



# Migration and Resilience in Urban Canada: Why Social Resilience, Why Now?

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## Abstract

Drawing on an extensive review of recent literature about resilience and integration, this paper evaluates a social resilience approach to the integration of international migrants in Canadian cities. We advocate a social resilience approach that acknowledges how institutions of all types play critical roles in newcomers' efforts to establish their lives in new places, especially when faced with unanticipated events such as a global pandemic. Centering research around the concept of social resilience goes beyond the neoliberal idea that integration is primarily an individual affair achieved with support from friends, family, and a nebulous community and draws attention to the social diversity of migrants and the complexity of their migration and settlement histories. Inherently relational, a social resilience approach encourages comparative studies of integration across cities that can reveal how different institutions and their programs affect migrants' trajectories. Detailed examinations of local institutions and their responses to shifting selection and integration policies, especially during a pandemic, also hold the potential to provide crucial information for supporting newcomers effectively.

**Keywords** Social resilience · Integration and migration · COVID-19 · Immigrant-serving organizations · Institutional support · Urban Canada

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## Introduction

Focusing attention on the critical roles of social institutions in helping people find relevant resources and develop successful strategies to overcome challenges (Hall & Lamont, 2013), social resilience is a recent and apt conceptual lens for studies of migrant integration. By integration, we refer to the processes by which migrants strive to achieve desired social, civic, and economic participation in society (Valenzuela Moreno et al., 2018).<sup>1</sup> The social resilience approach acknowledges the structural forces including the various services and other supports that shape integration in diverse places while still recognizing the agency of newcomers (DeVerteuil, 2017). By paying attention to the resources and strategies that assist newcomers as they encounter challenges, it takes account of the social inequalities that shape migrants' participation in the societies where they are building new lives. A social resilience approach also highlights how institutions such as immigrant-serving agencies, schools, and local chambers of commerce are dynamic agents providing services and voice that help support, represent, and empower newcomers fostering their resilience. By focusing on migrants' strategies and access to resources, a social resilience approach underscores how integration is shaped by various organizations as they strive to respond effectively to the changing needs of migrants (DeVerteuil, 2017).

Inherently relational, the social resilience approach requires a detailed examination of structural constraints and the roles of government and non-governmental institutions as determinants of migrants' resilience. With its equal emphasis on the capacities of migrants and the local institutions that serve them, this approach has the potential to challenge popular views of international migration as a crisis or threat by highlighting the potential of local institutions to facilitate integration. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a prime example of disruption and crisis and the role of social resilience in action. COVID-19 exposed glaring immigration and migrant-based health and socioeconomic inequalities and the role of social institutions in addressing needs of diverse migrants (APM Research Lab Staff, 2020; Boucher, 2020; Johnson, 2020; Platt & Warwick, 2020; Reich, 2020).

Despite its popularity in academic and policy circles (Harris et al., 2018; Meerow & Newell, 2016; Fainstein, 2018; Leitner et al., 2018), the concept of resilience has been discussed rarely in research about the integration of international migrants. Literature about resilience has focused on specific vulnerable populations: children and youth, seniors, indigenous peoples, the homeless, and refugees and refugee claimants rather than migrants more broadly and the institutions that they engage with and that support them in their journeys to integration. Yet all migrants face challenges associated with rooting themselves and their family members in a new place. A resilience approach that investigates how institutions influence integration pathways recognizes their dynamic nature and their sensitivity to the local context. Our

<sup>1</sup> While settlement often refers to the period immediately following migrants' arrival, integration has a more diffuse time horizon, referring to the long-term and to achievement of desired economic, social, and identificational participation (Collyer, Hinger & Schweitzer 2020).

analysis is motivated by the recognition that integration is a critical social and policy issue in cities around the globe where anti-immigrant sentiments are being voiced and too often acted upon. This has been further heightened by COVID-19, “where the pandemic has been weaponized to spread anti-immigrant narratives and call for increased immigration control and reduction of migrant rights” (Guadagno, 2020, 12). Corona racism has become a lived reality under COVID-19 for many immigrants (IMO, 2020).

From a review of relevant resilience literature, we describe a social resilience approach and examine how its focus on institutions, and the relations among them, enhances understanding of settlement and social inclusion in Canada. Informed by a social resilience approach, we propose a research agenda that addresses the growing variation in migrant experiences. We lay out the argument for a resilience approach to the integration of international migrants in three sections. The conceptualization of social resilience that underpins our argument is discussed in the first section where we address criticisms of the use of resilience for investigating social systems and outline its relevance for examining migrant integration. The second section identifies the rationale for a social resilience approach in the current Canadian context that is marked by geographically and temporally contingent integration processes, highly constrained labor and housing markets, and an explosion of different pathways to permanent residence and integration. In the final section, we develop a research agenda about migrant resilience that focuses on comparative and longitudinal studies investigating the critical role played by different social institutions. The conclusions emphasize the value of a resilience approach for studying integration, especially during a global pandemic.

