The challenge of defining a national urban strategy in the context of divergent demographic trends in small and large Canadian cities

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Abstract: Once forgotten as an object of research, a growing literature dealing with various aspects of small cities has emerged since the new millennium. The answer to the question "does size matter?" has so far received positive empirical support on both sides of the Atlantic. Using the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) three quality of life studies as backdrop, this paper offers further evidence that small Canadian cities are worth our attention. Since 1999, FCM has extrapolated results from its series of quality of life studies carried out on a sample of large and medium sized cities to monitor key changes in the quality of life of Canadian urban residents. Conclusions drawn from these studies have been used to define a common Canadian municipal agenda which identifies air pollution, public transportation, affordable housing, homelessness, social inclusion and integration, and community safety and security as some of Canada's key urban policy priorities. Following the evolution of a number of key demographic indicators in larger and smaller Canadian cities between 1996 and 2006, this research questions whether the municipal agenda derived from FCM's quality of life studies offers a fair and just reflection of the reality and of the public policy priorities of smaller urban municipalities.

Keywords: Small cities, quality of life, city size, municipal agenda, demographic trends, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

1.0 Introduction

At the core of this paper is a variant of an age old problem to which geographers and social scientists should be very sensitive, and that is the ecological fallacy problem. Ecological fallacy is generally defined as the problem of using general observations gathered from the study of a particular population, and projecting these generalizations to the level of individuals within that same population (Johnston 1986). An example would be to infer that because a particular individual lives in a neighbourhood afflicted by a high rate of drug addiction, he or she is likely to be a drug addict. In that context, people living in the neighbourhood become automatically guilty by association.

It is maintained that a variant of this fundamental inference problem characterizes the process used for more than a decade to guide the drafting of some of Canada's current urban strategy priorities. This paper looks at how research done by the Canadian Federation of Municipalities (FCM) on the quality of life of large and medium Canadian cities has been used to infer the condition of all Canadian municipalities, whether they be large, medium, small, or very small. Results from four sets of such quality of life studies have provided the building blocks from which was established what can be considered the Canadian national municipal agenda. However, considering that the intensity of the problems linked to social, economic, environmental and political pressures caused by urban density, urban sprawl, counter-urbanization, and the distribution of scarce public and social resources are very much scale dependent, and considering also that demographic trends in large, medium, small and very small communities are to a large

extent dissimilar, some doubts are raised as to relevance of the national municipal agenda promoted by FCM for all Canadian cities, and especially for small cities.

This paper begins with the definition of the research problem. It focuses primarily on a review of FCM's contribution in setting the Canadian national municipal agenda and questions how this agenda can be considered representative of the priorities of small cities on methodological grounds. This is followed by an analytical discussion about the importance and relevance of paying more attention to the study of small cities. This discussion is informed by an examination of the differences that exist in Canada among large, small and rural and northern communities. A review of a few key demographic trends between the 1996 and 2006 census years is then undertaken. It highlights the contrasting structures and divergent futures of larger and smaller Canadian cities and municipalities. The paper concludes with a speculative exercise by briefly theorizing on what a small city municipal agenda might look like if small cities had an advocate on the national scene.

2.0 The research problem

2.1 The Federation of Canadian Municipalities

The national voice of municipal government in Canada is the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). Founded in 1901 to serve municipal officials from coast-to-coast-to-coast, it is a professional association formed to advocate on behalf of all municipalities. It represents the interests of over 1,600 member municipalities and 86 per cent of the Canadian population scattered in every province and territory (FCM 2007a). Municipalities represented range from the largest metropolitan area to the very small town, and regardless of whether they are northern, rural or urban communities. An important aspect of FCM's mandate is to lobby the federal government to ensure that municipal governments remain vital partners in public-policy debates in the country. The overall objectives are to give municipal governments a stronger voice and to influence policy making of national importance. FCM' public policy lobby activity is guided by the work of 9 standing committees, each concentrating on specific sectors of intervention such as increasing women's participation in municipal government; community safety and crime prevention; environmental issues and sustainable government; international relations; municipal finance and intergovernmental arrangements; municipal infrastructure and transportation policy; northern issues; rural issues; and social economic development (ibid).

2.2 The Quality of Life Reporting System

In order to help the association follow the evolution of key factors that may affect the well being of Canadian municipalities, and also to allow it to assess the relevance of public policies in light of transformations that may be occurring in many of the 9 aforementioned sectors of intervention, FCM has been busy developing and fine tuning since the mid 1990s a very sophisticated Quality of Life Reporting System (QOLRS). This initiative "was born out of a desire [by members of FCM's Big City Mayors Caucus] to bring a community based perspective to the development of public policy and to monitor the consequences of changing demographics, as well as shifting responsibilities and fiscal arrangements" (FCM 1999, p.i). In its 2007 Policy Development Book, FCM introduces it as follows:

> The FCM Quality of Life Reporting System has given municipal governments a powerful tool to engage in public policy debates. It allows FCM to monitor trends

> in the social, economic and environmental condition of our communities. The system also assists in municipal planning and serves as an important tool for community organizations, research institutes and other orders of government (FCM 2007b, p.61).

The QOLRS is a set of quantitative measures and indicators taken from various national and municipal sources that are designed to monitor and report on the evolution of the quality of life in Canadian municipalities. Trends on 11 key quality of life domains are followed. These domains are indexed by 72 indicators which together are comprised of hundreds of variables (Table 1). The framework used by FCM to evaluate urban quality of life, is "based on the understanding that quality of life is enhanced and reinforced in municipalities that do the following:

- develop and maintain a vibrant local economy;
- protect and enhance the natural and built environment;
- offer opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes and aspirations;
- promote a fair and equitable sharing of common resources;
- enable residents to meet their basic needs;
- Support rich social interaction and the inclusion of all residents in community life." (FCM 2008, p.32).

