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ORIGINAL PAPER

Christian Churches and Immigrant Support in Canada: An Organizational Ecology Perspective

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Abstract Canada receives roughly 250,000 immigrants each year, and the government spends considerable resources on assisting them to settle and integrate into Canadian society through the agencies they support. Most of these new immigrants settle in Canada's largest cities, where churches meet specific needs that extend beyond the capacities of government agencies. In smaller centers, churches cover a wide range of services because few government supports are available. Little is known about the work of churches in Canada in spite of their importance to immigrant settlement and integration. In this study, we examine the services offered to immigrants by Canadian Christian churches. We show how the service provision of Christian churches is constrained by other organizations and groups in their environment, in ways consonant with the organizational ecology framework. Specifically, churches service the needs of immigrants by adapting to specific niche needs and by filling in gaps left by other service providers.

Keywords Immigrant settlement · Christian churches · Canada · Refugees

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Introduction

As a low-fertility, developed country, Canada receives roughly 250,000 immigrants each year to maintain its population and strengthen its economy (Simmons and Bourne 2013; Connor 2014). Religious congregations provide support to these newcomers through refugee sponsorship, English or French language classes, providing space for immigrant congregations or organizations, meeting basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, transportation), and by offering volunteer opportunities (Handy and Greenspan 2009) among a variety of other supportive, developmental activities (Dwyer et al. 2013). These supports can include short-term settlement and long-term integration services, and may be extended to immigrants regardless of their religious affiliation.

In this study, we examine the services offered to immigrants by Canadian Christian churches in four research sites: Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and the Maritimes. We show how the service provision of Christian churches is constrained by other organizations and groups in their environment, in ways consonant with the organizational ecology framework. Specifically, churches service the needs of immigrants by adapting to specific niche needs and by filling in gaps left by other service providers. Churches minimize the risk of expanding their niche to immigrants by offering services with low cost and by partnering with others.

Past Immigration Research Regarding Churches

To date, there is little research on how churches help to settle and integrate new immigrants in Canada, yet the research that is available suggests that they play a significant role (Ley 2008; Handy and Greenspan 2009; Tse 2011; Janzen et al. 2012; Goldring and Landolt 2014). Research in the U.S. has found that congregations are vital to immigrant settlement and integration (Warner and Wittner 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000) because they provide not only spiritual and social support, but networking opportunities that can lead to employment, social capital and skill development, and sometimes a place where their home culture can be maintained (Biney 2013). Many Christian congregations within Canada intentionally seek to integrate new Canadians into their worship experience and organizational life with varying degrees of effectiveness and intentionality (Wilkinson 2009; Janzen et al. 2012). A study of leaders in immigrant churches of Vancouver found that the experience of migration allowed them to assist others in the process of adapting to life in a new country (Ley 2008). Overall, religious groups can provide a sense of community among immigrants (Couton 2011; Tse 2011) and can support cultural adaptation (Dwyer et al. 2013).

Yet, research has not answered the question of how churches support immigrants vis-à-vis government and non-governmental immigrant service organizations (Janzen et al. 2015). What role do churches play in large cities when other service organizations are present? Does their role differ when other service organizations are not present? We think the organizational ecology framework, with its focus on

other organizations in a church's environment, is particularly useful for under-standing the service provision of churches. We show how churches adapt to other organizations in proximity. While the organizational ecology framework has been applied to churches and to their adaption to increased diversity in their community (e.g., Ammerman 1997; Dougherty and Mulder 2009), we extend its application to show how churches work with other immigrant service providers.

Canadian Immigration

Immigration is vital for Canada's future. About two-thirds of Canada's population growth is accounted for by immigration, a trend which is projected to reach 90 % by 2050 (Simmons and Bourne 2013). A policy shift occurred in the mid-1980's from targeting primarily European countries to a broad range of source countries (Murdie and Ghosh 2010) which has resulted in a great diversity of languages, cultures and religious backgrounds (Bramadat and Seljak 2008, 2009). Immigration supports a growing religious diversity in Canada, even though the process of adaptation may change their religious practices (Connor 2009, 2014; Breton 2012) or their affiliation (Skirbekk et al. 2012). Recent religious affiliation of immigrants to Canada is 59 % Christian, 24 % representing other religions and 17 % unaffiliated with any religion (Connor 2014). As immigration remains central to Canada's future, so too will the need to help immigrants integrate and settle into Canadian society, many of whom are unfamiliar with Canada's official languages or cultural norms.

