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Monographic Section

## Socio-Professional Integration and International Mobility: The Case of French Engineers Under the France-Quebec Mutual Recognition Arrangements

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**Abstract.** This article examines the dynamics of admission into the professional practice of French-trained engineers into Quebec's professional system. It also looks at the socio-professional integration of these engineers who have sought admission through the France-Quebec MRA since it went into effect on July 18, 2013. Therefore, we consider not only conditions of admission in the professional system, but also factors facilitating or impeding their socio-professional integration, and the impact of these factors on the entry into professional practice. This article also considers the roles of some stakeholders involved in the MRA process and the dynamics among them, as well as the effectiveness of policies that regulate immigration and the labour market, looking at the socio-professional integration as a multi-faceted process that brings together actors mainly from immigration, the professional system, the training establishments and the employers themselves. By analysing these professionals' trajectories, we also look at the impact of institutional disjunctions, with the aim of identifying solutions towards a more efficient integration of these foreign-trained professionals (FTPs). Our methodological protocol involved a case study approach (Creswell 2007) combining semi-structured interviews, participant observation, informal meetings with some stakeholders and documentary analysis about professional systems, focusing on the dynamics between regulation of professions and the socio-professional integration of FTPs in this context.

**Keywords.** Foreign-trained professionals; regulation of professions; socio-professional integration; mutual recognition arrangement; France; Quebec; governance.

### INTRODUCTION

This work is part of various research projects that started in 2012 (Bédard, Roger 2015; Houle 2014), which analyse the admission processes

of French professionals into Quebec's regulated professions' system, through mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) between France and Quebec. These arrangements aim at facilitating entry into professional practice among 26 regulated professions in each territory. Our research projects examine trajectories of various regulated professionals, mainly doctors, nurses, engineers, architects and lawyers, from immigration to actual employment, through admission by the regulating body, completing required courses and training and negotiating their integration into workplace and society, in Quebec and comparing with other Canadian provinces on some aspects. Our starting point looks at the equilibrium between two contrasting objectives in this context: the regulated professions' aim at protecting the public (closure and control), and the admission of regulated professionals trained abroad (opening through legal and political measures). Through this mitigation, regulating bodies operationalise protection of the public, but also a selective closure about the eligibility of candidates and conditions of admission. Meanwhile, they also put forward requirements to fulfil through other institutions, mainly training establishments (universities and colleges) and workplaces (mostly private firms, in the case of engineers). Such requirements include various processes of evaluating gaps between the country of origin's prevailing initial training system and professional practice, and the host country's corresponding characteristics. This article specifically examines the trajectories of French-trained engineers migrating to Quebec, by comparing the discourse of stakeholders in Quebec's professional system and that of French-trained engineers that enter professional practice, after admission first for immigration, then by the regulating body through the France-Quebec MRA, and further continue by fulfilling the required training prior to hiring and entering professional practice. After presenting our theoretical framework, we situate this agreement and its arrangements in the context of Quebec's professional system. We then outline our methodological approach before presenting data from interviews with French engineers and stakeholders in the Quebec professional system. The subsequent analysis offers an opportunity to examine the distance between policies and practices, the focus on economic dimensions neglecting other, more critical dimensions, as well as the actions of various institutions in Quebec's professional system, in order to identify critical steps towards these immigrants' socio-professional integration. By analysing these professionals' trajectories, this article also examines the impact of institutional disjunctions, with the aim of identifying solutions towards a more efficient integration of these foreign-trained professionals (FTPs).

## REGULATING PROFESSIONS, PROTECTING THE PUBLIC, AND THE MARKET

Regulated professions constitute a closed market based on asymmetry of information regarding specific areas of knowledge (Akerlof 1970). Our research draws from the sociology of professions' literature, in particular to analyse its territories' closure and related justifications, beside the State and the market (Freidson 2001) and in terms of distinct cognitive processes and work practices (Abbott 1988). Admission of foreign-trained professionals needs a specific set of justification for the required supplementary training and further measures of adaptation (for example, working under the supervision of a licensed professional during a few months or a year), in order to protect the public, which is the professional system's official main objective. Implementation of these measures includes various institutions, mainly colleges and universities for training, and workplaces for supervision.