## The Concept of Social Resilience

Contemporary understanding of resilience is shaped by two major theoretical perspectives: social-ecological resilience and social resilience. The social-ecological perspective that emphasizes how individuals, communities, and regions adapt to external threats (Adger, 2000; Cretney, 2014; Luthar, 2006) is often criticized for neglecting the influence of social structures, institutional inequalities, and power relations (Joseph, 2013; Leadbeater et al., 2005; VanderPlaats, 2016). For example, Fainstein (2015, 2018), Derickson (2016), and Leitner et al. (2018) argue that by treating cities as self-regulating systems, the social-ecological perspective fails to grapple with socio-spatial inequalities and the politics that underpin them. According to these critics, planners and politicians deploy a resilience approach to decrease state involvement and to increase self-reliance by promoting willing, adaptable, and resilient neoliberal subjects (Adger, 2000; Joseph, 2013; Leitner et al., 2018). This process of responsabilization, the neoliberal approach to resilience, opens “space for yet more pressure” on newcomers promoting “the capacity to resiliently ‘endure’” (Leary, 2018, 151). According to these critics, a resilience approach holds individuals and communities responsible for their own well-being without examining and addressing the inequalities that create vulnerabilities and limit adaptability (Fainstein, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2018). In the social-ecological approach to resilience,

migration is viewed as an external threat; a view that is inconsistent with public policies that actively recruit newcomers and public opinion that continues to support the recruitment of newcomers even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Association of Canadian Studies et al., 2020). The social-ecological perspective also threatens to elicit narrowly nationalist, anti-immigrant, and closed border responses during the pandemic (Omidvar, 2020).

Compared with the social-ecological approach to resilience, a social resilience perspective stresses the transformative capacities of individuals, groups, and social institutions in dealing with challenges and simultaneously recognizes how power relations and institutional structures shape these capacities (Webber et al., 2020; Betteridge & Webber 2019; Harris et al., 2018; Hall & Lamont, 2013). Social resilience suggests a movement away from a purely individual focus to the idea of the collective and a shift from independence to interdependence (DeVerteuil, 2017, 25). While adaptive capacities imply survival and recovery from adversity by either bouncing back to a previous state or renewing and retaining somewhat similar structures and functions through preventive measures, transformative capacities entail resistance and proactive measures. They imply change in existing structures and practices to thrive and attain a better state, where a better state may well be a more equitable one that serves the interests of the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the broader collective (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016; Meerow & Newell, 2016; Rega & Bonifazi, 2020).

Social resilience has gained considerable attention recently as research extends contemporary understanding of “resilience” beyond its initial definition as the capacity of individuals, communities, and systems to survive in the face of stress and shocks, and even transform when conditions require (Hall & Lamont, 2013). Identifying and gaining access to resources available in specific everyday contexts is the key to resilience (Betteridge & Webber, 2019; DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016; Ungar, 2012). Beginning from the premise that for all international migrants, migration itself, and settling in a new place are inherently challenging, we focus on the capacity to navigate the resources that enable international migrants to overcome the challenges inherent in integration (Ungar, 2012). These capacities can be transformative often leaving migrants better prepared and empowered to deal with future hurdles and setbacks (Wild et al., 2013). Our conceptualization emphasizes that capacities are learned and they are conditioned by the urban contexts in which international migrants live their everyday lives. Significantly, social institutions are often important sources of social solidarity, sanctuary, and refuge for vulnerable newcomer populations (DeVerteuil, 2017, 10), key to welcoming societies.

We emphasize the concept of social resilience as an approach to investigating international migrants’ integration for three reasons. The concept underscores the embeddedness of social actors within specific social and spatial contexts. As such, the concept possesses potential for addressing the unequal power relations, and social inequality manifest in the integration challenges facing migrants. A social resilience approach requires documenting local resources, investigating the power relations at multiple spatial scales that shape them, and developing strategies to address inequalities (Derickson, 2016; Hertzman & Siddiqui, 2013; Wild et al., 2013). For example, a social resilience approach acknowledges both the beneficial and the detrimental

impacts of spatial concentration in enclaves for migrants (DeVerteuil, 2017). On the one hand, migrants who live in enclaves may gain invaluable social capital from co-ethnics and institutions that serve them. Over time, reliance on local social ties in the enclave may impair migrants' language fluency and reduce valuable social interaction with people and institutions outside the enclave.