   The majority of immigrants arrive in the gateway cities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. The concentration of immigrants in urban centers has an extensive effect on Canadian cities (Hiebert 2000; Simmons and Bourne 2013), particularly their ethnic makeup, which varies from region to region. For example, there is a higher concentration of Arab, Caribbean, Latin American, Haitian and West African French-speaking people in Montreal; South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, and Arab in Toronto; and Chinese, South Asian, Filipino, Korean, and Japanese in Vancouver.[1]

   Toronto presents a prime example of a historic immigrant, cosmopolitan, gateway city (Lo 2008). Beyond the immediate municipality, the Greater Golden Horseshoe area (bounded by Orillia in the north, Kitchener-Waterloo and Brantford in the west, Peterborough in the East and St. Catharines-Niagara in the south) encompasses a population of 8,342,000 in 2011 and is projected to increase to 12,246,000 by 2036 (Simmons and Bourne 2013, 29). Since Toronto receives twice as many immigrants as Montreal or Vancouver, the foreign-born proportion of Toronto is expected to increase to 50 % by 2031 (Simmons and Bourne 2013, 30). Successive waves of immigration in the last century have created a hyper-diverse environment with different immigrants experiencing integration within the social

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[1] These data are from the 2006 Canadian census, available at http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/hlt/97/62/pages/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=CMA&Code=01&Table=1&Data=Count&StartRec=1&Sort=2&Display=Page.

context of the city in very different ways, not all of which is positive (Lo 2008; Murdie and Ghosh 2010).

Similarly, Vancouver and the Georgia Basin megaregion are anticipated to have 54.4 % growth from 3,107,000 in 2011 to 4,798,000 in 2036 (Simmons and Bourne 2013). The foreign born population is expected to increase to 45 % of residents during that same time frame (Simmons and Bourne 2013). The immigrant growth of Toronto and Vancouver megaregions are expected to drive 85 % of their growth. In line with the general overview of Canadian immigration and Toronto's cultural complexity, the Vancouver area likewise is home to a diverse group of immigrants and their religious organizations, including Christian churches (Ley 2008; Dwyer et al. 2013).

While Montreal's central metropolitan area was larger than Toronto in 1971, it has generally had a lower growth rate than the national average (Simmons and Bourne 2013). The surrounding megaregion, with a population of 7,895,000 in 2011, is projected to reach 9,323,000 in 2036 (Simmons and Bourne 2013). While there are some contemporary tensions arising from Quebec policies regarding the relationship between state and religion which can impact some immigrants with religious commitments and faith-based organizations which assist them (Mooney 2013), it remains one of the "big three" destinations for immigrants in Canada. The foreign born population is estimated to rise to 30 % of the total population by 2031 (Simmons and Bourne 2013).

In recent decades immigration to Canada has been an urban phenomena, as two-thirds of all immigrants to Canada settle in one of these big three cities, and most of the rest (27.5 %) settle in smaller metropolitan areas (Trovato 2015) such as Halifax. Unlike Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, the Halifax megaregion has grown by only 3.79 % (less than the national growth rate) as it has struggled to attract as high a proportion of immigrants (Simmons and Bourne 2013). In 2010 the Atlantic provinces represented about 6.9 % of the total population of Canada but were only selected by 2.8 % of immigrants as their destination (Akbari 2013). Halifax is a major regional center for the province of Nova Scotia and has attempted to attract and retain new immigrants (Coutinho 2006), as have other smaller Atlantic regional cities such as Moncton (Belkhodja 2006; Good 2014). The Halifax megaregion is expected to grow from 498,000 in 2011 to 610,000 in 2036 at a similar rate to national growth (Simmons and Bourne 2013). By 2031, just over 10 % of the total population is projected to be foreign born so "the local economy and the base of established institutions and receptive immigrant communities, are all relatively limited" (Simmons and Bourne 2013, 26).

Smaller centers have a lower percentage of immigrants and typically fewer immigrant supports, although this trend is beginning to change as smaller municipalities intentionally work to recruit and retain immigrants and to develop local settlement supports (CIC 2013). For this reason, we wanted to examine the role of churches in smaller settings, including Moncton (regional population of roughly 140,000) and Shediac (a coastal town of 6000) in the Maritime province of New Brunswick.

In these cities immigrants are supported by organizations which receive funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to provide a variety of settlement

services, including orientation information, language training, employment supports, and making community connections (CIC 2015). In addition, communities may also have other organizations or groups (including churches and other faith-based organizations) that provide settlement services without CIC funding. According to the CIC government website[2] the federal government estimates it will spend just over one billion dollars on immigrant settlement and integration services in 2014–2015. The numbers of organizations receiving government funding to provide immigrant settlement services in the cities in our study are shown in Table 1.