To implement this closure, there are of course great variations between countries, reflecting historical and cultural differences that have led to varying mechanisms (legal, political, and symbolic) (Champy 2009; Freidson 2001; Saks 1995). In Canada, each province and territory rules over its own professional system, known to be highly regulated and formalised. Among them, Quebec's professional system appears to be the most complex and regulated (Bédard *et alii* 2018). Its actors (regulating bodies, legislator, professional associations, training facilities, employers and professionals) operate within the legal context dictated by the *Professions' Code* (*Code des professions*), making explicit every regulating body's functions and rules to follow. It is through this legal context that the work of 46 bodies (*ordres professionnels*) regulate 54 professions in Quebec, for a total of over 380 000 professionals. The engineers' regulating body, the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec*, is the second-largest one, with some 64 000 members. Some of the smaller *ordres* have as few as 200 members.

Our research also draws from studies on global migration of foreign-trained professionals, which mostly look

at conditions of integration into the receiving country. Since entry into professional practice is also tributary to conditions of social integration (for example, at the workplace, but also for spouse and family, housing, schooling, etc.), our objectives are to analyse foreign-trained professionals' conditions of entry into professional practice in that global sense. We, therefore, hope to contribute to both of these fields by our outlook, considering that the most efficient, just or transparent mechanism for admitting a professional into a profession's regulating body is useless if other institutions are not "at par" in their own actual measures and practices towards these foreign-trained professionals. In other words, since entry into professional practice does not depend solely on the regulating body's actions, these interrelations must be considered in the research agenda on foreign-trained professionals' trajectories. Our approach seeks to bring together the literature about the global movement of skilled workers and recognition of foreign-trained professionals who seek to practice a regulated profession.

## SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF REGULATED PROFESSIONS

We understand integration as a process and state to include multiple dimensions or spheres that are part of a larger social structure. This process also includes an interactive component between the different dimensions, actors and institutions that compose them. Individual integration into a social structure comes into effect under a multilevel and multi-sectoral approach. The systematic approach of Lockwood (1964) allows us, empirically, to carry out an analysis of the "integration system" as processual and multidimensional.

Several models aim to explain the migrant's integration in a social structure (Esser 2004, in Heckmann 2005). All of these models share a multidimensional conception of integration (Esser 2004, in Heckmann 2005; Heckmann, Schnapper 2003; Heckmann 2005) and their focus on the consequences of the migrant's integration on host society.

We have adopted an analytical model based on work by Friedrich Heckmann (2005). This author identifies the existence of four dimensions of immigrants' socio-professional integration: 1) a structural dimension; 2) a cultural dimension; 3) a relational dimension; 4) a dimension of identification, related to feelings of belonging in the host society; and 5) a dimension that sees integration as a process of learning and socialisation.

For data analysis, we group these five dimensions into two broad categories. The first one includes structural aspects of integration (structural dimension) and the second one includes all socio-cultural and relational aspects, as well as those related to socialisation in the host society (cultural and relational dimension).

We define the structural dimension as the set of laws, regulations, administrative procedures and governance concerning immigration, admission to the profession and the labour market, as well as access to host society's institutions. This is particularly relevant in the case of professionals trying to enter a regulated profession through the MRA between France and Quebec.

The cultural dimension refers to the learning and understanding of cultural codes, related to employment as well as to the way of interacting with the host society in general. The relational dimension includes all kinds of migrant workers' relationships with members of the host society (social ties with colleagues, but also with their superiors, friendships, family, etc., so as their involvement in civil society). The reason for operationalising these dimensions responds to an integrated understanding of the processes of socialisation, which is enacted through structural, cultural, relational and identity aspects.

### *The socio-professional integration of foreign-trained engineers*

There is a large body of literature about the integration of skilled migrants, particularly in Europe, which discusses the short-term internships of foreign workers (Beaverstock 2011; Findlay *et alii* 1996; Walsh 2006), inter-company transfers (Millar, Salt 2008), and professional service firms (Faulconbridge *et alii* 2009). These studies emphasise the temporary and international nature of immigration. Other studies attempt to understand state pol-

icies for attracting skilled migrants (Kofman 2005; Hawthorne 2013; 2015). These policies aim to recruit skilled migrants, but do not examine their long-term trajectories nor their retention in the host country. Despite their privileged status, skilled migrants must adjust to the professional norms and practices in the host country (Walsh 2006).