Social resilience is also more active and dynamic than passive (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016; Wild et al., 2013). With its emphasis on relations between individuals, between institutions and individuals, and among institutions, social resilience highlights the agency of individuals and collectives, even highly marginalized and vulnerable ones. Migrants often remake the institutional landscapes where they settle. In Canada, many migrants are assisted by non-profit, non-governmental organizations and religious establishments founded by newcomers whose successors still direct many of these institutions. These institutions strive to transform themselves as migrant needs, funding priorities, and the local social, economic, and political context evolve. Their willingness and capacity to make change have been especially evident since the COVID-19 pandemic began as organizations moved quickly to online delivery of services.

Social resilience also draws our attention not just to everyday survival, but also to struggle, resistance, and reinvention. By allowing for movement towards a more equitable state, a social resilience approach acknowledges the acts of migrants that undermine and counteract the neoliberal status quo (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016). It also contests discourses and representations of contemporary international migrants as threats and disruptions, an especially important discursive shift during the current pandemic. Rather than viewing international migrants as contagious virus threats (Molnar, 2020), a social resilience approach draws attention to their contributions during the pandemic. Asylum seekers and other migrants are doing essential work in long-term care homes, medical facilities, retail outlets, and other workplaces that many Canadians avoid because it increases exposure to COVID-19 (Shields & Abu Alrob, 2020). A social resilience approach emphasizes the contingent nature of migrants' experiences and their impacts on urban societies (Macklin, 2020) and acknowledges their efforts to engage in the politics of COVID-19 and shape post-pandemic societies. The institutional context and its responses have critical roles in facilitating newcomers' efforts to establish their lives in a new place and enhancing their societal contributions.

## Integration and Social Resilience

Integration experiences are considered rarely in the resilience literature that is dominated by psychological studies (Wild et al., 2013), many investigating the resilience of vulnerable children and their families (Ungar, 2012) and urban resilience research that focuses on municipal responses to disasters and security concerns (Leitner et al., 2018). A handful of studies examine how international migrants utilize individual, family, and community resources to overcome challenges associated with obtaining suitable employment, education, and housing and achieving social inclusion (Molina & Alcántara, 2013; Rumbaut, 2000;

Mythen, 2012; Falicov, 2005; Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Simich et al., 2012; Michail, 2013; Gray et al., 2015). For example, in the USA, many Latinos overcome the psychological stress associated with stereotyping as undocumented illegal migrants by exercising their voice within their communities (Molina & Alcántara, 2013). Many Muslim immigrants in the UK combat institutional racism by strengthening family and community relations (Mythen, 2012). Social capital, resources embedded within the family and community, is also effective for enhancing the resilience of racialized immigrant women as they overcome social and economic challenges (Babatunde-Sowole et al., 2016; Rashid & Gregory, 2014; Lee et al., 2008; Raffaelli et al., 2012; van der Ham et al., 2014). Immigrants' efforts to resist exclusion by demanding culturally appropriate services, exercising voting rights, and pursuing education are also discussed as a form of resilience (Maiter & Stalker, 2011; Owens & Lynch, 2012; Trueba, 1998; Voicu & Comşa, 2014). These studies highlight migrants' agency and the significant impacts of family, friends, and other social contacts on their access to resources. Structural constraints and the roles of government and non-government institutions are largely ignored, however, as determinants of resilience. Yet, many institutions and programs are of great assistance to newcomers and their uneven availability that leaves some newcomers falling through cracks in programming is an urgent policy concern (Türegün et al., 2019).

Institutions are considered in more detail in the recent literature promoting community resilience as a means of discouraging radicalization in newcomer communities (Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Ryan et al., 2018). In this literature, resilience is often conceptualized concretely as a group's success in counteracting community-based violence and radical recruitment. This is a highly problematic approach because of its limited conceptualization of resilience and the factors that influence it. Defined as resistance to violence, radicalization, and other anti-social activity, resilience is often attributed to factors operating at the individual and community levels. For individuals, resilience in the face of radicalization and terrorism is explained by access to social capital in all its forms, especially linking capital, the ties between members of a social group and institutions. Although the emphasis on social capital is welcome, a neoliberal view of individual responsibility for integration and attention mainly to faith organizations and ethnic associations that serve like-minded people still constrain this research.

A social resilience approach goes beyond the neoliberal idea that integration is primarily an individual affair achieved with some support from friends, family, and a nebulous or narrowly conceived idea of community. According to the neoliberal viewpoint, migrants should develop goals, figure out how to achieve them, and actively monitor their progress towards these goals to make necessary adjustments. Admitting permanent residents who can achieve their integration aims with minimal recourse to formal services is an important policy objective (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). Neoliberal policymakers want migrants to "settle on less" publicly supported services, shifting risk onto the individual and family (Lowe et al., 2017). The neoliberal discourse is one that contrasts the "good immigrant" who is self-sufficient and individually resilient against the so-called bad immigrant who is dependent and a drain on public resources (Barrass & Shields, 2017; Root et al., 2019).

