address gaps in credential recognition and information on procedures for starting businesses. Efforts should be made up front to provide/seek training in English, either immediately upon arrival, or, better still, prior to departing original country.

Create opportunities for the immigrant community and non-immigrant community to simply interact with one another. This interaction is crucial to successful community relations and integration. The potential grounds for antagonism exist when the wider community has little say in the process of immigration.

Recommended Further Research on Case Study

Steinbach remains worth following for its response to challenges associated with immigration, as the city and its immigration stakeholders continue to actively engage the community on the matter of immigration.

- Exploring factors in retention, determining retention rate: How many have left? Why did they leave?
- What is the experience of non-German, Russian-German, Kanadier population? What are the motivations, successes and retention rates for Non-German speaking immigrants to the area?
- Retention rates of children in immigrant families: will they reproduce rural trends of out-migration, pursuing education and employment opportunities elsewhere?
- What is the impact of secondary migration to the city? How does employment and already settled immigrants facilitate new arrivals? What is the impact of immigration on outlying communities?
- What is the extent of business development by skilled worker immigrants and immigrant workplace mobility and job satisfaction over time?
- What are the effects of isolation on immigrants dispersed throughout rural areas, particularly stay at home mothers?
- How are (primarily) Russian-German immigrants reproducing their own institutions/preferences? How does this factor in immigration, integration and retention?
- Dealing with information gaps between departure and arrival- does this improve over time? If so, what contributes to this improvement? If not, how to improve this?

Introduction and Methodology

Steinbach and area is one of the four community/regional case studies under investigation, chosen after being identified by personnel from Manitoba Labour and Immigration as having undertaken distinct immigration initiatives and responded to large immigration flows, from which important lessons and recommendations can be drawn.

For the intended purposes of the case studies, qualitative and impressionistic information was sought directly from those involved in the immigration process. Contact was established and information gathered by phone conversation, email correspondence and/ or in person contact from individuals in each community/region who had themselves played important roles in immigration processes to date and/or could recommend further key contacts. It should be noted that due to the time and travel constraints of the project, not all recommended contacts were successfully reached. In some cases, those reached felt they had little relevant information to offer to the project.

Interviews were arranged with immigrants through local contacts. Time constraints, the comfort level of immigrant subjects and language concerns were factored into the determination of interview procedure. When it was possible, a focus group was established to permit greater levels of interaction and idea generation amongst immigration subjects. Semi-structured and open interviews were used, as well, in the case of Steinbach. The hybrid methods, employed out of necessity due to time concerns and the willingness of subjects to participate, did not lend to a neat systematization of findings. It is suggested that further follow up in this area would be fruitful.

The intent in speaking to immigrants was not to gain quantitative data, but rather seek impressions on their immigration experience that may be informative and instructive both to the communities they reside in and others hoping to develop immigration welcoming, settlement and retention strategies. Despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, vis-à-vis the overall immigrant population of the area, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weakness in attracting and retaining immigrants and strategies that may be employed for such initiatives.

The information provided by immigrants and additional community contacts has been summarized and analyzed to present general history, trends and impressions. Further input and recommendations have been sought from community contacts and Manitoba Labour and Immigration, and this document reflects their input.

Immigration to Steinbach and Area - History and Context

It remains difficult to disentangle the phenomenon of immigration to Steinbach and area from that of general growth. Prior to the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) creating a large immigrant stream, Steinbach was already the fastest growing area in the province and the region a primary destination for new arrivals. With Steinbach comes a complex situation in which growth and immigration feed off one another and, indeed, require one another. This process presents significant challenges and the necessary adjustment identified as “growing pains”. It becomes quickly apparent when speaking to those involved intimately in immigration that such challenges and adjustment are welcome, as they are the result of a community meeting its immediate human resource needs, developing greater long term growth prospects and experiencing cultural revitalization and diversification.

Steinbach’s immigration phenomenon emerged out of a climate of considerable growth through a process that was initially employer and consultant driven. Larger businesses in need of employment contacted the government to determine how these needs could be met through immigration and immigrant consultants recruited actively in Germany. The result was the arrival of considerable numbers, mostly from Germany (many of who had previously emigrated from Russia), numbers that would soon necessitate a coordinated community response for the provision of appropriate supports.