Three pan-Canadian studies have so far been completed (1999, 2001 and 2004) with a fourth one currently under way[1]. The inclusion of cities into the QOLRS is done on a voluntary basis. To join, cities must agree to support the administration of the project's budget, commit professional expertise and be part of FCM's technical Quality of Life research team. The sample of cities included in each set of reports can better be described as a mix-bag of communities including Canada's largest cities and some of their surrounding suburban communities, as well as medium sized cities and regional municipalities (Table 2). The sample has varied somewhat between reports, with some municipalities leaving the reporting system while new ones are introduced. It has grown from 16 communities in 1999, to 18 in 2001, 20 in 2004 and 22 in 2008, each time representing an increasing proportion of the Canadian population. Over the years, the minimum community population threshold covered by the QOLRS has also varied, and has ranged from a maximum of 179,000 in 1999 to a minimum of 114,195 in 2004.

2.3 The Canadian municipal agenda

Results from these 4 QOLRS sets of studies done on samples of cities with populations greater than 100,000 persons provided the principal ingredients used to define the main tenets of what can be called the Canadian municipal agenda. Development and sustainability issues faced by rural (communities with less than 10,000 inhabitants) and northern communities have also contributed to this list of priorities but their influence is somewhat subdued. According to FCM, this agenda draws attention to common issues, common challenges and common problems faced by most Canadian urban residents. Over time this agenda has identified the following issues as some of Canada's key urban priorities: the infrastructure deficit; air pollution and climate change; public transportation; affordable housing; homelessness; immigrant settlement and integration; community safety and security; and rural and northern development issues (FCM 2007c). Since

[1] FCM's QOLRS studies and other FCM documents used in this paper are available at www.fcm.ca.

Table 1: Federation of Canadian Municipalities Quality of Life Reporting System domains and indicators

Demographic and Background Information	Affordable, Appropriate Housing	Civic Engagement
Population Growth	30%+ Income on Shelter	Voter Turnout
Household & Family Composition	50%+ Income on Shelter	Women in Municipal Government
Average Income	Core Housing Need	Newspaper Circulation
Renters & Owners	Substandard Units	Volunteering
Population Mobility	Changing Face of Homelessness	Charitable Donations
Foreign Born	Vacancy Rates	
New Immigrant Groups	Rental Housing Starts	
Language Spoken at Home	Monthly Rent	
Visible Minorities		
Aboriginal Population		

Community and Social Infrastructure	Education	Employment
Social Housing Waiting Lists	Education Levels	Unemployment/ Employment Rates
Rent- Geared-to- Income Housing	Literacy Levels	Quality of Employment
Social Assistance Allowance	Adult Learning	Long-Term Unemployment
Subsidized Child Care Spaces	Education Expenditures	Labour Force Replacement
Public Transit Costs	Classroom Size	
Social Service Professionals	Student / Teacher Ratio	
Private Health Care Expenditures	Post- Secondary Tuition	
	Spending on Private Education	

Local Economy	Natural Environment	Personal and Community Health
Business Bankruptcies	Air Quality	Low Birth Weight Babies
Consumer Bankruptcies	Urban Transportation	Teen Births
Hourly Wages	Population Density	Premature Mortality
Change in Family Income	Water Consumption	Work Hours Lost
Building Permits	Wastewater Treatment	Suicides
	Solid Waste	Infant Mortality
	Ecological Footprint	

Personal Financial Security	Personal Safety
Community Affordability	Young Offenders
Families Receiving EI/ Social Assistance	Violent Crimes
Economic Dependency Ratio	Property Crimes
Lone-Parent Families	Injuries and Poisonings
Incidence of Low Income Families	
Children Living in Poverty	
Income Gap	

Source: FCM 2008, p.27.

Table 2: Quality of Life Reporting System member communities

2008 Report[1] *(22 communities)*

Community	Prov.	Population 2006
Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal	QC	3,532,575
City of Toronto	ON	2,503,280
Region of Peel	ON	1,159,405
City of Calgary	AB	988,195
York Region	ON	892,715
City of Ottawa	ON	812,130
City of Edmonton	AB	730,370
Communauté métropolitaine de Québec	QC	711,735
City of Winnipeg	MB	633,455
City of Vancouver	BC	578,045
Region of Durham	ON	561,260
City of Hamilton	ON	504,560
Regional Municipality of Waterloo	ON	478,120
Halton Region	ON	439,255
Regional Municipality of Niagara	ON	427,420
Halifax Regional Municipality	NS	372,860
Ville de Laval	QC	368,710
City of London	ON	352,395
Ville de Gatineau	QC	242,125
City of Saskatoon	SK	202,340
City of Regina	SK	179,245
City of Greater Sudbury	ON	157,910
	Total:	*16,459,395*
	Percent of Canadian population:	*50.5*

2004 Report[2] *(20 communities)*

Community	Prov.	Population 2001
Toronto (City)	ON	2,481,495
Peel (Regional Municipality)	ON	988,945
Calgary (City)	AB	878,870
Ottawa (City)	ON	774,075
York (Regional Municipality)	ON	729,255
Quebec (Metropolitan Community)	QC	674,700
Edmonton (City)	AB	666,105
Winnipeg (City)	MB	619,545
Vancouver (City)	BC	545,670
Hamilton (City)	ON	490,265
Waterloo (Regional Municipality)	ON	438,515
Niagara (Regional Municipality)	ON	410,575
Halton (Regional Municipality)	ON	375,230
Halifax (Regional Municipality)	NS	359,185
London (City)	ON	336,540
Windsor (City)	ON	208,405
Saskatoon (City)	SK	196,810
Regina (City)	SK	178,225
Sudbury (City of Greater)	ON	155,220
Kingston (City)	ON	114,195
	Total:	*11,621,825*
	Percent of Canadian population:	*37.5*