In the United States as well as in Canada and Quebec, several studies demonstrate the importance of informal and interpersonal networks for facilitating an immigrant's professional integration (Lin 1999; Arcand *et alii* 2009; Pellerin 2013).

More specifically, Friesen (2011) has documented the importance for foreign-educated engineers of learning the appropriate behavioural codes pertaining to the local work culture, which are potentially very different from those in their country of origin. They become competent in interpreting the hierarchical and social codes and behaviours in their workplace.

As for junior engineers trained abroad, recent studies demonstrate that this group encounters the most difficulties finding employment as compared to those with Quebec diplomas. For example, in 2013 the rate of unemployment for FTP members of the Quebec Order of Engineers (*Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec*, OIQ) was 6.5%, compared to 2.5% for all members of the Order. Nonetheless, once foreign-trained engineers are admitted to the Order (OIQ), their employment rate tends to be equivalent to that of engineers trained in Quebec. Some foreign-trained engineers even have an advantage, due to their previous work experience. This shows the difficulties faced by engineers trained abroad at being admitted into professional practice. Instead, they often turn to second-hand employment niches to survive and provide revenues for their family, thereby waiving off the required processes towards admission to practice engineering, at least officially and legally.

Nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of all professional engineers work in jobs that require membership in the Order (OIQ). Yet, according to this same study, belonging to the Order does not translate necessarily into a salary raise: «There is no significant difference between salaries and overall earnings according to these criteria [membership in the Order], except for the 10% who are most highly paid, for whom membership creates a salary raise of 6.26%» (Racila 2015: 10, our translation).

### *Mutual recognition arrangements in Quebec: history, guiding principles and procedures of recognition*

Signed in 2008, the France-Québec Agreement is a prime example of an international agreement aiming to facilitate the movement of skilled workers across territories. To paraphrase Quebec's International Relations and Francophony Ministry<sup>1</sup>, this Agreement aims to address skilled labour shortages and to respond more efficiently to the needs of both Quebec and French companies. Following the signing of the Agreement in 2008, the main actors within both territories' professional systems were pressured from both governments to examine quickly the feasibility of implementing the Agreement through profession-specific mutual arrangements. Furthermore, this Agreement has since been presented as a step towards «negotiating an economic partnership between the European Union and Canada»<sup>2</sup>, now commonly known as CETA. The CETA (*Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement*) partnership now being under the process of ratification by each jurisdiction concerned, these regulatory changes are part of a larger plan, aiming to support the movement of workers in the context of an economic partnership between the European Union and Canada.

In Quebec, in order for the negotiated MRAs to become effective in Quebec, specific regulations were developed and applied to each of the professions involved, in accordance with Quebec's *Codes des professions*. To date, MRAs involve mutual recognition for 27 professions regulated by professional orders (and for 36 regulated trades) in Quebec.

Instead of processing cases one by one as in a more traditional approach, each MRA conducts a comparative

<sup>1</sup> Website of the *Ministère des relations internationales et de la francophonie*. <http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/Content/documents/fr/2008-12.pdf> (in French), consulted on April 18, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Website of the *Ministère des relations internationales et de la francophonie*. <http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/en/ententes-et-engagements/ententes-internationales/reconnaissance-qualifications/entente-quebec-france>, consulted on May 21, 2018.

analysis that defines the differences between professional practice in each jurisdiction (France and Quebec). This analysis then defines the additional training and/or internships needed to enter professional practice in the host society for all eligible candidates. Therefore, it includes the need to coordinate with other institutions (mostly, training and internship). Each MRA follows five guiding principles: protect public health and safety; maintain the quality of professional services; equity, transparency and reciprocity; compliance with French-language standards, and efficacy of mutual recognition of professional competence<sup>3</sup>.