Thus, our data from these locales allow us to see how churches adapt to various concentrations of organizations who also service immigrants.[3]

Theoretical Framework

Organizational ecology[4] is a theoretical framework drawn from animal and plant ecology, which focuses on the environmental factors surrounding an organization. These factors include competition from similar organizations, the "niche" that the organization targets, and the "fitness" of the organization to draw its needed resources (volunteers, customers, finances) from its environment. This framework has been applied to voluntary organizations (e.g., McPherson 1983) and to religious organizations like congregations in the religious ecologies literature (Ammerman 1997; Eiesland and Warner 1998). This literature focuses on the interdependence between religious institutions, congregations and other institutions, and the broader community around the congregation (Cimino et al. 2013). In this study, we apply organizational ecology's central notion of the organizational niche to illuminate the ways in which congregations serve the needs of immigrants. An organization's niche is that segment of the population from which it draws its resources, and organizational fitness refers to its "ability to thrive in the face of given competition" for these resources (Hannan et al. 2003, 323).

Organizations vary in how broad an audience they seek to attract. Some organizations are specialists, targeting a narrow or specific niche. Other organizations are generalists, seeking wide niches (Carroll 1985). While wide niches make it possible for an organization to attract a broader audience and resource base, wide niches of generalist organizations have at least two drawbacks. First, generic products, services or programs do not fully satisfy anyone, making it difficult for the organization to draw people in and secure their loyalty. For example, churches that seek to attract immigrants from all countries of origin may find that they cannot provide a worship style that pleases everyone. As a result, they may lose some

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[2] (http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/map/services.asp).

[3] Unfortunately, we have no data on the numbers of organizations in each city/town that provide service to immigrants without CIC funding.

[4] Note that organizational ecology framework and the terms (e.g., niche, competition, organizations, etc.) are not terms used by the churches to describe themselves. While we find the framework helpful to understanding immigrant support, we are not suggesting that churches do or should orient themselves according to this framework.

Table 1 Number of organizations in each location receiving government settlement funding Source: (http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/map/services.asp)	City/town	Number of organizations
	Toronto	156
	Montreal	53
	Vancouver	42
	Halifax	4
	Moncton	2
	Shediac	0

adherents. The second drawback is that wide niches are more likely to overlap with competing organizations (Hannan and Freeman 1977). A church that seeks to attract all Asian immigrants will find competition from a Korean church and Chinese church in geographic proximity, whereas a church service targeted specifically to Japanese immigrants may find no local competition. For this reason, organizations with narrow niches tend to have better fitness, provided the environment is fairly stable and the target audience is of sufficient size (Hannan and Freeman 1977; Scheitle 2007). As neighborhoods around congregations become increasingly diverse, churches that seek to be "neighborhood" churches—that is, they desire to be open to or attractive to all people in a geographic area—may put themselves at a disadvantage with such a broad niche (Cimino 2013).

Congregations attract a certain niche based on multiple dimensions (Scheitle 2007). Since adherents develop fairly stable desires for certain types of religious goods over time (beliefs, rituals, etc.), churches tend to attract a fairly narrow niche who seek a certain denomination or liturgical style. Churches also attract a certain demographic (Scheitle 2007) so they tend toward internal homogeneity (Popielarz and McPherson 1995). For similar reasons, there are several factors that encourage specialization in immigrant services:

1. Religious—immigrants come with diverse religious preferences, including denomination, worship style, beliefs, etc.
2. Culture and language—some immigrants prefer cultural and linguistic familiarity, or because of language limitations, seek services in their native language.
3. Geography—for some churches, their services target their immediate neighborhood, or a more specific niche within their neighborhood. With at least 25,000 Christian congregations in Canada (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015), they are fairly ubiquitous, and this allows them to meet localized needs. Some immigrants are not as mobile (lacking money for travel, a car and/or a driver's license) so they look for services offered in close proximity to where they live which in turn can shape a congregation's niche.
4. Networks—In contrast to churches with a geographic niche, some churches service far-reaching networks. Healy's (2005) research shows that many congregations are organized around networks and less around geography. For this reason, similar churches can be in the same geographic space but serve different networks or niches.

5. Needs—economic class immigrants need different types of services than do refugees. Churches may not be able to meet diverse needs equally well.

The result is that there are many different intersecting identities and constraints which attract people to very specific sets of religious activities that will meet their specific needs. These multiple factors make it difficult to meet a broad array of needs for diverse immigrant populations.

Finally, an organization's fitness improves if it successfully changes products to a niche with less competition and a higher demand for their services (Baum and Singh 1996). Where demand is high, organizations will "crowd" around a niche to meet the demand, increasing competition. For example, a charismatic/Pentecostal church may enjoy initial growth in an area served mainly by liturgical churches, but soon other charismatic/Pentecostal churches will move in to meet the demand. For this reason, some organizations will intentionally or unintentionally adjust their niche to lessen competition. A church may broaden its niche by doing service projects in an immigrant community or offering a service in their (foreign) language, thus attracting new affiliates. However, targeting a different niche is risky (Hannan and Freeman 1984) due to costs associated with change, or because change can alienate current affiliates.