2001 Report[3] *(18 communities)*

Community	Prov.	Population 1998
Toronto (City)	ON	2,509,400
Peel (Regional Municipality)	ON	948,496
Calgary (City)	AB	841,505
Ottawa (City)	ON	757,663
York (Regional Municipality)	ON	663,494
Edmonton (City)	AB	646,466
Winnipeg (City)	MB	627,320
Vancouver (City)	BC	551,831
Hamilton (City)	ON	490,201
Waterloo (Regional Municipality)	ON	432,030
Halton (Regional Municipality)	ON	362,907
Halifax (Regional Municipality)	NS	360,117
London (City)	ON	339,039
Windsor (City)	ON	206,537
Saskatoon (City)	SK	204,116
Burnaby (City)	BC	194,650
Regina (City)	SK	186,617
Sudbury (City of Greater)	ON	165,393
	Total:	*10,487,782*
	Percent of Canadian population:	*34.8*

1999 Report[4] *(16 communities)*

Community	Prov.	Population 1996
Toronto (City)	ON	2,385,420
Peel (Regional Municipality)	ON	852,525
Calgary (City)	AB	768,085
Ottawa-Carleton (Regional Municipality)	ON	721,140
Winnipeg (City)	MB	618,475
Edmonton (City)	AB	616,305
York (Regional Municipality)	ON	592,445
Vancouver (City)	BC	514,010
Hamilton-Whentworth (Regional Municipality)	ON	467,800
Waterloo (Regional Municipality)	ON	405,435
Halifax (Regional Municipality)	NS	342,965
London (City)	ON	325,645
Windsor (City)	ON	197,695
Saskatoon (City)	SK	193,645
Regina (City)	SK	180,400
Burnaby (City)	BC	179,210
	Total:	*9,361,200*
	Percent of Canadian population:	*31.6*

Sources: [1] FCM 2008, p.28; [2] FCM 2005, p.5; [3] FCM 2001, p.16; [4] FCM 1999, p.14.

they were established, these priorities have been at the centre of FCM's political lobby activities and representations in front of the federal government and policy makers. For all their effort municipalities were recently rewarded with commitments from the federal government to invest a $ 5-billion share of the federal gas tax until 2010-2011; a $300 million top-up of the Green Municipal Fund; $800 million in transit funding; $1.6 billion for affordable housing; $2 billion over 5 years for the Canada Infrastructure Fund; and $2 billon over 5 years for the Municipal Rural infrastructure fund (FCM 2006, p.i).

2.4 Small cities and the Canadian municipal agenda

Does the municipal agenda promoted by FCM accurately reflect the range of issues faced by all cities and communities within Canada's urban system? One type of cities that appears to have been forgotten in the process used to help define this agenda, is Canada's small cities, i.e. those that have less than 100,00 inhabitants but which cannot be considered to be either rural or northern communities. From a small-city perspective, the problem with FCM's municipal agenda has less to do with the priorities themselves, and more to do with the sample of cities studied to conclude that the above mentioned issues are Canada's key national urban policy priorities (Table 2). It would be of bad faith to pretend for instance that the environmental, public infrastructure and social priorities on the agenda are not of national importance, and that the response from the government and policy makers is ill advised. Methodologically speaking however, FCM is clearly guilty of extrapolating results from a relatively small sample of large and medium size cities with populations over 100,000 to help influence and shape the nature of Canada's national urban priorities, thus the reference to the ecological fallacy problem mentioned in the introduction. What about the priorities of small cities, i.e. those with populations between 100,000 and 10,000? Is it fair to assume that they experience the same social, economic and environmental challenges faced by their larger and smaller counterparts? Would conclusions drawn from studies focused on monitoring the quality of life in small cities for instance, generate a similar set of urban policy priorities than the studies currently conducted by FCM on larger cities?

3.0 Small cities in Canada: definitions and comparisons

It is clear that as an object of research, small cities are the *parents pauvres* of the urban literature, a neglect qualified as "woeful" by Bell and Jayne (2006a, p.2). On the one hand, small cities do not seem urban enough or large enough to be of interest to theorists tracking the impacts on urban forms of new demographic, economic and cultural trends. On the other hand, they are considered too large by those concerned with the fate of very small communities in the new rural economy. According to Ofori-Amoah (2007a), small cities "have fallen through the cracks … because they are neither too small nor too big to attract attention" (p.5). As an empirical category, small cities belong in that grey area between the large and the very small, extreme categories which still win most of the favours of urban scientists today. Edited books by Ofori-Amoah (2007b), Bell and Jayne (2006b), and Garrett-Petts (2005) are some of the most recent and significant attempts to address this knowledge gap and counter that trend in social sciences.

In the context of this critical review of the process that has influenced the drafting of national urban priorities in Canada, the consequences of not paying attention to small cities are highlighted in Table 3. In this table, communities are divided into 4 groups according to the size of their population. The definition of small cities used in this research is broad and takes into consideration FCM's organizational structure into a) the *Big City Mayors Caucus* (BCMC) – which membership

only includes municipalities larger than 100,000 in population and which through its control of the QOLRS has had an overwhelming influence in setting FCM's urban policy agenda priorities, and b) the *Rural Forum* – which includes "representatives from municipalities with no more than 150 people per square kilometre or a population of fewer than 10,000" (FCM 2007b, p.51). Our definition of a small city fills this empirical gap by considering these upper and lower population thresholds. Small cities are all municipalities between 100,000 and 10,000 people. The only exceptions to this rule are cities between 10,000 and 5,000 that are located within the boundaries of a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). Inclusion of a municipality in a CMA means that "50% or more of the employed labour force that live in a municipality outside a large urban area, work in the large urban area" (McNiven et al. 2000, p.4). There are also many instances of very small cities in the 10,000 – 5,000 population range that have population densities in excess of 1,000 people per square km – a fact hardly typical of rural municipalities. Since all of these cities happen to be located within a CMA, the decision was taken to consider them as small cities.