Protecting public health and safety is the cardinal principle of the professional system and is thus logically found at the heart of the MRA. For workers already holding professional permits in France, MRAs create an accelerated process for obtaining a professional permit in Quebec (as compared to the process required for other foreign-trained professionals, FTPs), while also assuring the protection of public safety (Sweetman *et alii* 2015).

In order to guarantee that the recognition of professional skills upholds the principle of protecting the public, the various professional orders in Quebec have developed “compensatory measures” when facing “substantial differences”. To this end,

in order to meet the substantial differences concerning training or apprenticeship<sup>4</sup> programs, the Agreement establishes that the regulating organisations must determine if these differences can be compensated for by the applicant’s professional experience. If this measure is judged inadequate, they can require other compensatory measures, such as an adaptation period, an aptitude test, or additional training. (Houle 2015, our translation)

For engineers, a list of over 400 French training institutions, periodically updated, states the recognised establishments. Upon establishing their eligibility, each French-trained candidate must work for a full year under the supervision of an engineer who is a member of the Quebec Order of Engineers (*Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec*, OIQ). Upon completing this internship and passing the Order’s admission exam, the engineer is entered on the Roll of the OIQ.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article draws from data collected through mainly two research projects. The first one ran from 2012 to 2015 and was financed by the *Office des professions du Québec*, the *Conseil interprofessionnel du Québec* and the *Institut national de recherche scientifique* (INRS). The second one, from 2015 to 2018, was a larger partnership financed by Canada’s Social and Human Research Council (SSHRC), in partnership with the *Office des professions du Québec*, the *Conseil interprofessionnel du Québec* and the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse*. Two smaller projects also completed specific issues around admission and recognition of foreign-trained professionals in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, between 2015 and 2018. Certificates of ethics obtained for each project specify that we offered conditions of participation under free and informed consent, with the usual anonymity of participants. All first names used here are pseudonyms; we translated verbatims from French.

This article examines the dynamics of admission into the professional practice of French-trained engineers into Quebec’s professional system. It also looks at the socio-professional integration of these engineers who have sought admission through the France-Quebec MRA since it went into effect on July 18, 2013. Therefore, we consider not only the conditions of admission in the professional system, but also the factors that have facilitated or impeded their socio-professional integration, as explained above (Heckmann 2005), and the impact of these factors on the retention of professionals and their families. We also take into account the roles of some stakeholders involved in the MRA process and the dynamics among them, as well as the effectiveness of policies that regulate immigration

<sup>3</sup> Website of the *Ministère des relations internationales et de la francophonie*. <http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/en/ententes-et-engagements/ententes-internationales/reconnaissance-qualifications/entente-en-details>, consulted on May 21, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Website of the *Ministère des relations internationales et de la francophonie*. [http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/Content/documents/en/procedure\\_commune\\_entente\\_qualif\\_prof\\_FrQc\\_en.pdf](http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/Content/documents/en/procedure_commune_entente_qualif_prof_FrQc_en.pdf), consulted on May 21, 2018.

and the labour market. This includes the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec*, the *Conseil interprofessionnel du Québec*, community organisations, French-trained engineers and their employers. We subscribe to the neo-institutionalist approach (Rizza 2008), examining how various institutions contribute to or impede such integration.

Our methodological protocol involved the case study approach (Creswell 2007) combining semi-structured interviews (14), including eight engineers trained in France and admitted through the MRA, and six key informants. Among the eight engineers, three were civil engineers, three electrical engineers and two from other engineering fields. Among the six key informants, three were stakeholders in the Québec professional system, two from community organisations and associations involved in the integration of skilled immigrant workers, especially French engineers, and one from an employer (who employed two of the engineers interviewed). We added participant observation at meetings held by community organisations and the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec* about our study's object. We also met informally with three other actors involved in the France-Québec MRA's governance, and documentary analysis was included as well. This methodological protocol was developed to validate data collected through triangulation (Céfaï 2003).

We selected engineers through a first round of call for participation with the help of the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec*. Afterwards, the snowball method allowed us to reach a sufficient number of participants to ensure data saturation.