With a social resilience approach, by contrast, integration is conceived as inherently challenging and a broader societal process that goes beyond the individual. Recognized as a dialectical two-way process between the migrant and society, integration requires adaption, accommodation, and support on both sides. Key elements in this process are the various social institutions that help migrants overcome challenges and acquire strategies and resources that assist them when facing current and future challenges (Shields et al., 2019). By focusing attention on the two-way process and contrary to the views of some scholars that emphasize how resilience underpins the status quo (Derickson, 2016), the social resilience approach can challenge the neoliberal characterization of integration and promote solidarity, social justice, and community-centered approaches to forging diverse and sustainable societies.

## **Social Resilience and Migrant Integration in Canada**

A social resilience approach is especially relevant for investigating the integration of international migrants arriving in Canada in the past 20 years, a period when integration has become increasingly variegated, difficult, and complex. We lay out the argument for the relevance of a social resilience approach to integration in three parts. First, we examine how the institutions aiming to assist international migrants vary from place to place within Canada. Second, the impacts of economic restructuring and neoliberal public policies on migrant integration are investigated. Finally, we discuss the proliferation of two-step pathways to permanent residence that mean increasing numbers of migrants who arrive as temporary residents live for long periods without access to many services, often intensifying integration challenges (Rajkumar et al., 2012; Samuk, 2020).

## **Variegated Integration Across Canadian Cities**

A social resilience approach is consistent with the dynamic and contextual nature of integration that is influenced substantially by when migrants arrive and where they settle (Dempsey, 2014; Hou & Picot, 2016). In the early 2000's, employment prospects in specific occupations influenced economic integration in Canada (Picot, 2004; Picot et al., 2008; Picot & Sweetman, 2012). In addition to labor market demand at the time migrants arrive, integration is affected by the locations where migrants settle. In Canada, provincial and municipal authorities play an increasing role in integration trajectories. For example, under provincial nominee programs, provinces have different criteria for selecting permanent residents. In Manitoba where recently arrived immigrants have high rates of employment, more than half of permanent residents are provincial nominees who are already employed in the province, whereas in other provinces where provincial nominees are admitted without a firm job offer, employment rates are lower (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). The recent housing experiences of Syrian refugees also illustrate the impacts of provincial policies on integration. In provinces that relaxed residency

requirements, refugee households moved into affordable social housing, while in provinces that retained their residency requirements, they were placed on lengthy waiting lists (Hamilton et al., 2020; Rose & Charette, 2017).

The potential impacts on integration of well-known variations in the availability and quality of employment and housing opportunities among and within Canadian cities are compounded by well-established geographical variations in the supports available to migrants. In Canada, migrants are confronted by four main groups of organizations that deliver services and integration supports; municipal and provincial governments, medical service providers, educational institutions, and civil society organizations (Praznik & Shields, 2018; Walton- Roberts et al., 2019). The four groups of organizations engage in a broad array of activities from offering services directly to newcomers to coordinating the organization and planning of services and advocating on behalf of the migrants and service providers. With mandates that range from the universal provision that characterizes schools and hospitals to civil society organizations that serve clients from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and others that focus on individual issues and ethnocultural populations, the four groups also receive different levels of public funding.<sup>2</sup> For example, schools and hospitals are primarily publicly funded, whereas many multicultural organizations receive funds from multiple levels of government that they supplement with private donation unlike faith groups, ethnic associations, and loose coalitions of engaged citizens and activists that rely mainly on donations.

Many major cities—such as Toronto and Montreal—have dense networks of civil society organizations that serve as service hubs and collectively constitute powerful agents that support resilience in vulnerable and migrant communities (DeVerteuil, 2017). The absence of such service hubs in smaller centers and suburbs (Lo et al., 2015; Mukhtar et al., 2016; Zuberi et al., 2018) may hamper integration, and even when available, suburban services are often viewed unfavorably. In Vancouver, immigrants reported that services offered at downtown locations were more relevant and effective than services offered at suburban locations (Zuberi et al., 2018).

With its emphasis on the local context and available supports, a social resilience approach considers the timing and geography of settlement (Dunn, 2013). It allows for the complicated and differentiated pathways that research is now revealing. At the same time, it encourages researchers, policymakers, and service providers to consider the dynamic nature of migrants' integration trajectories. A focus on social resilience necessarily draws attention to the diversity of institutions that influence integration and the interactions and inter-relations among them that influence the integration of international migrants in specific locales.

<sup>2</sup> In Canada, settlement services that aim to facilitate migrant integration often involve services delivered by non-profit, non-governmental organizations with funding from federal and provincial governments (Praznik & Shields, 2018). With its funding, the state exerts control over the nature and quality of services and supports and eligibility for services, a process of neoliberalization (Peck & Theodore, 2018).