This basic classification of cities captures 89.6% of the country's total population[2]. Large and medium cities are all communities larger than 100,000 in populations and account for 30.1% and 21.9% of the Canadian population respectively. These are the city categories under the umbrella of the BCMC whose periodical monitoring of the quality of life of some of its member communities by FCM's QOLRS since 1999 has had the most influence in helping set Canada's key municipal policy priorities. The 47 cities in these two categories account for only a tiny fraction (1.5%) of the 3,147 communities tracked in Table 3. In the brief analysis that follows, the large and medium city categories are collapsed together and are referred to as large cities.

At the other extreme, and with 12.5% of the country's population, are communities represented by FCM's Rural and Northern Forums. With 89.2% of all locations included in the data set, this is a group of marginally urban communities with populations less than 10,000 people that is mostly constituted of small rural towns, villages and isolated northern hamlets. Because of their sheer numerical volume, and due to their extreme sensitivity to geographic isolation, to the vagaries of economic cycles, and now to the effects of climate change, the plea of these communities has received growing considerations in recent policy debates in the country.

[2] This classification is the result of an aggregation of the 1996 and 2006 Statistics Canada's Census Subdivisions (CSD). In order to avoid double-counting communities that are both listed as individual CSDs while being also part of larger regional administrative bodies such as a county municipality for instance, the decision was taken to err on the side of caution and not include the following CSD categories: County municipality, *Municipalié de Canton*, *Municipalié de Canton unis*, Township, Rural community, Specialized municipality and Subdivision of county municipality. *Terres réservées*, Indian reserves, and Summer and Resort communities are also not part of this classification. Because many small rural villages across Canada are too small to be listed as individual CSDs, the census information collected in those communities is generally amalgamated with that of other contiguous small communities into one of the regional CSDs listed above. The decision to eliminate these regional administrative bodies has thus resulted in an underestimation of the number of very small communities in the classification. A final factor leading to this underestimation was the necessity that all communities included in the data set be traceable in both the 1996 and 2006 census, the 2006 census acting as the benchmark. Communities that could not be matched in both census years are not included in the data set.

Table 3: Communities by size, Canada, 2006*

Type of community	Population thresholds	FCM^ monitoring structure	Number of communities	% of the communities in the data set	% Canadian population	Proportion (%) of Canada's surface area	Population density per sq/km
Large	> 450,000	BCMC and QOLRS^^	10	0.3	30.1	0.08	1250
Medium**	450,000 - 100,000	BCMC and QOLRS	37	1.2	21.9	0.22	355
Small	100,000 to 10,000		299	9.4	24.9	0.99	88
Very Small	< 10,000***	Rural and Northern Forums	2848	89.2	12.5	10.73	4

* The classification is derived from an aggregation of Statistics Canada's 2006 Census subdivisions and captures 89.6% of the Canadian population.

** In the analysis that follows, medium sized communities are aggregated with large communities to form the new large city group.

*** Includes rural and northern communities, and excludes indian reservations.

^ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

^^ Big City Mayors Caucus (BCMC) and Quality of Life Reporting System (QOLRS) communities.

Finally, small cities are the remaining 299 communities nested between those already spoken for by FCM's BCMC and its QOLRS and by the association's Rural and Northern Forums. Small cities make up 9.4% of all municipalities studied in this research. While this group represents nearly a quarter of the Canadian population (24.9%) - which is a sizeable proportion of the total Canadian population, it does not, however, appear to have a clear voice or a designated advocate on the national scene. There seems to be the implicit assumption that if FCM can help influence the development of policies to resolve problems that afflict large and medium cities, those worries that trouble small cities will also be addressed. If they are not, surely the solutions promoted to fix problems in rural and northern communities might do the trick! Labelled "mundanization" by Bell and Jayne (2006a), this process of adapting "big-city policies and ideas in small-city contexts" has generally led to "ineffectual practical outcomes" (p.1). In the Canadian context, we can now add to this definition the application of rural and northern policies to small-city issues. As far as their political representation on the national scene is concerned, small cities in Canada fall clearly in that grey area discussed earlier, between the large and the very small.

Not surprisingly, the general character of the populations living in large cities and in very small communities is polarized. While the population in larger cities is highly concentrated (52% of the Canadian population) into very densely populated area (between 1,250 and 355 person per square kilometre) and over a tiny portion of the Canadian landscape (less than half a percent), the population in rural and northern communities can better be described as extremely dispersed (12.5% of the country's population) over a very large area (10.7% of the country's surface area) and into a multitude of low density (4 person per square kilometre) and isolated settlement pockets (Table 3). On the surface, these simple observations provide our first glimpses of explanations as to why, for instance, issues related to air pollution, public transportation, affordable housing, homelessness, and community safety and security are so high on the policy agenda of those cities sitting at the top of the Canadian urban system. These observations may also account for the

federal government spending of public resources towards an infrastructure fund to help isolated rural and northern municipalities in need of economic sustainability.

It is interesting to note that at one level, the overall population distribution pattern of small cities does not fit well into either of the large or smaller cities' moulds. With a population density of 88 persons per square kilometre distributed over one percent of the land, the 25% of the Canadian population that live in small cities is neither very concentrated nor too dispersed (Table 3). At another level however, if the focus is on the range of responsibilities and roles small cities have within the urban system, we are forced to conclude that small cities share attributes with both their larger and smaller counterparts. Indeed, the role of individual communities within regional urban systems may vary widely. While many centres such as Kamloops and Nanaimo in British Columbia, North Bay in Ontario or Moncton in New Brunswick are the major central places for the vast region which they dominate, others like Comox and Williams Lake in British Columbia or Estevan in Saskatchewan act more as local service centres to small local or regional populations. A similar observation can also be made of the nature of the demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges that small cities face which may not always be unique to this type of city. But what do we really know?

In the following pages, the analysis of recent trends in the structure of the Canadian population over the last decade will highlight the contrasting demographic structures and divergent future trajectories of the country's larger, small and smallest communities. Even if in many respects they tend to share similar attributes, the challenges that they face are either polarized or of a different magnitude. It will be argued in the conclusion that these differences may be important enough to require FCM to put small cities on their radar. Paying more attention to small cities' wide ranging and diverse realities, and keeping a close eye on the quality of life of their residents, may lead FCM to amend and refocus some of the policy priorities it currently promotes.

