












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"The German public needs to be assured by the government that migration is in their interest"

Interview with Howard Duncan, Metropolis, Ottawa, Canada

Howard Duncan has been with the Metropolis Project since 1997, as Executive Head since 2002. Metropolis is an international network for comparative research and public policy development on migration, diversity, and immigrant integration in cities in Canada and around the world. Duncan studied Philosophy and English at Carleton University in Ottawa and completed his doctorate in Philosophy of Science at The University of Western Ontario. His current interests are immigrant integration theory, multiculturalism theory, and globalization and migration.



In Canada, women have 1.69 children on average. The fertility rate is higher than in Germany with 1.38 but also does not reach the so-called replacement level of 2.1. Does this cause any problems for the country?

It would cause problems if we didn't have a lot of immigration. Not only but partly to overcome the low fertility. As long as we keep immigration levels where they are the population will continue to grow for another 25 years and then it will begin to level off.

So you focus on stabilizing or even boosting immigration instead of trying to raise the fertility rate?

We have tried but nothing works. You might nudge it up by maybe 0.1 maybe 0.2, but that is far from what we need. High fertility is correlated with poverty, low education for women, and women staying at home rather than working. Our societies have moved beyond this and there is no going back.

Do you think that the Canadian public and the government understand the necessity of immigration?

I think the evidence is obvious and the government supports immigration. With the recent global recession, a lot of countries were scaling back the numbers of immigrants they were allowing in – and Canada did not. We kept our immigration levels exactly the same, that was a government policy. I think you can assume that the Canadian government is a strong believer in immigration.

Canada is a traditional country for immigration like the USA or Argentina. What makes Canada attractive for immigrants?

I suppose it's the same sort of thing that makes the traditional countries of immigration attractive: It's Canada's open economy, so there are a lot of employment possibilities; Canada is a modern society, it's a democratic society, and it's a very welcoming society to immigrants. I don't think immigrants are worrying when they come to Canada whether they will be accepted, whether they will be treated well, whether they will be objects of discrimination. So they are comfortable. And knowing that they will be able to make a living, of course that is important. We have been bringing in immigrants for a very long time so you have many well-defined ethnic communities in Canada. That itself encourages more immigrants from those same countries to come, so we have a very strong family reunification program. For example, you bring in a few people from India and they tell their friends and families and they sponsor them to come and you have a chain migration effect. This will continue. Family reunification is in fact a big driver of migration to Canada.

Do you notice a rising pressure in the competition for skilled workers within the last years?

Yes, absolutely. We have always been competing with the United States. They are the world's number one destination for immigrants. So we have had to work very hard to have an attractive immigration policy, to have employers willing to welcome immigrants, and to create a welcoming society in general.

Do you notice any new players in the field? For example, Germany and other ageing societies in Europe now try to attract high-skilled workers.

We do worry a little bit about the European Union's ability to attract immigrants. But I don't think that we are terribly concerned about any single country because the numbers so far are still small. You know, at the high end Germany brings in just a few hundred. It's not 50.000 or 100.000. If the United States introduced a point system and took in half a million people, we would notice that in Canada.

Are you also competing for students?

Interestingly, when we talk about competition for students, it's Australia that we think about. They have been extraordinarily successful in recruiting students and they do better than we do. So we are working with our universities to try to make Canada more attractive as a destination for students. We notice the competition and we feel it and we try to respond.

Where do most of your immigrants come from?

It's a huge mix. In 2008, the number one source country was China, number two was India, number three the Philippines, and number four the US. Among the next five were the UK, Pakistan, and France. We have immigrants from virtually every country in the world in Canada. So the diversity of Canada's population is very, very high. And this is an advantage for a country of immigration, because no one group dominates. I think people are taking that into account if they think about emigration.

What would you recommend to Germany to improve the immigration policy, to make it more successful?

I think first thing Germany needs to do is to essentially declare itself to the world open to immigration. You need this coming from the chancellor's office and down through cabinet. It's probably not fair, but I think many people who are potential migrants do not choose Germany because they don't feel that Germany wants them. Germany has the reputation as a country that will take guest workers for a short time – even though it's not actually true anymore. But I think that is the reputation so Germany needs to engage in a strong international public relation campaign, first of all. News travels very fast.

Selected Studies

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What else?

Second of all, I think that the German public needs to be assured or maybe reassured by the government that migration is in their interest, that the government has it under control, because unless you have public support of immigration, it will never fully succeed.

Immigrants mostly come from third world countries or from emerging nations. Many of them return to their home countries after a certain time – is Canada concerned about this brain circulation?