The risk associated with servicing immigrants varies. Churches are resourced largely through the donations of time and money from its volunteer members. In some (minority) churches, immigrants are their niche, thus serving and gaining the loyalty of immigrants is key to their survival. For other (mostly white) churches, immigrant support is less important for niche loyalty, and the costs or benefits associated with it have less effect on their survival. That is, the non-immigrant majority will still give financially and volunteer whether or not immigrants are supported. This is partly because servicing community needs is not central to most churches (even though many church practitioners may wish it was), nor is it central to maintaining their niche. Baggett (2002) states that "congregations are not, first and foremost, social service organizations. Most congregations say they exist primarily to promote the spiritual well-being of their members through worship…followed by fellowship…" (430; see also Chaves 2004). The primary niche of most churches, then, are the people in the pews in their main worship events. Of course, the importance of servicing immigrants to a congregation's fitness depends on whether congregants are drawn to the church because of its immigrant services, and whether immigrants (eventually) support the church.

Since churches have limited resources, we expect their immigrant service to require minimal additional (financial) cost for most non-ethnic churches, and do little to disrupt the loyalty of their (white/non-immigrant) resource niche. For example, many churches are already involved in providing short-term social services like food, clothing, and shelter to poor and vulnerable populations (Chaves et al. 2009), so supporting refugees and immigrants with such needs widens their niche without much additional cost or risk. In addition, we expect to find that churches do more where few other organizations (government funded or otherwise) exist. Cadge et al. (2013) studied immigrant reception in two smaller US cities, and found that in the city with less money for government services, the churches did more.

While the organizational ecologies literature focuses on an organization's need to adapt to their environment to survive, the religious ecologies literature also notes the agency of the organization in its survival, where churches act back on their environment and bring change to communities for good or ill (Eiesland and Warner 1998; Levitt 2007).[5] And while organizations compete, at least implicitly, with other organizations in their niche, fitness can be improved through cooperation and partnering (Ammerman 1997; Cimino, Mian and Huang 2012). As churches adapt to an increasing number of immigrants in their communities, information and resource sharing are common, and necessary for fitness (Mian 2013; McRoberts 2003). Galaskiewicz, Bielefeld and Dowell (2006) found that networking improved the fitness of donative organizations, and others have found improved fitness and survival through network ties (e.g., Podolny and Page 1998).

Methods

The overall study used mixed-methods conducted in parallel (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003). Three national methods (literature review, key informant interviews, denominational survey) provided breadth of insight and were triangulated with two local methods (focus groups and case studies) that provided context-specific insights. In this paper, we report on the focus group and case study findings of the four sites: Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, and Maritimes (Halifax, Moncton and Shediac).

Focus group interviews were held in each site. Focus groups are an efficient means to collect in-depth data from a number of respondents at one time. They also serve to enhance the quality of data by encouraging participant views to build on each other (Creswell 2007) and are particularly useful when trying to build shared meaning around a community narrative (Mankowski and Thomas 2000). Focus groups consisted mostly of church leaders (both congregational clergy and lay leaders), and included NGO and GO representatives as well (Vancouver = 6 total participants; Toronto = 20 total participants; Montreal = 4 total participants; Shediac = 6 total participants; Moncton = 4 total participants; Halifax = 8 total participants). In addition, 20 individual face-to-face interviews with church leaders and other immigrant service providers supplemented the focus group data.[6] Participants were asked about what their churches were presently doing in supporting immigrant settlement and integration, what they could do in the future, and promising practices. Local congregational leaders active in immigrant ministry

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[5] Religious ecologies are also "multi-layered,","in that the interconnection between a congregation and its environment occurs at the level of the demography of people, other organizations, and culture (Eiesland and Stephen Warner 1998:41–42). Here we focus primarily on a church's interaction with other organizations that also serve immigrants.

[6] Individual face-to-face interviews were added since some church leaders were not able to attend group interviews. These interviews were important because they reinforced the themes from the group interviews. For example, the theme of cooperation was not simply because of the presence of other service providers in the group interviews. Cooperation was emphasized in our one-on-one interviews as well. The content or emphases in the individual interviews closely matched that of the group interviews.

were purposively sampled for diversity in denominational affiliation, immigrant/
non-immigrant status, gender, age, and congregation size. Members of the research
team facilitated interviews. Interviews were audio recorded with researchers also
taking written notes.