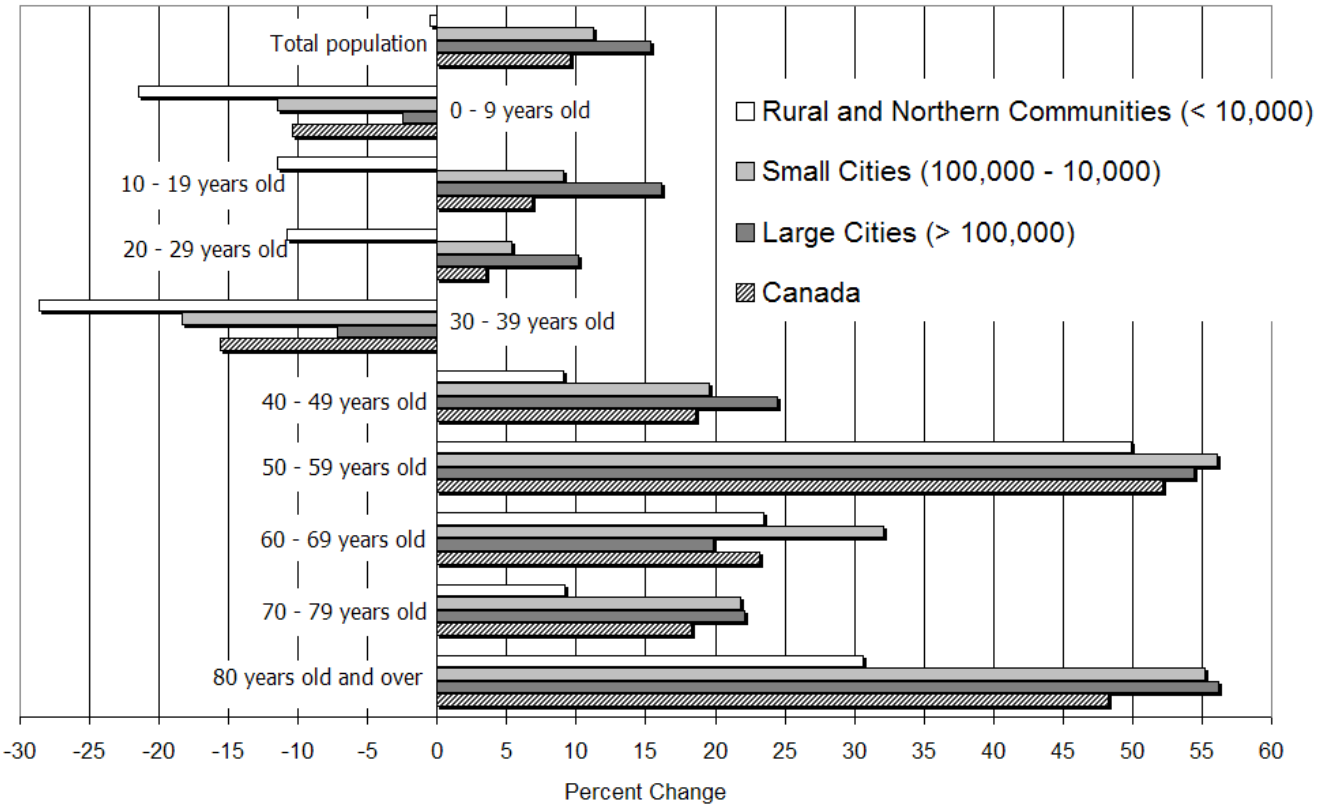
In the context of this short paper, the scope of the analysis is limited to the review of a few simple demographic indicators between the 1996 and 2006 census years: age structure, migration status, visible minorities, and knowledge of official languages. The trends reviewed are not new and have been closely monitored by geographers since the 1971 census (Bourne and Rose 2001; Bourne and Simmons 2003; Simmons and Bourne 2003 and 2004). They speak of the aging of the Canadian population and of the importance of immigration in helping maintain the demographic and economic viability of regions, especially of those centered on larger metropolitan areas. Besides contributing to update these trends, the originality of this descriptive analysis is the emphasis it places on small cities rather than on large cities or on rural areas, the traditional foci of most urban research.

4.0 Demographic trends in large, small, and rural and northern communities

4.1 Age structure

Figure 1 presents a visual snapshot of the changes in the structure of the population by age cohort between 1996 and 2006. Although the general pattern of growth and decline in small and larger centres tends to follow similar peaks and valleys, the magnitude of the observed changes and their implications for small cities should be a source of preoccupation for policy makers interested in scale relevant policy interventions. In most instances, trends in small cities tend to sit half way between those recorded in rural and northern communities and in larger cities. For simplicity, the

Figure 1: Population change by age, Canada, 1996 - 2006



analysis first focuses on the 0 to 39 cohorts, populations whose variations in growth patterns seem to show the greatest sensitivity to scale (Table 4).

Canada's population grew by 9.6 % during the period under study (Figure 1). This is significantly less than the 15.4% recorded in large cities and the 11.2% observed among small cities. To a certain extent, it could be argued that these increases were partly made on the back of rural and northern communities which have registered a half percent decline. This attrition is attributed to the heavy losses incurred in the 0 to 39 age cohorts (-18.6%; Table 4 and Figure 1) due to the well documented and long established rural to urban migration trends that have seen for over forty years an ever increasing number of younger individuals and families opting to leave rural and remote communities in search of better employment opportunity prospects in larger urban centres. This loss has been further fuelled by the relentless decline of the country's rate of natural increase. As will be discussed later, the inability of rural and remote communities to attract new immigrants is also a major factor contributing to the erosion of their population. Although less pronounced in their effects, these processes are also evident in small cities.