## Restructured Labor and Housing Markets

A social resilience approach is also urgently needed to examine how social institutions can assist migrants who encounter persistent and often crippling obstacles to integration in Canada's restructured labor markets and housing markets. Labor markets are increasingly bifurcated between well-paid, secure, and permanent professional jobs demanding excellent language fluency and post-secondary qualifications and temporary or part-time jobs that require little educational preparation but pay low wages and offer few benefits or job security (Drolet, 2017). Even skilled jobs are more precarious and less stable than in the past. Most new entrants to the job market confront a labor market marked by the disappearance of standard employment norms and their displacement by less secure forms of employment (Procyk et al., 2017). In such highly polarized labor markets, it is not easy for migrants to work their way up from survival jobs to jobs commensurate with their qualifications and experience (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). Neoliberal job resilience demands employee flexibility, entrepreneurial spirit, and self-reliance that shifts the responsibility for employment success onto the individual. For example, the high levels of proficiency in one of Canada's official languages required for employment that pays well often place migrants at a disadvantage that they can only overcome with prolonged and appropriate language training (Haque, 2014). The social resilience approach speaks to the need for social institutions to mitigate the negative impacts of employment precarity and put in place supports to help newcomers navigate contemporary labor markets.

For minority migrants, discrimination exacerbates the difficulties of finding and keeping well-paid, secure employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience. Evidence of discrimination in earnings is now well documented (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2015; Smith & Fernandez, 2017). Even after controlling for differences in human capital, studies report persistent wage disparities between immigrant workers, especially racialized minorities, and their white, Canadian-born counterparts. Even though newcomers are on average better educated than Canadian-born of the same age and some minority newcomers are better educated than non-visible minority newcomers, the length of time required to reach wage parity with Canadian-born workers has increased. Often stuck in jobs that do not acknowledge their experience and qualifications, migrants' economic circumstances are also affected by constrained wage growth. Since 1961, Canadian average wages have increased more slowly than productivity, and in the past decade, real wages have been stagnant, except in regions where resource extraction buoyed them until 2014 (Brouillette et al., 2017; Russell & Dufour, 2016). Wage growth has been especially constrained for temporary jobs, the jobs that many migrants no matter how well qualified are forced to take when entering Canadian labor markets (Drolet, 2017).

Migrants' economic circumstance contributes to difficulties finding affordable and suitable housing in good repair in many Canadian cities. In the current neoliberal period, private market housing is treated as a financial investment that is judged on its returns rather than as a source of shelter. In many Canadian cities, housing costs, especially rents, have increased faster than average wages and average household incomes (Rose & Charette, 2017). As successive provincial and federal

governments have reduced their support for subsidized housing, newcomers' efforts to obtain affordable rental units have been stymied by growing shortages. Across Canada, more than 283,000 households had at least one member waiting for a subsidized unit in 2018 (Statistics Canada, 2019). Many newcomers also struggle to obtain housing that is large enough for their households of four, five, and six people. Suitability guidelines which dictate that children of different sexes should have separate bedrooms, a requirement that landlords sometimes enforce when selecting tenants, can worsen the shortage. The limited supply of suitable rental vacancies and their high rents may force newcomers into units that are poorly maintained and overcrowded.

In the context of deteriorating economic and social outcomes for migrants, a social resilience approach focuses attention on the institutional resources and strategies that can enhance integration. The research is urgent, especially during a pandemic when many newcomers are doing the jobs that other Canadians do not want to do. Precarious, dangerous, and dirty jobs such as retail, personal support, and meat-packing jobs expose newcomers disproportionately to the virus and then, they contribute inadvertently to community transmission (Bouka & Bouka, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). COVID-19 has been creating "two major groups along socio-economic lines: one that has the power to control its exposure to the coronavirus outbreak and another that is forced to choose between potential sickness or financial devastation" (Tankersley, 2020, A1). Newcomer groups are disproportionately represented among the vulnerable group. Additionally, recent immigrants have been negatively impacted by COVID-19-related job loss that is much deeper than the 2008 "great recession." Prolonged unemployment creates serious scarring that can have permanent and adverse economic outcomes for affected immigrants (Hou et al., 2020a; Hou et al., 2020b).

The risk of transmitting the virus is often compounded by newcomers' housing conditions. Overcrowding always poses a potential threat to physical and mental health but its adverse effects are especially problematic during the pandemic when it has been associated with increased transmission of COVID-19. Toronto and Montreal have documented high COVID-19 infection rates in neighborhoods that are low income with high concentrations of newcomers living in crowded housing units (CBC News, 2020; Lindeman, 2020).