Steinbach has offered for some of its more enthusiastic new arrivals an opportunity for open spaces, excellent schools, plentiful work and the ability to practice a lifestyle perceived threatened by European secularism, withering employment opportunities and urban crowding. Families are large: immigrant families to the area from overseas average five children and it is not uncommon to see a family with twelve or thirteen children (Source: South Eastman Health, Inc., 2004).

Table 1: Immigration to Steinbach, 1999-2004

Immigration to Steinbach	
Year	Number
1999	126
2000	197
2001	150
2002	136
2003	393
2004	310
Total	1312

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada; prepared by Manitoba Labour and Immigration, May 2005

Many of the so-called Russian-German immigrants bring with them a preference for continuing religious institutions and practices and have built their own churches in the area.

Religious institutions are key to ensuring cultural preservation and continuity and may diminish the impetus and desire to integrate into the wider community on certain levels. A crucially important question remains of the extent to which and on what levels immigrants integrate, and want to integrate, into the existing communities. It should also be noted that that this group in and amongst itself is very diverse with different religious beliefs and practices, and in many cases members may not be integrating with Canadians, nor with other Russian-Germans. The community has also witnessed the arrival of considerable numbers of Germans who do not have larger families, and although they may be 'faithful' they do not have the strong pull of a certain religious belief or practice. In the eyes of the Russian-Germans this group would perhaps be considered more secular.

The development of enclaves is further enabled by the development of an extensive social network amongst immigrants, and this is not confined to the larger Russian-German population alone. Though critical issues remain with expectations around employment and language issues, as will be discussed further, some information gaps are being 'stopped up' by the proliferation of contacts between settled and potentially arriving immigrants from Germany and elsewhere. Many make visits prior to immigrating and have the added advantage of close friends and/or relatives already existing in the area. This provides the opportunity for a more realistic impression of what the community offers.

Though immigration to Steinbach exhibits a strong Russian-German constituency, this is by no means the only group. With its vibrant economy, Steinbach is increasingly becoming the destination for immigrants of diverse backgrounds, with some of them finding their respective way to the community after first landing and intending to settle elsewhere in Canada. The community, therefore, offers numerous pull factors. Amongst these is the area's ability to attract, settle and retain members of the Kanadier population - Mennonites from Mexico and Central and South America who have some historical ties to the region and have retained citizenship rights.

Steinbach has offered opportunities for those who exhibit a preference of a rural lifestyle over an urban one. Mostly anecdotal information suggests that the community has attracted some secondary migration of those who have become dissatisfied with Canadian urban life and the potential negative impact on children. As one of the forerunners of rural immigration in the province, Steinbach's immigration personnel regularly receive inquiries from other communities interested in recruiting immigrants.

Settlement

The trend in service provision for immigrants is one of growth and formalization of structure, a trend that has occurred as a response to the vast numbers of previous landings. This is how settlement services have evolved. Steinbach's immigrant settlement program was initially managed by City Council. In 1999 the Chamber of Commerce became the centre for managing the settlement program due to funding stipulations that a nonprofit entity was required for management and delivery. The program at the time consisted of a part time settlement worker who was working out of a car and inundated with requests from new arrivals. Current members of the immigration committee state that the workload at this time was overwhelming, management of intake proved difficult and processes remained non-formalized.

The Steinbach and District Immigrant Settlement Program (SISP) provides the first and often most needed contact for immigrants. The organization's mandate is to facilitate settlement by responding to whatever needs are indicated by immigrants. This necessitates a flexible approach and the willingness to develop appropriate programs to respond to needs. Indispensable services, contact, friendship and general support for the immigrant population come from the office. SISP committee representatives estimate that settlement personnel have contact with fifty percent of immigrants that settle.

Core services of SISP consist of:

- Information on immigration and the Steinbach area including referrals to services;
- Reception and orientation services such as school registration, obtaining social insurance number cards and Child Tax Benefits;
- Translation and interpretation services with schools, employment services, doctors, hospitals, immigration offices and others;
- Employment related services such as resume writing, assisted job search and pre-employment counseling; and
- Programming for youth and initiatives for women.

(Adapted from SISP brochure, with input from settlement staff)

SISP presently has two full time employees with an employment assistant being added soon. It is hoped that adding a specific employment assistant can free up time for other volunteer programming. One such area is in increasing activities to create and promote a greater intercultural understanding in the community. SISP has already initiated this work in schools, encouraging children from immigrant families to speak of their experiences. This has involved projects in which K-6 students draw pictures and communicate their experiences as well as an essay competition developed for junior high students.