At least one case study was held in selected sites (Vancouver = 2; Toronto = 2;
Moncton = 1; Halifax = 2). Case studies used maximal sampling to provide
intensity-rich information (Creswell 2007) about congregations showing promising
practices in how immigrants could be supported in their settlement and integration.
Cases were constructed through the triangulating of individual interviews,
participant observation and document review using a narrative format to illuminate
vision, structures, and processes over time (Janzen 2011; Patton 2002).

Nationally, case studies were sampled to ensure diversity in congregation size,
composition (ethno-specific versus multicultural), type of denominational affilia-
tion, and strength of denominational affiliation. Individual research participants
were those who were active with church activities and were purposively sampled for
individual or group interviews to ensure diversity in gender, immigrant status
(Canadian-born or immigrant), and church affiliation.

A two-staged analysis process began with individual-method analysis prior to
cross-method triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Within both stages, the
systems-change categories of vision, structure and process were inductively
analyzed using content analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994), considering such
contextual factors as denominational affiliation and community size (listed in order
of size: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Halifax, Moncton and Shediac).

Findings

In this section we show how three major themes from our interview data—response
to need, cooperation, and benefits to churches—are illuminated by organizational
ecology. Interviewees referenced these three themes repeatedly across all the sites.
We then show how differential availability of services from surrounding organi-
zations directs churches to target specific niches. The exact services provided by
churches in our study varied based on the contextual and competitive environment,
as we note below.

Response to Need

First, church support for immigrants tends to be ad hoc, contextual and malleable.
Churches in our sample largely started working with immigrants in response to the
needs they encountered in their communities; that is, the churches react to external
forces, in keeping with organizational ecology. One east coast church leader
explains, "[T]he church began working with immigrants because they began
attending." In Vancouver, one church was active in offering political sanctuary to
one of its immigrant members even though they did not fully understand the
implications of doing so until months later. While this needs-based approach has the
advantage of adaptability to changing circumstances, it has the disadvantage of

instability, in that service provision is often driven by a small group of passionate volunteers. However, many of the churches represented had moved from reacting to needs in the community to proactively discovering and addressing newcomer needs. If churches are intentional about servicing immigrants, many of their regular activities can meet immigrant needs (e.g., regular church services, small group meetings, gathering in members' homes, practical services for children, youth and seniors, making space available for meetings). One Presbyterian focus group member explains,

> I think if you can integrate them into the church life or community then it's easier. Then we could offer a wide range of programs for the whole family based on their needs like employment, work with young people like high school issues like teenagers, marriage problems, if they have addiction issues you know there's a bunch of resources that we have that we can handle if we get to know them better and if they can be integrated into the community and the life of the church then there is a lot more benefits for them.

Second, our data show that churches tend to meet short-term needs. The informal nature of churches, with their lack of structure, volunteer base, and localism allow them to be easily deployed. Short-term needs are tangible and visible, thus volunteers are easy to mobilize around them. They tend to meet smaller-scale, local needs that dovetail well with current services. In Toronto, the five focus group interviews found that the most common reason for helping immigrants was in response to a need. People and churches did not necessarily set out with the objective of helping newcomers settle and integrate. This was often a result of changes in the communities in which the churches operated and in which their participants live. While there were a large number of needs mentioned, three that stand out are language training, physical and relational needs, and cultural navigation.

Our data suggests a widespread response to the needs of immigrants to learn Canada's official languages. Churches in all four sites offered language training. Some had regular formal classes while some had informal conversation and some were based on reading the bible together. Physical assistance included setting up house in Canada and assistance with the immigration process. Churches are quick to provide food, furniture, clothing, transportation, health care, housing and job-finding support. Churches are also adept at meeting relational needs, something that they are naturally inclined to do as organizations that emphasize fellowship and community. The role of friendship and personal relationships came up repeatedly. In Vancouver, focus group respondents agreed that church-sponsored refugees received better support than government-sponsored refugees because of the community of support offered by churches. In Montreal, respondents emphasized the importance of eating together and meeting in member's homes. In Toronto one church uses Facebook to maintain relationships with new immigrants. One Korean participant explained, "most of our work with immigrants and refugees is trying to connect with people personally rather than formal programs and we've had some success developing friendships and that's been a lot of fun." Closely related to relational support is help for cultural navigation. This included services to explain

Canadian holidays, pairing immigrants with established Canadian families, and events to help the people already in the church better relate to immigrants (e.g., exposure to immigrants' traditional dress and food, events to encourage friendships). Individual relationships also contribute to cultural navigation in areas as diverse as cell phone plans in Canada and navigating public transit. A Filipina migrant worker in Shediac, New Brunswick said, "Actually the first thing the church can do especially for us is to let us feel like we are also part of the community or family—to be at home." A Toronto church leader said:

> Another group in Toronto that has just started their own ESL Café...And they ended up having people coming to their home for meals and just develop relationships. But again, its just people saying, "Hey, I want to connect so how do we help network?"