The decline in the 0 to 9 population cohort in small and large cities is for the most part a consequence of the ripple effect caused by the significant decrease in the proportion of people 30 to 39 (Figure 1). Born in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these are the children of the first post baby-boom generation, a period in Canadian history that marked the beginning of the county's birth rate collapse, a downward spiral which has yet to subside. The decline in 0 to 9 and 30 to 39

Table 4: Population by age, community size, growth patterns and growth intensity, Canada, 1996 - 2006

Age cohorts	Proportion in 2006 (%)				Population growth (G) or decline (D) between 1996 and 2006*				Intensity of growth (G) or decline (D) compared to large cities (faster (F) or slower (S))*	
	Canada	Large Cities	Small Cities	Rural and Northern Communities	Canada	Large Cities	Small Cities	Rural and Northern Communities	Small Cities	Rural and Northern Communities
0 - 9 years old	11.1	11.0	11.1	10.8	D	D	D	D	DF	DF
10 - 19 years old	13.4	12.6	13.9	13.5	G	G	G	D	GS	D
20 - 29 years old	12.9	14.5	12.0	10.5	G	G	G	D	GS	D
30 - 39 years old	13.4	14.5	12.7	11.6	D	D	D	D	DF	DF
Total	*50.7*	*52.6*	*49.7*	*46.5*	*D*	*G*	*D*	*D*	*D*	*D*
% Change 1996- 2006	*-4.7*	*3.3*	*-4.8*	*-18.6*						
40 - 49 years old	16.5	16.4	16.8	16.3	G	G	G	G	GS	GS
50 - 59 years old	14.1	13.4	14.2	15.4	G	G	G	G	GF	GS
60 - 69 years old	8.9	8.2	9.1	10.5	G	G	G	G	GF	GS
70 - 79 years old	6.1	5.9	6.2	7.0	G	G	G	G	GS	GS
80 years old and over	3.7	3.6	3.9	4.3	G	G	G	G	GS	GS
Total	*41.0*	*47.2*	*50.3*	*53.5*	*G*	*G*	*G*	*G*	*GF*	*GS*
% Change 1996- 2006	*29.5*	*32.5*	*33.4*	*23.2*						

* See Figure 1 for a review of the population trends.
Source: Statistics Canada 1996 and 2006

populations was significantly more rapid in small cities than in larger cities, the decrease in small cities even slightly exceeding the Canadian average. In contrast, and except in rural and northern communities, the growth of the 10-19 and 20-29 cohorts in small and large cities has exceeded the Canadian average and can partly be linked to the expansion of the 40 to 49 and 50 to 59 cohorts during the period under study. Of interest also is the fact that the growth recorded in these age groups has been twice as rapid in large cities (16.1% and 10.1%) than in small cities (9.0% and 5.4%; Figure 1).

The consequences of these variations between small and large cities in those age cohorts that are so critical for the long term demographic stability of communities and regions are better understood when we look at Table 4. The table summarizes the information contained in Figure 1 by first stressing the direction of the demographic trend (growth or decline) between 1996 and 2006, and second by drawing attention to the relative pace or intensity (faster or slower) of the trend in small and in rural and remote communities compared to the trend observed in large cities. The table also gives the proportional percentage of each cohort out of the total population in the three types of communities. The intensity columns reveal a particularly interesting pattern: when a population cohort in large cities declines, the decline in small cities happens at a faster rate (0 to 9 and 30 to 39 cohorts), and when it increases, it does so at a slower rate among small cities (10 to 19 and 20 to 29; see also Figure 1). When the proportional size of each cohort is added to the

interpretation, an alarming trend is uncovered: it points to the dwindling ability of small cities in the future to maintain their populations at current levels and to larger cities' superior position to address the situation. For instance, the impact of the slower growth of the 20 to 29 cohort in small cities compared to large cities is heightened by the fact that this cohort also accounts for a smaller proportion of the total population in small cities (12%) than in larger metropolitan areas (14.5%). Similarly, the faster decline in 30 to 39 in small cities is made more acute than in larger cities since this cohort is proportionally smaller in small cities (12.7%) than in larger cities (14.5%). Unless solutions to address these trends in small cities can be found, a shadow is cast on small cities' demographic future and on the potential for many of them to experience meaningful growth in the next century. The situation has reached a critical state in rural and remote communities where decreasing 0 to 39 populations represents already less than half of their total populations (46.5%).

The long-term demographic sustainability of Canada's small and smallest communities is not only in jeopardy because of the proportional decline of their younger generations, but also because they are more severely impacted by population aging than are larger cities. The aging of the Canadian population is not a recent phenomenon. Canada's population has been slowly getting older since the end of the baby boom. Figure 1 and Table 4 show the aging trend to be still very strong between 1996 and 2006 and that it is generalized throughout the urban system. In 2006, the proportion of the population in each cohort above fifty years of age in small and in rural and northern communities was greater than the national average while similar figures in larger cities were lower. There are also proportionally fewer individuals of these older age groups in larger cities. Thus, as far as the aging of the population is concerned, scale appears to be a factor. Table 4 shows the existence of a clear linear progression in the size of the cohorts 50 to 80 years old as we move from large to small and then from small to rural and northern communities.

The growth of the population older than forty years of age in rural and northern communities has been significantly slower than that in large and small cities (Figure 1 and Table 4). However, considering that the bulk of the population (53.5%) in Canada's smallest and most isolated communities is now found in this growing age group once again raises questions about their long term sustainability. Similar questions can also be raised about small cities whose population experience a faster rate of aging than those living in larger cities.