Some programs are available in High German, which serves the largest immigrant population, but non German-speaking immigrants would have difficulty in accessing the same quality of services if their English skills were poor. An information packet on Steinbach and area is being developed in German, including basic information and frequently asked questions.

The SISP Committee is undertaking a needs assessment to determine how information can be better collected and recorded in order to report more accurately on immigration and settlement in the community. This remains of considerable importance, as appropriate supports and services are allocated based on information collected.

Many immigrants use the services of **Anna's House**, a facility that provides services for new mothers. Despite a few elements of the community initially believing that a soup kitchen was not required, it remains a valuable service for the community as a whole, and a service that some newly arriving immigrant families and individuals may use. This is also the case with the **community food bank**.

Language

According to members of the settlement committee, many new arrivals came with the expectation that German could be spoken uniformly throughout workplaces - this expectation was quickly challenged in a number of situations. A German worker's ability to speak German in the workplace is often predicated on whether a foreman or floor manager can also speak the language. Many have noted that language requirements in the workplace became stricter, and several immigrants commented further on the extent to which English remains critical to access necessary information and function in the wider community, despite there being a considerable number of people in the community capable of communicating in High and Low German.

Language has thus become a noticeable concern, and language provision has had to continuously reflect the capacity to grow and be flexible to respond to the newly identified needs. It has taken great time to develop a model with appropriate funding mechanisms that could address the specific challenges being offered by the arriving immigrant workers. These needs differ greatly between workplaces.

South Eastman English and Literary Services (SEELS) moved into shared offices with SISP in September 2004, having been previously run out of homes of employees. This move reflected the trend of growing formalization of services. SEELS:

- offers language skills assessment, training, referrals, daytime and evening classes, support for individual learning and childcare services;
- works with the communities to meet local needs;
- provides volunteers for conversation partners, literacy tutoring, childcare, clerical work, committee work, literacy promotion, fundraising and support of language and literacy issues;
- establishes partnerships with workplaces to assess the need for and type of basic skills training,
- develops and deliver custom workplace training; and
- provides ongoing program monitoring and evaluation and program funding support through government grants.

(adapted from SEELS brochure)

There is a great emphasis on flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs and situations of immigrants. Services began in Steinbach, though further needs noticed elsewhere prompted the regionalization of services. Areas outside of Steinbach are accruing critical masses of immigrants and warranting the provision of language services, though multi-level needs make this difficult.

The capacity to successfully provide language services in light of the numerous challenges of geography and funding is increased through establishing effective partnerships. Workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are delivered with costs being shared between the workplace and SEELS and with the employee often receiving some work time and giving up some personal time for the classes. Programs are being run out of churches or schools with minimal costs, businesses assist with photocopying costs and the regional health authority supports family literacy programs as a component of literacy for healthy living. The library offers an ESL section, volunteers provide one on one tutoring and Providence College and Steinbach Bible College provide classroom aids as part of their college practicum component. The latter also houses a resource centre for instructors.

According to SEELS' Executive Director, basic English is required more and more to receive jobs in the community as employers have become cognizant of the issues surrounding workplace dynamics and the need for English. She also stated that many students will begin entry level English to obtain a job and then return later for further training and added that classes that are offered immediately after work witness higher attendance than those offered in the evenings. ESL classes are now being offered in the summer for the first time, the period that sees the greatest number of arrivals.

Challenges to ESL provision are similar to those facing other services. SEELS doesn't know precisely how many immigrants are coming until they arrive, what level of English they will require and where they will eventually settle.

Education

The **Hanover School Division** has both benefited from and been tested by the influx of immigrants to Steinbach and the surrounding area. The division's budget projection reveals that since 1999, Hanover School Division has registered over 1200 ESL students. Overall growth in the Hanover School Division since 1999 is 1065 students. This translates into an overall decline in enrollment without the influx of ESL students. For 2005/06 it is projected that ESL enrollment will be 650 students. This constitutes approximately ten percent of total student population.

As with other service providers in the community, the school division receives little warning of the numbers it will receive and when and where the families will settle within the schools division. Planning under these circumstances remains very difficult. While there exists a formula to adjust to the new arrivals, there is a lag in funding after the time a student enrolls, and the amount does not cover all new arrivals. Immediate costs, therefore, are born by the division.