We first interviewed the key informants, gathered and analysed the relevant documentation, and finally conducted semi-structured interviews with engineers. Most of the interviewees are just starting their careers, after some years of work in France, with the exception of three, who arrived in Québec by their mid-careers.

Two factors limited the scope of our data collection. First, due to the MRA for engineers' recent implementation, we had to wait for sufficient cohorts of French-trained engineers to go through this new arrangement. Second, despite a positive response to our research initiative, representatives of the employers were relatively reluctant to participate in interviews.

## ANALYSIS: THE PROCESS OF SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION

### *a) Structural dimension*

This dimension includes all government structures related to professions' mechanisms of regulation and governance, the dynamics between actors and normative and legal guidelines related to socio-professional integration of French engineers eligible to MRA process.

The aspects of structural integration analysed here are the following: 1) the effect of certain policies pertaining to immigration and the integration of skilled migrants in Québec; 2) the specific MRA process for engineers; 3) the coherence of political discourse with the reality of lived experiences, both in terms of the labour market and at a social level; 4) the practice of the profession and its differences between Québec and France; and 5) the effect of other policies on the integration socio-professional workers – including education and recognition of diplomas, access to social services, housing, etc.

*Various institutions, lack of coordination.* A wide range of diverse institutions and actors play a role in the development, implementation and application of the MRA. They likewise play an important role in the processes related to the socio-professional integration of French-trained engineers in Québec under this arrangement. This study finds that employers – and the services they have established for welcoming and integrating French professionals – play a very important role in these migrants' processes of socio-professional integration. A few firms have developed expertise in welcoming French engineers, where a designated employee accompanies and supports the integration of French employees, both in the workplace as well as in Québec society, providing valuable information and helping them with the process of finding housing, a physician, and so forth.

We do not have a formal welcoming program. We act according to each case. I make sure, well, how and where he arrives, is there someone who accompanies him on his arrival. I did it once; one person arrived during the Christmas season. At that moment I went to pick him up at the airport and brought him to his apartment. I welcomed him as best I could. (André, key informant)

Other companies offer the services of a lawyer to assist French-trained engineers with the necessary steps for immigration beyond the procedures related to the MRA. Those engineers who have had access to such services are unanimous in stressing their benefits. Due to this assistance, they were able to focus instead on preparing their dossier for becoming a member of the Order (OIQ). These types of practices are more frequent in engineering firms that are part of a French company or which have subsidiaries in France, and accordingly are familiar with integrating professionals from France into their team.

As for the steps required to enter the Roll of the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec* (OIQ), most of the engineers interviewed stressed the importance of preparing their dossier in advance, so as to accelerate the process once they arrived in Québec. Several of them had already started to prepare their dossier a year in advance:

My wife and I, we had already prepared one year before while we were still on Reunion Island. That's why, once I arrived I quickly got my junior engineer title, and after that, I passed the exam, and that's it! (Victor, engineer)

*Lack of MRA awareness among employers.* Some informants also addressed the obstacles and problems caused by the lack of awareness among certain employers about the MRA process and required documents, especially concerning recognition of their academic qualifications. Several engineers who obtained/benefitted from an MRA and who obtained a restrictive temporary permit, nevertheless were asked to request another comparative evaluation of their academic qualifications by the Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion (MIDI). Considering the existence of the MRA this process is unnecessary. Engineers and key informants have underlined this issue. The large number of complaints about this has led the OIQ to organise information sessions concerning the MRA for employers. In a previous study, a similar lack of understanding about the MRA among employers was also reported with the cases of social workers and architects (Bédard, Roger 2015).

This study thus demonstrates that the employer becomes one of the central actors for developing the professional and socio-cultural knowledge, playing an important factor helping or hindering these professionals in their workplace integration and the receiving society in general. It is a critical step towards getting familiar with the culture at work and outside of work. Difficulties experienced in these steps can lead to misunderstandings, frustrations and further disillusion, even to failure of the immigration project and return to France. Therefore, these key steps need to be included, along with the usual requirements for immigration and admission into the professional system per se.