The demographic trends discussed so far pose very significant challenges to provincial governments in their attempt to deliver quality health care and education services to the growing elderly population on the one hand, and to the declining school age population on the other. They also pose serious doubts about the future capacity of vast numbers of communities to raise through taxation the necessary revenues to help them bridge the nation-wide, endemic infrastructure deficit. This situation has especially reached a crisis situation for those that live in dispersed, low density, small, rural and northern centres and regions. The traditional response of governments to such demographic shifts and associated variations in demand for services has usually translated into the closure of hospitals and schools in small and remote communities and in the consolidation of those public resources in larger regional centres. While such loss of services has led to a decline in the quality of life of small city residents affected by these consolidations of services, residents in larger regional centres have comparatively generally benefited from this restructuring. Although the national trend in the restructuring of health care is towards the centralization of specialized services, a position which solidifies the higher status of larger cities within urban systems, governments must be responsive to the decline in quality of life that these decisions mean for the large and growing population that has lost easy access to those services.

4.2 Immigrants, visible minorities and mother tongue

The influx of immigrants and visible minorities in Canada is contributing to alter and enrich the ethnic, linguistic and cultural personality of the places in which they have chosen to live. Their impact has particularly been felt most among large cities, whose population growth is largely driven by immigration (FCM 2005). This has especially been the case in the three gateway cities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (Bauder and Sharpe 2002). Along with the trends discussed earlier regarding the aging of the population and the increase of the 10 to 29 year old population, the growing cultural and racial diversity experienced by large cities has sparked fundamental changes in the quality of life of the communities most affected by these demographic dynamics. These transformations have led to changes in the structure of the workforce and in levels of civic engagement. They have also transformed the role of social infrastructures and of public and non profit organizations whose mandates are to monitor and service the health, the level of stress and the safety of the community (FCM 2005). Speaking of the influence that these changes are having on the quality of life of the twenty communities studied in the 2004 QOLRS report, the report cautions that

> [f]ailure to anticipate and respond to these demographic changes will adversely affect overall quality of life, including inadequate levels of service and infrastructure for expanding populations, and inappropriately designed services for segments of the population with unique and evolving needs (ibid, pp.1-2).

The reality of large cities is not shared by small and by rural and northern communities. Populations in these communities are much more homogeneous in their ethnic and cultural compositions than in larger cities (Table 5). In large cities, the percentages of immigrants (29.9%), of visible minorities (27.3%) and of those whose mother tongue is neither English nor French (29.5%) in 2006 far exceeds the Canadian average. These groups are grossly under-represented in small and very small communities and their proportion declines drastically as we move down the urban hierarchy. The bulk of the population in small and in rural and northern communities is constituted of non-immigrants born in their province of residence (75.9% and 83.7%) and shares one of Canada's official languages as mother tongue (89.8% and 93.3%; Table 5). While the number of immigrants and visible minorities in small and in very small communities has grown between 1996 and 2006 (Figure 2), their proportion out of the total population can still be qualified of marginal (Table 2).

An undeniable relationship exists between the size of an agglomeration and its capacity to attract immigrants. Small cities sit somewhere between the very heterogeneous and the very homogeneous. Because of this, national strategies meant to facilitate the social inclusion and social integration of new immigrants may not have the same relevance or speak to the same sense of urgency in small cities than in larger metropolitan areas. "Municipalities with the highest levels of immigration face significant social and economic pressures, placing new demands on municipal governments to change their approach to service delivery" (FCM 2005, p.5). The expansion and introduction by federal, provincial and municipal governments of immigrant settlement services, of programs for the translation of documents in non-official languages, of labour-force transition initiatives, and of English as a second language (ESL) schools and programs to name a few, may not make as much financial and political sense in most small cities as in Canada's largest cities. Strategies designed to encourage the immigration or relocation of new immigrants away from larger centres and toward smaller municipalities would be more useful in providing needed demographic boosts to the vast number of small and smaller communities and regions faced with a

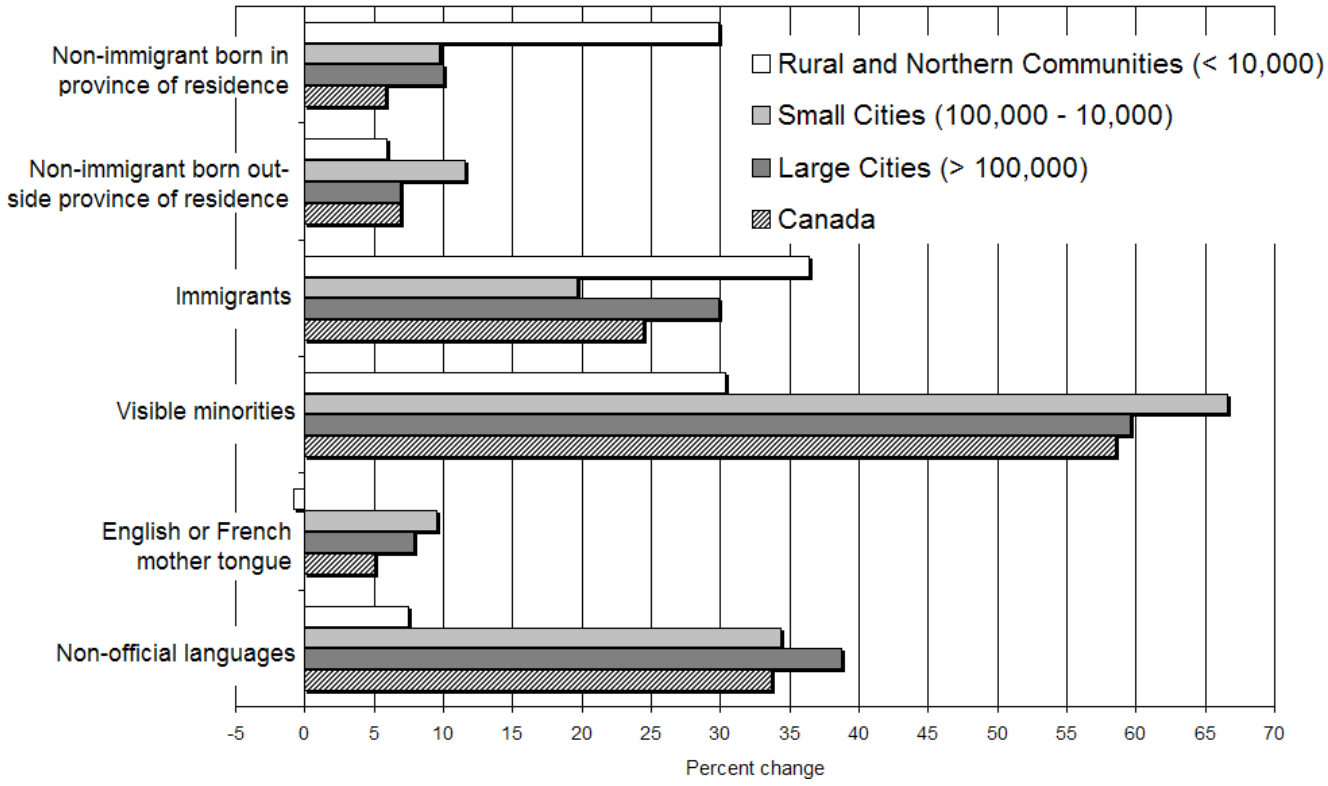
dwindling labour force, the erosion of their entrepreneurship and a lack of sustainable investment capital. While such a strategy has already been drafted by FCM in its policy statement on rural issues (FCM 2007c), none seems to have been drawn to capture the particular situation specific to those cities between 100,000 and 10,000 in population.