Hanover School Division's superintendent is quick to stress that despite the challenges brought by the immigration boom, the overall effect has been overwhelmingly positive. He maintains that coping from year to year is manageable enough, but the real strain is noticed

in the cumulative effect of the new arrivals. The division has added teachers, ten new buses, bus runs and an ESL component. Six temporary classrooms have been built. The division has hired an interpreter/translator to do educational/technical bookwork, and social workers have established close contact with the immigrant population.

Health

The health sector has similarly been affected by the arrival of large numbers of immigrants. Largely due to immigration, **South Eastman Health** has had to contend with a considerable population growth in the region over the past five years at a rate greater than that experienced by any other Regional Health Authority in the province (Source: South Eastman Health, Inc., 2004).

Again according to its 2003/04 Community Health Assessment, South Eastman Health recognizes that immigration has brought “significant unmet needs in the areas of prenatal/obstetric care, family health care, immunization and mental health. Language barriers, compounded by lack of language appropriate resource material, compromise the quality and safety of care in facilities and the community” (ibid., 99).

The arrival of young families, many of them large, have led to an increased demand for the provision of primary health care, and the area has witnessed a considerable growth in immigrant births. Midwifery is preferred to physicians by many immigrants: a German speaking midwife has been hired for this reason. However, there remains a shortage of German staff workers and considerable challenges with collecting and conveying necessary medical information due to language concerns.

On the side of Public Health, there is sufficient staff and German speakers on staff, including a German-speaking community nurse. The Chief Executive Officer of South Eastman Health is aware of the potential social isolation of the immigrant population and anticipates an increase in demand by the immigrant community for mental health services.

New challenges to the healthcare system are dealt with differently than those to education: health care does not have a funding formula that makes formal acknowledgement of increased numbers. Conversely, while a younger immigrant population brings certain needs to the health care system they have less demands than would an older population. The growth that immigrant families contribute to ensures a steady demand for a diverse range of services.

Immigrants' Perspective: Key Findings

Due to the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, the information presented by immigrants poses challenges to neat systematization and generalizations. Nonetheless, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weaknesses in attracting and retaining immigrants. It should be restated that the intent of contacting immigrants in this study was to receive qualitative feedback and impressions on the immigration and settlement experience to inform future initiatives towards welcoming, settlement and retention.

German / Russian-German Population

One focus group was held with 12 German/Russian-German immigrants and two in-person interviews were conducted, for which a questionnaire was completed (see Appendix B). The findings from both the focus group and interviews are presented in broader categories below:

Positive Aspects about Community and What Factored in Choosing and Settling in Steinbach and Area

Respondents spoke positively about the school system, citing more structure and stronger teacher-student relationships than they had experienced in Germany.

Some of the area's geographical factors were spoken of highly. Specifically, the area exhibits "less people (and) more land" than does Germany and provides the opportunity to live on acreages. In this sense, it is powerfully reminiscent of the home/land this group was familiar with in the Soviet Union. Steinbach itself is a comfortable small city with amenities and services, with close proximity to Winnipeg to satisfy other needs.

The presence of many relatives and friends in the area contributes to the choice to come to the community and facilitates the transition by providing further information and supports. Many were familiar with the area prior to moving, having visited previously, some a number of times. The presence of a number of immigrant church communities is also a comforting and attractive factor.

The presence of the German language in the community is attractive. Some feel as though they can live comfortably enough without a sophisticated understanding of English. Conversely, many expressed being pleased with ESL classes, especially that these are provided for them by the government.

Many responded as being impressed with the outreach and further assistance they encountered from settlement workers, volunteers and the community at large.

The existence of plentiful work in the community is attractive.

Negative / Challenging Aspects about Community / Immigration Process

The majority of negative aspects cited involved employment or financial issues.

Many responded as having significant issues related to employment. Some reported having had the impression that they could step immediately into their trade and subsequently being disappointed upon learning of issues of credential recognition. Others reported disappointment in the wages they received, feeling these to be low despite their abundant experience and credentials. There is the perception that less work is available in the community than in the past.

Many found both houses and housing taxes to be expensive. As well, frustration was expressed over the increasing cost of living in the community coupled with stagnant wages.