Participants talked regularly of developing long term relationships, of eating together, and of visiting in each other's homes.

Some larger churches with a longer history of meeting immigrant needs were able to provide longer-term support like legal or educational services,[7] but these were relatively rare. Instead, churches tend to provide local, high demand, low cost services that can easily be met by volunteers (like ESL and relational support) and that overlap current services (like food distribution). In this way, churches with few resources meet their mandate to serve their communities and broaden their niche with low risk. Our interviews strengthened this perception. In Vancouver, the focus group emphasized that support for immigrants by churches is "needs-based," and they do not have the structure or resources for long term support. This needs-based focus is evident in our interview with a pastor of an African church in the Maritimes, who stated that his church prefers to meet needs as they come up rather than create longer-term programs or structures: "I don't believe so much in programs. I believe that [if] there's a need we will meet [it]..." Immigrant support organizations, however, are able to focus more on long term supports (like housing, education, employment training, etc.), but are unable to meet all the local needs. Thus the churches and non-church organizations tend to meet different needs, and churches meet needs that are beyond the reach of other organizations. Also in Vancouver, we see the birthing of immigrant serving organizations that grew out of churches like Kinbrace House, an organization working with refugees that was initially started by a local Baptist Church. Church lay persons started organizations and developed expertise in the field, ultimately providing training for immigrant care in the churches. In one east coast location they were no longer providing ESL because their program was no longer needed. In their view, this was because of ESL programs offered by a local government-supported organization. Such flexibility allows churches to provide a service or end it as the market for the service dries up, or as other organizations "crowd" a niche to meet demand.

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[7] For example, some large churches in Toronto are able to combine both needs based and long-term support services. One Toronto church started a welcome centre that, in addition to providing a casual space to meet, includes an office for use by a settlement worker from outside the church.

Cooperation

One of the distinctive aspects of our data was the widespread use of partnerships to meet immigrant needs of all kinds. Examples abound. In the east coast, a Roman Catholic, Baptist, Anglican, United, a Gospel Hall and an independent Pentecostal church cooperated to support migrant workers. In Toronto a very large, conservative, suburban, Cantonese speaking congregation partnered with a small, charismatic, urban, Mandarin speaking congregation. Churches partnered with other churches or service organizations like the YMCA, to meet needs as diverse as raising money to providing theological training. In Vancouver and the Maritimes, many of the church, GO and NGO leaders we interviewed knew each other before the group interview, and greeted each other by name as they entered. One Vancouver respondent expressed her gratitude for being able to refer refugee claimants to the organization of another focus group participant. She referred to this as a "warm hand-off" as she is confident of the quality service the refugees will receive there. In Toronto, seventeen of twenty focus group participants mentioned partnerships, which were based on pre-existing linkages (like denominational networks) or necessity (like relationships with GOs or NGOs that could provide services that they could not, like legal or employment services). Moreover, most focus group participants were partnering with groups not present at the group interviews. In Vancouver, a range of Protestant denominations and Roman Catholics cooperated in providing immigrant services, especially when the organization was unable to meet the needs itself.

Of course, organizational ecology focuses on competition between organizations, as they seek to maximize their market and fitness. How does this ubiquitous emphasis on partnerships and cooperation fit this model? First, in spite of cooperation, there is an implicit competition. That is, organizations with overlapping niches compete for limited resources (affiliates, volunteers, future converts, etc.) in their environment even if they are not aware of it. Qualitative researchers in the U.S. have noticed both the spirit of cooperation and the implicit competition between congregations (for affiliates and their resources), even within the same denomination (Becker 1999; Lawson 1999; Eiesland 2000; Chaves and Giesel 2001). Although congregations cooperate together and emphasize a "no strings attached" altruism, a degree of competition is present. Implicit competition, as presented by organizational ecology, can co-exist with a spirit of cooperation.

In Canada, implicit competition between Christian churches may be increased by the overall decline in adherents (Bibby 2011). Immigrants are more institutionally religious than their Canadian-born counterparts, and can provide churches with new adherents, should they be able to attract them. Furthermore, current attendees can be energized by service to groups like immigrants, and involvement in service can increase organizational commitment and legitimacy. Our interviews with denominational leaders show that many have strategies to integrate new immigrants, and immigrant congregations, into their denominational fold (Janzen et al. in press). In other words, churches have shrinking niches, immigrants can expand them, and denominations want them in their churches. All of this points to implicit competition, at least for congregations in close proximity with similar niches.