### **The Diverse Pathways of Recent Migrants**

A social resilience approach is also valuable because it recognizes international migrants' varied pathways to integration in Canada. Routes to permanent residence in Canada have proliferated (Alboim & Cohl, 2012; Ferrer et al., 2014) with more people being admitted through two-step pathways. In some Provincial Nominee Programs, employers may nominate temporary foreign workers, even those admitted in the low-skill stream, for permanent residence after short periods of employment, sometimes only 12 or 18 months (Leitner & Preston, 2011). The Canadian Experience Class created in 2008 allows international students admitted originally on temporary visas to obtain permanent residence but only after they have graduated from

accredited Canadian post-secondary institutions and obtained required work experience. Finally, access to permanent residence is differentiated by skill. Many temporary foreign workers who are considered highly skilled may apply for permanent residence while less skilled workers are largely prohibited from settling permanently (Goldring et al., 2009; Rajkumar et al., 2012; Vosko et al., 2014).

Even as the numbers of people admitted with temporary status increased and pathways to permanent residence proliferated, the Canadian state still funds services and supports mainly for people admitted as permanent residents who are expected to become permanent residents.<sup>3</sup> Non-governmental organizations have scrambled to fund language training and other services for expanding numbers of temporary foreign workers and international students (Praznik & Shields, 2018). The gaps in services mean that temporary residents who become permanent residents are likely to face additional hardships. Until recently, they had fewer opportunities to learn one of Canada's official languages, acquire professional skills and accreditation, receive mentoring and other job counselling programs, and benefit from orientation programs. Case studies of live-in caregivers reveal the long-term challenges that result (Banerjee et al., 2018; Pratt, 2012).

As routes to permanent residence have proliferated, migrants are increasingly racialized minorities. Continuing a trend that began in 1981, more than 80% of permanent residents who arrived between 2011 and 2016 self-identified as a racialized minority (Statistics Canada, 2016). Growing shares of racialized newcomers are settling outside the major gateway cities of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, in places where the British and French have long been the dominant groups. Even though Canadian society has become pluralist, recent minority newcomers are still vulnerable to overt prejudice and systemic discrimination that damage their material circumstances and may undermine their psychological and physical well-being (Ray & Preston, 2009; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2017).

## **A Research Agenda: Social Resilience and Integration**

The research agenda that emerges from a social resilience approach focuses on three aspects of integration: the array of institutions that influence integration, the relationships within and between institutions in specific locales, and migrants' diverse pathways to integration. In addition to outlining the rationale for each research topic, we also advocate specific research methods, namely, longitudinal and comparative research designs.

First, integration research from a social resilience approach requires detailed information about the institutional contexts in which migrants settle. Recording relevant state policies about integration and documenting the local institutions that offer support to different migrants require a broad net to capture the range of institutions

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<sup>3</sup> The persistence of this policy in the face of the growing prevalence of two-step migration exemplifies what (Collyer, Hinger, & Schweitzer, 2020) have labelled disintegration policies that actively discourage and disrupt achievement of integration.

that influence integration. They include ethnic associations, religious establishments, and loose coalitions of activists and migrants that offer supports on an informal basis as well as formally constituted non-profit, non-governmental organizations that often receive some government funding in Canada. In all instances, equal attention needs to be paid to organizations that serve a broad swath of the public, such as schools, libraries, hospitals, and community health centers for whom migrants may be a principal clientele even though their mandate is universal, public coverage. In addition to documenting the services and supports that institutions offer to migrants, their advocacy on behalf of migrants and their efforts to give voice to migrants' concerns also warrant attention.

Second, in places where economic restructuring has bifurcated labor markets and made it harder for migrants to secure affordable housing, the resilience of institutions themselves, especially the quality of their leadership and the collaboration and cooperation among institutions of different sizes and with different sources of funding, is an important area of research in a social resilience approach. We aim to identify the strategies that will enable nimble responses to changes in local context that threaten the institutions' capacities to serve their clients (Meinhard et al., 2016). Studies in other policy areas (David, 2018; Hertzman & Siddiqui, 2013) suggest that welcoming communities would benefit from deeply rooted and on-going respectful relations between large, public institutions such as school boards that benefit from relatively stable funding and small, non-profit institutions that often have more precarious finances. Certainly, the immigrant-serving agencies that facilitated the initial settlement of Syrian refugees in Canada reported that they succeeded because of ongoing collaborations among local institutions and between federal, provincial, and local institutions (Walton-Roberts et al., 2019).

During the pandemic, the Canadian Federal Government Department responsible for funding services and supports for migrants in many provinces and the non-profit non-governmental organizations that receive these funds have been highly adaptive in the face of the crisis. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) maintained its financial support at the same time that it relaxed outcome and reporting requirements. The agencies reshaped and shifted programming to online digital formats as offices were forced to close. This transformation enabled many clients to continue to access services although the most vulnerable migrants who often lacked digital skills and digital access were at risk of being shutout. To maintain some services for vulnerable clients, agencies not only instituted public health measures, they also negotiated with IRCC so that workers who offered in-person services at the height of the pandemic received a wage premium. In the future, the challenges will be to re-open offices safely and maintain operations in a post-COVID-19 environment where severe fiscal constraints are anticipated (Shields & Abu Alrob, 2020). A social resilience research agenda focuses attention on the post-pandemic fiscal supports and institutional "partnerships" between government and non-profit, non-governmental organizations that are key to the resilience of institutions offering immigrant supports.