Many cited the language barrier as challenging.

Many expressed disappointment with the difficulties associated with family reunification.

Additional Recommendations / Comments from Immigrants

More industry jobs would help attract more immigrants.

Access to more information would facilitate the immigration process for new immigrants, as would contact with a settlement office.

Most had no idea how long they would settle in the community.

Non-German Immigrant Population

Three in person interviews were held with immigrants from three different Asian countries with key findings offered below. Their specific countries of origin and additional characteristics are not given to ensure confidentiality.

Despite the predominance of immigrants from Germany in the overall makeup of Steinbach's immigrant community, there is a growing number of immigrants from other sources; in the case of the three contacted, Steinbach was the second destination in Canada, attracting each one with available work. The positive employment climate is therefore a drawing factor for a wider pool of immigrants, as well as Germans.

Steinbach offers different challenges for immigrants from origins other than Germany. There is not the same critical mass that speaks the same first language or can offer certain cultural comforts. One expressed difficulties in being both non-white and a single mother in the community.

However, the proximity of Winnipeg eases the strain of disconnection from a wider cultural community, and one interviewee stated that he has regular social contact with this element at work, where many originally from his home country commute to and from Winnipeg.

Settlement services played a particularly helpful role for the three interviewees. Two with families expressed great satisfaction living in Steinbach after moving from larger Canadian centres, feeling that the move was beneficial for their children. Despite some integration issues, all were impressed with the assistance received from the wider community.

All three are connecting Steinbach to external forces. One interviewee reported how she regularly receives phone calls from her home country from people with whom she has no previous connection, who then request rides from the Winnipeg airport. She often provides

rides as well as offers temporary space at her home for these new arrivals. Another spoke of inviting friends to work in Steinbach and is sponsoring members of his family to arrive. A third spoke of arranging work for former contacts in Winnipeg.

Employer / Employment

The ability to procure a livelihood remains the most crucial factor impacting whether an immigrant can successfully settle in a rural community, indeed whether he or she comes to a rural community in the first place. It is an issue of overwhelming importance in the case of Steinbach. Four businesses and a number of additional contacts offered perspective on the relationship between immigration and employment and some of the associated challenges and opportunities.

Steinbach offers a broad and expanding industrial base that has exhibited the capacity to meet immediate immigrant job needs, whether or not such jobs meet all expectations. Abundant blue-collar work is available in the community. Many immigrants in the Steinbach area have exhibited great flexibility in their approaches to seeking and attaining work, according to one area settlement worker. Furthermore, skilled immigrants are starting businesses. Many of these originally related to trades, though retail outlets are developing, according to members of the settlement committee.

Numerous employers utilize the PNP to seek out immigrant workers who can satisfy their human resource needs. Some businesses have no knowledge if those they have signed job offers for actually arrive, and there remains no guarantee they will. For some, there is too long of a wait with the PNP and no ability to ensure their human resources needs will remain the same from the time a job is offered to when an immigrant arrives. One contact reported no longer signing job offers because of this uncertainty.

Those utilizing the PNP are not the only businesses benefiting from the arrival of immigrant workers, however. Many who land in the area come to businesses by word of mouth referrals or a close personal connection to an existing employee. Furthermore, Steinbach businesses benefit from the secondary migration of those who move to Steinbach because of its strong economy. This secondary migration appears to facilitate further arrivals, as word is passed to others about employment opportunities.

The grounds for misimpression and unmet expectations are indeed fertile, and credentials recognition remains a great concern. One area response to this dilemma is **the Trucking Pilot Program**. The intent is to provide an opportunity for unemployed and underemployed immigrants with a minimum of two years experience to be in a truck in twelve-fourteen weeks by assessing the participants' strengths and shortcomings in language and communication skills, driving skills, border crossings, cultural adaptation and other skills required by the industry. The hope is that the Pilot will be replicable across other communities.

Though there is a high level of German spoken in the community, the competitiveness of the business environment and skills required therein means that there may be little flexibility to use languages other than English, including German, in the workplace. One contact from Advanced Education and Training remarked that "if (immigrants) need English, they need English" for successful employment. Multiple workplaces have established partnership with

SEELS for the delivery of English classes that are catered specifically to the needs of the workplace. A lack of English is challenging for integration, particularly in work scenarios with technical requirements and standards.