In some large cities, however, some churches are very aware of their competition within their environment. One Toronto-based participant explains,

> we have to decide about what we were going to be because there are nine full-time professional language schools in two blocks of where we are so we thought, "Well we can't compete with them, we don't have that." So what we do have is small classroom size and so [participant name] has been very helpful in keeping us on track and driving the vision of like, "What are we about in comparison to someone else?"

This same participant also noted the implicit competition with other churches and yet a cooperative spirit moved them to avoid explicit competition when it became evident.

> We started our class on a Wednesday night after offering to help another church that was literally across the road from us who was doing the exact same thing on the exact same night. They took a break for the summer and came back and started their class on Wednesday night and then they said, "You change your class to another night so you don't steal any of our students."… We did switch our night just so they know that our character is more important than our numbers and we'll never compete with another church. It doesn't make any sense.

Yet, this competition is ameliorated by several factors. We already noted how cooperation and networking can improve fitness, particularly in donative organizations. In addition, churches have qualities that encourage cooperation. Partnering is common because of an ethic of non-competition holds sway among many churches. Due to limited resources, churches cannot meet all needs, and affiliates are more likely to be satisfied and stay in the church if those needs are met, even if through an outside organization. One large Toronto church developed a welcome center with this goal in mind. They explain,

> the Welcome Centre is the partnership with five agencies helping newcomers. The five agencies, they have their own core program so they bring their own core program in one Welcome Centre so the five agencies work together in one Welcome Centre so the clients, they don't know which agency first can serve this client. They only know one Welcome Centre and this is a one-stop services for all newcomers.

Finally, transnational networks associated with globalization mitigate competition by providing diverse pipelines for recruiting new immigrants to a church (see Wilkinson 2009).

Benefits to Churches

The work that goes into meeting needs and developing partnerships could appear non-beneficial if using only a monetary calculus. However, when understood from the perspective of the self-identity and objectives of churches the benefit becomes apparent. In Toronto, when focus group participants from minority churches were

asked about helping immigrants they were initially puzzled. As churches of immigrants it was second nature to meet the needs of new immigrants. They had experienced immigration themselves and had always been a resource for new people to Canada. Non-immigrant churches often mentioned scriptural mandates to serve the poor and the stranger. One self-identified Canadian explains, "Well even in terms of immigrants and refugees, the most literal and explicit reading of Scripture shows an extraordinary care for those people so I think even just an honesty and frankness with the Word of God and the commission of the church." In this way churches received benefit because they experienced serving immigrants as a tangible expression of their mission. In keeping with their mission, interviews talked about a "no strings attached" approach. They offer services to Christians and non-Christian immigrants alike, and regardless of whether they join the church or not.

However, immigrants also provided very practical services. For example, on the east coast Filipino immigrants provided musical ability that a Baptist church was lacking. In Montreal, a leader of a large multi-ethnic church said that once immigrants become settled, they take a more active role in the church and often reciprocate the help that was given to them: "Most of the people that we helped, 80 % of them will say 'the same way you helped me, I will help others because of what I received when I had nothing, and you gave me something'." A leader of a Latino Baptist church noted that immigrants were key to his church's vitality and growth. Other study participants discussed friendships or their improved cultural competency that resulted from engaging immigrants. In Vancouver a participant spoke about "walking alongside" new immigrants and refugees in long-term friendships. In sum, immigrants can improve organizational fitness in a Canadian environment where new Canadian-born affiliates are difficult to attract.

Overall, support for immigrants provided by non-immigrant churches do not indicate a niche move, that is, a move to provide services or products to a different niche market. Such a move would require changes in the way they deliver their primary "products"—worship and religious education. While examples of Canadian churches who underwent transformative organizational change when embracing new immigrant ministry have been found (see Janzen 2011), in our study we found few churches that talked about changing the language, worship style, or leadership in their primary worship services to fit a new immigrant niche. Instead, minor changes were made, like including simultaneous translation headsets in the (English only) services, or having an occasional multicultural service, or expanding offerings to pre-existing services (like providing space for immigrants to meet, or offering different kinds of food to immigrants in a church that already has a food pantry).