Finally, to understand the proliferation of pathways to permanence and their impacts on integration requires nuanced and detailed information about migrants' decisions and experiences from their initial arrival in Canada. A recent study by Hou

and Lu (2017) underscores how migrants' experiences as temporary international students affect earnings even after people become permanent residents. Despite entering the Canadian labor market with Canadian educational qualifications, the earnings of migrant workers are on average lower than those of equally well-educated Canadian-born workers. Years of employment in Canada prior to graduation had much less impact on earnings than whether Canadian-educated men and women had a well-paid job before obtaining permanent residence. While this study illustrates the subtle intricacies of pathways to permanence, it also raises questions about international students' social networks, knowledge of the job market, and preparation for job searches that are key components of a social resilience approach. The same careful analysis is required for other immigrants who enter on other types of temporary visas as well as to assess the impacts of pre-migration services on permanent residents' integration. Moreover, the same attention given to earnings needs to be paid to other aspects of integration including civic participation and sense of belonging.

An intersectional analysis that takes account of the diverse social characteristics of migrants and their various integration trajectories is needed to investigate how social characteristics help migrants overcome obstacles. Although admission category is especially salient since it affects access to publicly funded institutions and services of all types (Goldring et al., 2009; Rajkumar et al., 2012), effective evaluation of its impacts requires simultaneously considering the confounding effects of many other social characteristics including social class, gender, ethno-racial background, age, sexuality, and language abilities on integration. Understanding the intersectional dynamics of integration is crucial in a social resilience approach.

## Research Methods and a Social Resilience Approach

To achieve these research goals requires longitudinal and comparative research. Since integration is dynamic so that the social characteristics associated with economic and other outcomes change from one time-period to the next (Bonikowska et al., 2015), research must examine migrants' integration over time. Although there is no single best approach to longitudinal research, understanding of integration dynamics would benefit from prospective research that collects information from a group of migrants at several different points in time as well as retrospective methods that rely on recall of past events, emotions, and behaviors (Menard, 2002). The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada that was conducted between 2001 and 2005 illustrates the benefits of a prospective approach. Within 6 months of becoming permanent residents, newcomers were asked to participate in the first wave of the survey with subsequent waves occurring approximately 18 months and 3 and a half years later. The data allowed across-time analysis of the use of services, the labor market experiences of newcomers, and their housing careers (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). Despite its success from the perspective of researchers and policy-makers, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada ended in 2005, due to its high cost and the Conservative Government's skepticism about evidence-based decision-making (Walton-Roberts et al., 2014). Cost considerations also limited the

utility of the information available from the longitudinal survey. The sample was so small that information could not be disaggregated much below the geographical scale of the province, despite the growing evidence of substantial metropolitan differences in integration (Rose & Charette, 2017; Hiebert, 1999; Mendez et al., 2006). Furthermore, the questionnaire consisted mainly of closed-ended questions that did not allow newcomers to describe their experiences in their own words.

Retrospective studies are usually quicker and easier to conduct since they only require one data collection phase to retrieve information from the past. They can involve the collection of life histories and biographies as well as questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews (Menard, 2002). Although inherently flawed by errors in recall, the geographical coverage of retrospective studies that can be conducted in all the locations where migrants settle; major metropolitan areas, second-tier metropolitan areas, small towns, and rural areas are an offsetting advantage. Combinations of longitudinal research methods are especially useful for examining the impacts of institutions on integration. A prospective longitudinal study that traces the experiences of migrants would complement retrospective studies that ask migrants with similar integration outcomes to recall their experiences and reflect on their interactions with different institutions. The goal is to investigate migrants' involvement with a broad array of institutions including those targeting newcomers, ethnocultural associations that serve specific ethnic, racial, and religious groups, and organizations catering to the general public.

Research using a social resilience lens also needs to be comparative, across places, people, and institutions. A social resilience approach acknowledges that migrants' capacities to overcome obstacles and learn from these experiences depend in part on the institutions with which they interact. Rather than just catalogue the ever-changing array of services and supports available to migrants in specific locations, a social resilience lens focuses attention on the institutions that offer supports and services, no matter where they are located. For example, pre-arrival services promoted by federal and provincial governments are available online or through institutions in the countries of origin of migrants. Comparing migrants' experiences of integration among places provides opportunities to document how various institutions influence integration processes and outcomes and reveals absent institutions and the impacts of their absences. The goal is to problematize the resources that are available to migrants and examine how they are provided, be it on a fee-for-service basis by private firms, subsidized fees by non-profits, and free services to eligible clients by public and non-profit institutions. Specifically, research will investigate methods for institutions to track their activities, staffing, and funding in ways that will inform migrants and other service providers about available support.