Some area employers find successful fits with the strong technical background of immigrant workers. As mentioned, there are issues surrounding the transfer of credit and credentials that are frustrating for both employee and employer.

Expectations of some immigrant workers, particularly those coming from Germany, can be higher than what the environment can satisfy. Entry-level positions are the most commonly available due to language and credentials concerns.

Additional Challenges and Observations

In the case of Steinbach, there appears to have been a process of immigrant arrivals and relatively quiet integration followed by a growing realization of the accumulated challenges posed to the system by a then substantial immigrant population.

Affordable housing remains a persistent issue, both for immigrants and the community at large. Sadly, an increasingly visible housing shortage has recently been attributed to an increasingly visible immigrant population. Immigrants are then being wrongly identified as the sole factor contributing to the city's housing shortage, creating the conditions for a wider misunderstanding of Steinbach's immigrant population by the established Canadian population.

Some service providers have expressed concern for mothers dispersed through the region and their inability to access services or be contacted. Also, whether these individuals are having regular social contact outside the home is of concern.

Small lots around Steinbach are becoming less and less available and immigrants are dispersing further, spurring new challenges for providing appropriate health care, education, settlement and ESL services. Smaller surrounding communities of non-German ethnic, linguistic and cultural composition are also now witnessing the influx of German immigrants.

In the case of Steinbach and surrounding communities, officials have little idea of the numbers they are to receive and when. There is significant movement between Steinbach and surrounding towns; as well, Steinbach is an attractive option for secondary migration.

Issues of culture shock and misimpressions have been, understandably, plentiful. Many spoke of the tensions developed between European expectations and Canadian systemic realities. A component of this is workplace dynamics, as mentioned earlier.

A challenge remains in offering services that have a considerable degree of specialization and satisfy the needs of a growing immigrant population without the same resources, both human and material, a larger centre may have to draw from.

The settlement committee is in place to deal with the substantive issues concerning settlement, including the perception of immigration in the community. There is an acknowledgement that the arrival and settlement of newcomers is going to continue, whether this be from overseas or elsewhere in Manitoba and Canada. With this acknowledgement is the realization that Steinbach needs to offer continued leadership within Manitoba as the

province itself hopes to become a leader in immigration policy and settlement in rural communities.

With certain negative feedback happening in the community, the committee is wrestling with the issue of how to best reduce ignorance around the topic of immigration. The community and committee realize that specific interventions and initiatives are required to continue to manage immigration.

Steinbach is witnessing the complexities associated with rapid growth. Immigration itself is inextricable from the wider processes of growth, though the opportunity for it to become a visible target to blame for the community's growing pains remains. The success of many businesses is in no small way enabled by immigration flows to the community, and the danger of businesses leaving the community remains if human resource needs aren't met.

One contact stated that some residents are under the misguided impression that immigrants are receiving additional funds from the Canadian government. He further stated that many immigrants have displayed the capacity for "making a lot out of a little" and that there is a general lack of understanding in the community how some can afford houses with big families and often only a single wage earner.

There exists a perception amongst immigrants that jobs are drying up in the region, this despite continued assurances from settlement and community sources to the contrary. Such a perception might influence immigrants' motivations for coming to the community, though incoming numbers remain high. With further out migration comes new cultural linkages, supports and information flows between immigrants in Steinbach and other destinations within Canada.

Conclusion

Steinbach offers a robust model of rural immigration. However, before assuming an easy transferal of Steinbach's model and experience, those seeking to encourage immigration elsewhere need to consider at length the extent to which Steinbach's unique cultural composition (factors of language and religion), continued growth and diverse economic base have all contributed to the numbers of immigrants received.

Strong leadership from and co-operation amongst government, business and social services to facilitate the successful arrival and settlement of immigrants and respond to the challenges are indeed apparent. The vast settlement experience of the community and challenges faced (credentials recognition, housing shortage, engaging wider community) may prove instructive to those seeking to develop immigration models for their communities. The diverse needs of immigrants, even with the community capacity for German language, suggest that even with certain strengths of an area there is no simple fit for immigration, and immigration processes need consistent evaluation and public engagement to ensure success.

Recommendations and Lessons from Steinbach

Understand that immigrants bring with them complex, diverse and often unpredictable needs. Communities should be aware of the efforts required for settlement and retention, including volunteer and paid positions, prior to initiating immigration. Partnerships and involvement of stakeholders from throughout the community are key, especially where the capacity to deliver needed services is diminished.