*Academic, social and legal differences between France and Québec.* There are many differences between France and Québec's regulations for the engineering profession and between the academic training of engineers in each country, which make it difficult to understand each country's systems and the requirements put in place by the Québec Order of Engineers (OIQ) to admit French candidates. In France, engineers are initially trained in the *Grandes Écoles* system, which is part of the professional schools, apart from universities. Afterwards, they receive their engineer titles from the *Commission des titres d'ingénieurs* (CTI). Each of these numerous *Grandes Écoles* has varying levels of prestige. Moreover, marks are somewhat unimportant; the degree, title and mostly, the name of the training establishment are paramount. In Québec, the title of engineer ("Ing.") is issued by the OIQ upon completion of an engineering faculty or school, which is part of a university. Its importance is somewhat equivalent to that of the transcript for admission by the Québec Order of Engineers. However, among employers, it is with recognised skills and experiences that an engineer succeeds in securing a position. In other words, once admitted by the Order, academic documents become less important and demonstrated skills are key to professional advancement. Therefore, French engineers need to put forward concrete accomplishments instead of their *Grande École* based on which the CTI issued their title. This emphasis on demonstrated accomplishments is much more present in Québec than in France, echoing a North-American work culture.

An additional difference is that the OIQ requests a copy of each student's academic transcripts, a common practice in North America. These documents are routinely kept by individuals after completing their studies. In contrast, very few French-educated engineers keep a copy of their transcripts, and requesting them years later can be a burden, thereby delaying the engineer's entry on the Order's role.

It is also difficult for these engineers to produce proof of their previous professional experience, as required by the OIQ. In some cases, this is a sensitive problem for an engineer, since they must reveal their plan to leave France to their employer. In recognition of this problem, the OIQ has reconsidered the requirements they have set concerning engineers' previous professional experience. Likewise, other frustrating administrative aspects of the MRA are being reviewed, as experience shows these shortcomings.

Another great difference relates to the amount of responsibility assumed by the individual engineer. In Quebec, each engineer takes personal responsibility for their work when they sign off on projects and cost estimates. In contrast, in France, each engineering firm assumes full legal responsibility for the actions of its engineers. Accordingly, as noted by the informants in this study, the work of an engineer in Quebec is much more regulated than in France, particularly due to the fact that each engineer holds individual responsibility for their work and their mandate to protect the public, whereas in France, the engineering firms take responsibility for their engineers' professional actions.

I discovered – personally, I didn't know – that engineering is highly regulated in Quebec. It's not that way in France; an engineer is an engineer. There is no order, and there are no restrictions for signing documents, etc. This is truly specific to Quebec. (Luc, engineer)

The engineering association in France serves more of a support role for professionals, whereas in Quebec the Order's primary task is to ensure public safety. Besides, its membership is mandatory to exercise the engineering profession in Quebec. This helps explain the OIQ's strict admission requirements for foreign-trained engineers:

I was surprised because I thought the OIQ was an organisation that protected engineers. And no, it is an organisation that protects, rather, the public. (...) It exercises strong control over engineers. (Luc, engineer).

*Alignment of political discourse with reality of lived experiences.* Several informants in this study also noted that the discourse promoted by the Ministry of Immigration (MIDI), which aims to attract foreign professionals to work in Quebec, presents false information, can lure immigrants and does not correspond to the multi-layered realities of integration. There seem to be many discrepancies between this discourse and the lived experiences of migrants during their first months of integration, notably concerning the availability of places in government-subsidised day care centres for their children and the length of the workday (not shorter than in France).

There are many, many frustrations that are experienced in relation to the image that Quebec gives in France as being the host country facilitating the recognition of skills. When people come here, it's not always so easy; people are realising that the process is very long and it creates a lot of difficulties for themselves, for the immigrant who comes to work, and for the partner who comes to work, who often leaves a job in France and comes to Quebec. We do not recognise that person's profession, especially in the area of health. That, I would say, creates a lot of frustration. (André, key informant)

In addition, some engineers note their deception in coming to Quebec and trying to balance their work and family life:

In terms of work and family conciliation, it's the same (...). Yes, I work as much as in France, but I have fewer holidays. That's it (Victor, engineer).