Well, that's the chance that you take. We have nearly two million Canadians living outside of Canada, so in part what we are doing is replacing those people who leave. The immigration program in New Zealand is partly designed to replace the New Zealanders who move to Australia. So every country that is in the immigration game needs to understand that a lot of people will come and then go again. You also have a lot of Germans who are leaving Germany. You cannot expect to run an immigration program such that all the people you bring in will stay. That's just not realistic. But it seems to me that this is irrelevant. You need immigrants, we need immigrants, so the job is to get them coming. If some of them stay, well, that is the best you can do in this globalized world. Let's say you need 200.000 immigrants. You might in fact want to bring in 300.000, knowing that a hundred thousand of them will leave – these are very crude numbers, but you see my point.

Do you worry about the home countries of the immigrants, for example the Philippines?

It varies country by country: The Philippines produces a large number of graduates from their nursing schools, from health care schools in general. They oversupply their own market and they do this on purpose. However, this does not mean that it has no negative effects on the Philippines. They do have a problem with doctors leaving the Philippines. Interestingly, many doctors retrain as nurses in order to work as nurses abroad. So the supply of doctors especially in rural parts of the Philippines has declined. I think that the West needs to engage with countries like the Philippines to manage the size of flows out of these countries in such a way that they are not devastated.

Does the brain drain slow down the development of these countries?

The brain drain is a very controversial issue and one about which there is no consensus now. Many argue that the loss of educated persons impedes development. Others argue that the brain drain in fact increases the human capital of sending countries in the following way: those who leave and do well create an incentive to others to raise their education levels so that they have greater prospects to leave; however, many of these people in fact do not leave and the result is a net increase in the human capital of the society which should aid development. Yet others point to the value of remittances that many migrants send, however remittance flows tend to wane over time. It is a complex situation that must be studied in more detail.

You made the point that in Canada, the ethnic mix is one reason of the successful integration and the high numbers of immigrants. But in Germany, we cannot produce such a mix as fast as we will need skilled migrants. What has to be done here?

It's going to take political leadership. The politicians need to give a message to the people in Germany that migration is for the good of Germany, that it is under control, that the people you are bringing in are going to contribute to your economy and will contribute to society. And maybe you might want to point to other countries that have done this successfully and be able to say, you know, the United States did not come to an end, Canada did not come to an end as a result of immigration and people are happy there. I don't think you can overestimate the importance of political leadership on this. One thing about Canada and Australia and New Zealand: There are no political parties that are anti-immigration. In the USA, both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party strongly support immigration, all parties in Canada strongly support immigration, and that makes it easier to deliver this message to the public. If you have political parties that are anti-immigration, it's going to be more difficult. So that's a challenge for the parties in power to overcome the negative messaging that comes from far right parties. I do think that the most important thing is political leadership, but then of course you need effective programs to manage the process, to manage the intake of immigrants, to manage the integration, to make sure that they are actually employed. So the foreign credentials issue is one that needs to be taken care of very seriously, language instruction needs to be taken very seriously.

Germany has a bigger problem than English speaking countries, don't you think so?

You will need to invest a lot of money in language training, but it's not impossible. Israel gives an example: It has an open door for anybody who is a Jew and most of them do not speak Hebrew, in fact hardly any of them speak Hebrew. As soon as they enter the country, the first thing they do is to get language education. Israel has had to do that, otherwise the immigrants who come to Israel would not be able to work, they would not be able to succeed. So they decided to invest a huge amount in integration. I think Germany will have to do the same – at least on the language side. It's possible.

In Germany, some people fear that immigrants might abuse the social welfare system. Does this concern also exist in Canada?

The Canadian public has shown in public opinion polls year after year that they believe the number of immigrants coming to Canada to be about right. Canadians show strong support for immigration, and they believe that immigration is well-managed for the benefit of the society and its economy. The confidence that Canadians have long had in the immigration program extends to a low concern that immigrants abuse the social welfare system. Immigrants to Canada fall into three broad classifications: economic migrants, family class migrants, and refugees. Canadians expect refugees to need support from the social welfare system; they are seeking protection after all. Family class migrants are sponsored by family members who undertake to support them. And economic migrants come to Canada to work or to create businesses and therefore jobs. There are concerns about current levels of unemployment amongst skilled workers admitted to Canada, but these are typically expressed as problems of foreign credentials recognition and the need to do more to help immigrants find work as opposed to calls for reduced immigration numbers.

Interview by Margret Karsch, July 2010

The interview may be reprinted citing the source (Margret Karsch / Berlin-Institute).

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