Encourage exploratory visits and personal linkages. Personal linkages with family, friends, and/or church community facilitate immigration, settlement and retention, as does previous exposure to an area through visiting. Immigrants are as mobile as other Canadians and will continue to seek out a situation that satisfies their work, housing, schooling, linguistic and cultural/religious needs.

Provide outreach and be proactive in contacting immigrant families to determine their needs. Attempts to bridge all information gaps before and after arrival are required. Organized and visible services are absolutely critical for successful settlement. The flexible delivery of programs assists in meeting the immigrant population's needs. For example, offering ESL classes at a work site after work may increase attendance, as efficiencies of travel and time can be utilized. Also, immigrants desire more programs to address gaps in credential recognition and information on procedures for starting businesses. Efforts should be made up front to provide/seek training in English, either immediately upon arrival, or, better still, prior to departing original country. **Attempt to bridge all information gaps before and after arrival.**

Immigrants desire more programs to address gaps in credential recognition and information on procedures for starting businesses.

Create opportunities for the immigrant community and non-immigrant community to simply interact with one another. This interaction is crucial to successful community

relations and integration. The potential grounds for antagonism exist when the wider community has little say in the process of immigration.

Recommended Further Research on Case Study

Steinbach remains worth following for its response to challenges associated with immigration, as the city and its immigration stakeholders continue to actively engage the community on the matter of immigration.

- Exploring factors in retention, determining retention rate: How many have left? Why did they leave?
- What is the experience of non-German, Russian-German, Kanadier population? What are the motivations, successes and retention rates for Non-German speaking immigrants to the area?
- Retention rates of children in immigrant families: will they reproduce rural trends of out-migration, pursuing education and employment opportunities elsewhere?
- What is the impact of secondary migration to the city? How does employment and already settled immigrants facilitate new arrivals? What is the impact of immigration on outlying communities?
- What is the extent of business development by skilled worker immigrants and immigrant workplace mobility and job satisfaction over time?
- What are the effects of isolation on immigrants dispersed throughout rural areas, particularly stay at home mothers?
- How are (primarily) Russian-German immigrants reproducing their own institutions/preferences? How does this factor in immigration, integration and retention?
- Dealing with information gaps between departure and arrival- does this improve over time? If so, what contributes to this improvement? If not, how to improve this?

References

South Eastman Health, Inc. (2004). *Community Health Assessment 2003/04: Comprehensive Report*. La Broquerie: South Eastman Health. Available at <http://www.sehealth.mb.ca>.

Appendix A: Resource List and Contact Information

- Settlement Office Brochure

Briefly outlines settlement services available and contact information for the settlement office. Available in English and High German.

For further information on material and Steinbach's immigration program contact:

Kim Shukla
Executive Director
Steinbach Chamber of Commerce
225 Reimer Ave. Steinbach, MB R5G 1N4
Telephone: (204) 326-9566 Fax: (204) 346-3638
E-mail: ks.stbcofc@mts.net

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. Name: _____
(note: your name is required only for follow up by the interviewer. It will not be included in any presentation of the findings)

2. Age: _____ 3. Gender: _____
4. Marital Status: _____ 5. Number of Children: _____
6. Year of arrival in Canada: _____
7. Original country of departure: _____
8. Additional country (countries) of residence prior to Canada: _____
9. First community of residence in Canada: _____
10. Current community of residence in Canada: _____
11. Are you currently employed? YES _____ NO _____
If yes, what is your employment? _____
12. Have you had more than one place of employment in Canada? YES _____ NO _____
If yes, why did you change places of employment? _____

13. Does your normal occupation/profession (for example, your occupation in your home country) differ from your present employment?
YES _____ \Rightarrow Normal occupation/profession _____
NO _____
14. What are the most positive aspects of living in your present community?

15. What are the most negative/challenging aspects of living in your present community?

16. What factors contributed to your choice to live in your present community?

17. What helped you settle in your present community? (example: services, other people in the community, relatives)

18. What would help other newcomers when they arrive?

19. How long do you anticipate living in your present community? (check one)

1-2 years: _____ 3-5 years: _____ 6-10 years: _____ Over ten years: _____

20. Do you have anything you would like to add about your immigration experience?

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