

Spaces of encounter:

French-speaking migrants' experiences of social and cultural integration and participation in Francophone minority communities

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Summary

Our study examined the role of community spaces in the social and cultural integration of French speaking immigrants and refugees living in two Francophone minority communities (FMCs) in Ontario, Ottawa and London. We adopted an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995) that combined different dialogical data collection methods and included four stages with different target populations. For stage 1 (key informant interviews), we discuss three key themes stemming from our results: the challenges faced by Francophone communities in maintaining their community spaces, the issue of FMC (in)visibility, and the role of community spaces in the integration and participation of French-speaking immigrants and refugees. In stage 2 (focus groups with immigrants and refugees) we describe the types of community spaces discussed by participants, as well as the role these spaces play in facilitating their social and cultural integration experiences. We then present the challenges they have experienced in this regard as well as their suggestions for practices that could help facilitate their integration. During stage 3 (interviews with representatives from community spaces), we address three primary themes: the issues and challenges faced by organizations serving French-speaking immigrants, the role of community spaces in immigrants' integration and the challenges these spaces confront. Our primary recommendations are informed by these results, as well as by stage 4 (community meeting), and address: the Francophone community organizations and institutions as well as the socio-economic and political context in which they operate; communication and information dissemination strategies; the nature of and access to Francophone community spaces; and the Francophone communities themselves. Ultimately, Francophone community spaces play an important role in integration and show potential to help immigrants participate in FMCs. However, barriers and challenges facing immigrants, the organizations that serve them, and the communities that welcome them need to be addressed for integration to be further facilitated. Additional resources are required to support community infrastructure and to enhance the role of Francophone community spaces.