Table 5: Structure of the population by immigrant status, language spoken and community size, Canada, 2006

Variable	Canada	Large Cities	Small cities	Rural and Northern Communitie
% Non-immigrants born in province of residence	67.0	57.5	75.9	83.7
% Non-immigrants born outside province of residence	12.3	11.3	12.6	11.8
% Immigrants	19.8	29.9	11.0	4.2
Total	*99.2*	*98.7*	*99.5*	*99.7*
% Visible minorities	16.2	27.3	6.7	1.3
% English or French mother tongue	79.1	68.9	89.8	93.3
% Non-official languages	19.7	29.4	9.3	6.1

Source: Statistics Canada 2006

Figure 2: Population growth by immigrant status and mother tongue, Canada, 1996 - 2006



5.0 Conclusion

It is fairly obvious that the very intense social and political pressures caused by urban density, urban sprawl, counter-urbanization, and the distribution of scarce public and social resources generate different sets of problems and should elicit different types of responses in small and large municipalities. It is also clear that the use we make and the interpretation we derive from the analysis of FCM's QOLRS indicators should and must be adjusted to reflect the size of the city under study and the demographic, social, urban and economic reality it faces. The brief analysis of simple demographic variables carried out in this paper has allowed us to discriminate among three urban realities. The changing demographics and urban conditions in the first two, the very small communities and the large cities, are already receiving FCM's full attention, the trends in these types of communities having been formally monitored for almost a decade by the BCMC and by the organization's Rural Forum and Northern Forum. Fuelled by the out migration of its young adults and families, and also caused by the slow but unrelenting aging of their populations (Table 4), the decline in rural and northern communities is not new as it has been their sad reality for over a quarter century (Simmons and Bourne 2003, 2004). Demographically speaking, the future of large cities is on more solid footings. It is the only type of city in Canada to have experienced a growth of its 0 to 39 cohort between 1996 and 2006 (Table 4), an increase essentially driven by the arrival of large numbers of foreign immigrants (Table 5 and Figure 2).

Less known, however, is the reality of the third category of community, the small city. While the population in this category recorded an increase similar to that experienced in large cities between 1996 and 2006 (Figure 1), the hopeful future that this growth might suggest at first glance must however be tempered by the structural character of that expansion. When compared to the situation in large cities, populations in small cities tend to age at a faster rate (Figure 1 and Table 4) and the change in the 0 to 39 cohort between 1996 and 2006 is negative, which points toward the fading capacity of populations in small cities to replenish and maintain their current levels in the decades to come.

Due of the uniqueness of their situation between the large and the very small, it is difficult to identify urban priorities or policies that would speak only to the reality of small cities. The urban agenda promoted by FCM does not seem to fully encapsulate the breadth of the challenges faced only by small cities. Neither do the policy priorities meant to alleviate the serious problems faced by rural and northern communities (FCM 2007b). As mentioned earlier, small cities are neither too small nor too big and, as a result, their problems appear to be neither too large nor too specific. The in-between, nebulous character of small cities makes their study a complex analytical and empirical endeavour. It could be argued that because of this, it also makes them prone to be relegated to the background and set aside as an analytical category.

Policy priorities of greater concerns to small cities revolve around addressing the specific demographic dynamics and related economic impacts that characterize this category of cities. Among others, and in no particular order, priorities relevant to the overall reality of small cities should focus on: encouraging the relocation and redistribution of new immigrants away from larger centres and toward small municipalities; gaining commitments from governments to help retain and even develop key public services tailored around small city life and toward increasing the quality of life of their inhabitants; addressing the limited fiscal capacity of small cities to attract and retain investment in the public and private sectors; attracting and retaining skilled labour, especially health professionals; fostering conditions for economic development and economic diversification; and fostering investment in technological, social and cultural infrastructures.

Finally, environmental concerns as well as issues that deal with housing affordability should also be prioritized. The implementation of such an agenda would provide opportunities to enhance the quality of life in small communities, and would also contribute to improve their attractiveness and regional, provincial and global competitiveness. These priorities are also shared to a large extent by rural and northern communities, and to a lesser extent by larger municipalities.

Not surprisingly, the analysis demonstrates that demographic trends between rural and northern communities and Canada's largest cities are polarized. This supports the focus that FCM puts on big cities and on rural and northern communities in its organizational structure. It is suggested here that in light of this analysis, small cities are deserving of the same attention. Not doing so not only deprives the quarter of the Canadian population living in communities between 100,000 and 10,000 in population from having a voice at the national stage, but also prevents small-city problems from potentially receiving small-city solutions.

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