Contextual Differences

First, the services provided by churches in our study varied based on both the "crowding" of organizations serving immigrants in a locale, and by the size of the church. The proximity of government-funded organizations are important, as are nearby congregations also serving immigrants. Larger organizations supported with government funds tend to have wide niches, attending to the diverse needs of

diverse immigrants. Where government-funded organizations are non-existent in small centers like Shediac, churches provide more services, filling broader niches. Specific niche products, like worship services in Mandarin or Filipino, are not available. In Shediac, churches struggled to provide basic services of food, clothing, housing, and transportation to the migrant workers, but the need was much greater than what the small churches could handle. "I wish we could do more," said one focus group participant. They work together across denominational lines to provide legal and health services, which is rare for small churches in the other locations. There was no talk of competition among them. In contrast, Toronto has many established organizations meeting immigrant needs. Although rare, we heard some concern about overlapping services and the need to work together more (as in the quote above). One Toronto focus group respondent said: "I wish that the church could work together on how to help newcomers because I work in one agency...There are so many agencies helping immigrants right now [with similar services]." In Vancouver, churches and immigrant aid organizations are unaware of services offered by other organizations. In the Vancouver focus group there was also a concern expressed for more cooperation. One focus group participant in Vancouver suggested "twinning churches" where a more established church would partner with a new immigrant church and work alongside the church offering assistance where needed.

Since diversified immigration is a smaller and more recent phenomenon in the Maritime sites there are fewer service providers. The result is that churches have wider niches (i.e., more diverse services) since niche overlap is less common while competition is lower and specialized religious products are not available. Cooperation across churches and service providers is also more common. However, in larger urban centers like Toronto and Vancouver where government-funded organizations are active, and there is a longer history and higher percentage of immigrants, our research shows that congregations tend toward narrow niches. In Vancouver and Toronto, for example, some congregations focus primarily on English as a Second Language programs and do so without any links to other organizations or congregations. In Toronto one church focuses narrowly on Mandarin speaking Chinese refugees.

Churches can avoid competition with larger organizations, thus improving their fitness. The wide niches and broad services of some agencies can miss less common or more hidden needs. Churches will fill such needs as they become aware of them. Churches specialize in different products than government-funded agencies, such as meeting spiritual needs and providing community support. As we learned from immigrant interviews, the relational support offered by churches to lonely, newly arrived immigrants is important. Finally, churches tend to be small with limited volunteer time and money. The typical Christian church in Canada and the U.S. averages 75 attendees each week (Chaves 2004; Posterski and Barker 1993; Reimer and Wilkinson 2015), including children and occasional attendees. While there are some very large churches with considerable resources, the typical church must focus its limited resources. Overall, then, Christian churches tend to be specialists when it comes to immigrant services.

Second, a congregation's niche width is related to the characteristics of the congregation. Large churches are more likely to be generalists, because they have more resources (money, staff, volunteers) that can service more diverse markets. Large churches tend to be in those cities where there is the necessary population to sustain them. Small towns have both fewer government services and also tend to have smaller churches. Thus, the churches carry more of the burden, where the demand is high and the competition is low. Ethno-specific churches are more likely to target an ethno-specific niche, matching their language or country/region of origin (Ley 2008). Non-minority churches are more likely to attract immigrants from within their communities as they become aware of their needs.

Conclusion

The self-identity of churches as communities that serve the marginalized encourages and enables their effective response to the changing context of Canadian immigration. Churches in different parts of the country and of different sizes responded to specific contextual needs and thus fill narrow niches that are left unmet by other organizations in their environment. Their willingness to respond ad hoc to needs, cooperate with other organizations for information and service provision, and focus their services to specific niches, provide them with the fitness they need to compete with other service providers.

Since most churches serve a (Canadian born) niche before they began serving immigrant populations, they tend to provide support that 1) does not disrupt services to their primary niche and 2) offers immigrant services with minimal cost. As Dougherty and Mulder (2009) and Ammerman (1997) found in the U.S., churches rarely attempt radical change, like changing the language of their primary worship service, or replacing current staff with immigrant staff. Such changes are risky because they may lose their current membership niche. Instead, they will add to existing outreach, and meet short-term needs. ESL programs can be added with a few volunteers, and food distribution to immigrants may dovetail well with pre-existing services, like a soup kitchen.

Immigrant settlement and integration is a priority to the Canadian government as a means to boost the economy and manage declining populations. Churches play a significant, and often hidden, role in servicing immigrants. This research has added to our understanding of churches and immigrant service provision in Canada, where very little research exists. Specifically, we applied the organizational ecology framework to show how churches adapt to their environment, including the presence of government and non-governmental organizations. In larger urban centres where there are many organization serving immigrant needs, churches normally serve a narrow niche to avoid competition. In smaller towns with few services available, churches serve a broader niche with a boarder spectrum of needs since they face little competition. They also show higher levels of cooperation.

One focus group participant who worked for a government agency noted that as churches decline (in terms of members and resources), they are unable to do as much for immigrants as they once did, particularly in the area of sponsoring

refugees. If this is the case, the government may need to provide greater support to their agencies to maintain a similar level of care (Bramadat 2014). Yet, churches in our study show that they can creatively adapt to contextual factors to maximize their limited resources in immigrant settlement and integration.

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