This research agenda acknowledges the tremendous resilience of newcomers who overcome numerous obstacles as they build new lives in Canadian communities. We recommend a social resilience approach for investigating their prolonged and difficult paths to integration. Investigating how institutions affect integration processes highlights the strategies and resources that migrants use to overcome challenges and the impacts of their success on their own and future migrants' integration trajectories. Such research also has the potential to identify the policies and programs that contribute to disintegration, especially when challenges to integration are likely to

be heightened by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The research requires a longitudinal design that takes account of the social diversity of migrants and their migration histories as they settle in specific places. Investigating how institutions at all geographical scales affect settlement in a comparative framework will reveal initiatives that succeed and the reasons some are not successful. This information is crucial for supporting newcomers effectively now and in the future.

## Conclusions

This paper has outlined the distinguishing characteristics of social resilience, explained its relevance to contemporary immigrant integration, and proposed a research agenda from a social resilience perspective to enhance understanding of immigrant integration and the policies and programs that will facilitate it. Explaining the concept of social resilience, the discussion extends the concept in migration studies from a singular focus on individuals to a relational approach that pays attention to the institutions of all types that influence integration. Moving away from a social-ecological view of migrant resilience that is grounded in neoliberal self-reliance, we advocate a critical social resilience approach that emphasizes local and institutional support and addresses the institutional inequalities and power relations that shape migrants' capacities to obtain resources, especially during a crisis like the current pandemic. Considering the geographical aspects of integration, we highlight how a social resilience approach recognizes location-specific factors that have various impacts on different migrants. Social resilience is conceptualized as a theoretical lens as well as an action model through which the two-way relations between migrants and social institutions can be strengthened with the goal of resisting and redressing inequalities and thereby facilitating equitable integration.

We have reviewed how a social resilience approach acknowledges new understandings of integration as a dynamic and highly variable process that begins with diverse pathways to permanence and is shaped by contemporary restructuring that excludes many people, especially newcomers, from local labor and housing markets. Although Canadian examples underscore the merits of a social resilience approach to integration, the approach is well suited to investigating integration and disintegration in many other national contexts marked by contemporary international migration. Social resilience calls attention to the contextual nature of integration and the need for detailed analysis of institutions and migrants on the part of researchers, policymakers, service providers, and advocates.

Throughout the discussion of a social resilience approach to integration, we have drawn attention to the relevance of the approach for understanding contemporary settlement processes, experiences, and outcomes. We use examples of the experiences of international migrants during the global pandemic to illustrate how a social resilience approach illuminates immigrant integration generally. As migration flows and the integration trajectories of contemporary international migrants became more unpredictable during the pandemic, numerous institutions ranging from government departments to non-profit settlement agencies played critical roles as anchors of support for newcomers. A social resilience approach draws attention to the adaptability

and effectiveness of such institutions, particularly when they are under stress. Social resilience's emphasis on dynamics identifies COVID-19 as both a "great disrupter" of health and economy and as a "great revealer" of the vastly unequal burdens born by some segments of the population because of the pandemic, including migrants and immigrants. The pandemic also demonstrates the importance of agency. COVID-19 has brought to the fore political dynamics including the emergence of CoronaRacism and a progressive movement demanding structural reforms to address inequalities. Immigrant populations are actively engaged in these struggles and a social resilience approach underscores the key role played by their agency.

In terms of public policy, the social resilience perspective speaks to the necessity of an inclusive approach to economic and social recovery and restructuring—the need to "build back better" post-pandemic. Neoliberalism's hyper-competitive and individualized model of market-centered public policy has been unable to address the scale and scope of the COVID-19 crisis widening socioeconomic divides that are so visible within the migrant population. The mobilization of institutional actors such as immigrant settlement agencies, and other community-based civil society organizations that were supported with public resources during the pandemic, and large-scale state supports, often accessed at the local level, bring to the forefront the effectiveness and value of collectivist responses to societal challenges rooted in a social resilience policy frame.

Finally, we proposed a research agenda that will enhance understanding of integration and add to the growing literature about social resilience. The research agenda advocates an in-depth examination of the social characteristics of migrants to recognize their diverse needs and intersectional challenges followed by an inventory of organizations and their roles to understand the local institutional contexts where international migrants live. Building on this background information, the research agenda calls for longitudinal and comparative research that captures the dynamic nature of integration and examines institutional responses to support integration in different national and urban contexts, especially during the current crisis. Research informed by a critical social resilience approach will not only inform ongoing debates about services for international migrants in Canada and elsewhere, it will also contribute to efforts to challenge neoliberal views of resilience, especially for international migrants whose arrival and presence will pose challenges long after the COVID-19 pandemic resolves.

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