*Professional integration of partners.* In most cases, these engineers' plans to migrate includes moving their families, which thus holds implications for their partners and children. This aspect adds to the relationship between engineers' retention in Quebec and the conditions that favour the social and professional integration of these



workers and their families. Consequently, a strong factor for retaining these engineers in Quebec is the possibility for their partners to have their academic credentials recognised and to be able to practice a profession similar to their field of experience from France. Yet many obstacles impede their partners' socio-professional integration, since having their academic and professional credentials recognised entails further requirements, costs, and delays.

We also did a comparative evaluation of diplomas at the MICC. In this case, it's the same, it's necessary to prepare a big paper folder, which needs to be certified by a commissioner, blah blah, with copies of the diplomas, the identity, the schools' reports translated by trimester, by who knows who, reviews of courses, stuff, things. They took about a year to study the file (...) to give a kind of equivalence. But, as her profession is not recognised, well, the training was not recognised either. (Victor, engineer)

The difficulties these engineers' partners face concerning their labour market integration in Quebec thus represents an additional barrier to their social integration. Furthermore, according to our field research, interviews and conversations with key informants, French workers are nonetheless less inclined to access job search services than are immigrants from other countries. Moreover, French-trained engineers have access in Quebec to specific support groups such as the association *Francogénie*, which offers integration support and job search assistance.

### *b) Cultural and relational dimension*

The cultural and relational dimension brings our analytical focus from a macro to a micro level. We examine here the role of individuals in their experience of using structures set up for professional and social integration.

This second dimension includes: 1) the process of learning social and cultural codes related to employment and wider social life; 2) relational, personal and professional dynamics as well as the role of networks on the experience of integration into Quebec society. Concerning the first aspect, this research highlights the cultural differences between working in France and Quebec. Our interviews reveal that several engineers who have obtained employment in Quebec experience culture shock, which adds to their difficulties in integrating professionally and personally. The key informant cited here represents an association with expertise in this field of adapting to workplace culture in Quebec.

But what I can tell you is that after a year, we find these engineers in the offices of organisational psychologists because they have an attitude problem. Attitude, not skill. Why attitude? Because their "French behaviour", it doesn't work (...) with their bosses, it doesn't work with their employees, etc. I've seen many of them, who have passed by, and each time they were given my name saying: «So, go see him in this organisation to explain to you how to change to eliminate this attitudinal problem». I have never seen them. Never. (Marc, informant)

This informant argues that while the MRA is useful for recognising academic qualifications, it does not address what he considers the greatest challenge for French engineers migrating to Quebec: adapting to a new environment and workplace culture. This reminds us that the MRA for engineers aims at technocratically facilitating admission to the OIQ for French-trained engineers, without measures or programs intended to ease steps further down the road to regulated professional practice.

The courses leading to the professional practice of French workers in Quebec (...) is broader than the MRAs, (...) the MRA allows to enter the Order without a problem, [but if] we talk about integration (...) it goes further. (...) we have a path, there. That's three to five years. (Marc, informant)

Several of the interviewed engineers also noted differences in Quebec's workplace culture that they appreciate, such as less hierarchy than in France. In addition, workplace culture in Quebec is generally based on performance and skills, as mentioned above, rather than on the origin of training (*Grande École* x or y), as opposed to the French system:

Here, they put your expertise and your skills in front, while in France the diplomas and the educational establishment where you studied is the first thing you look at. (Denis, engineer)

These perceived positive differences in workplace culture partially help these engineers to counter the effects of deskilling following the first years they work in Quebec. Besides, as shown by Hawthorne (2013: 13), «migrants can become marooned in conditional status for years, left in an invidious professional situation that may be associated with lower wages and the under-use of skills».

Engineers experience such professional deskilling especially during the period before they pass the Order's admission exam. They then hold a restrictive temporary permit that requires them to work under the supervision of an engineer who is a member of the OIQ, regardless of the number of years of work experience they might have already accumulated. Similarly to local graduates accessing the job market, they are considered a "junior" engineer, although they often are older and have more professional experience (even managerial experience) than their supervisor. Indeed, the dynamic interactions among colleagues and employers that characterise workplace culture in Quebec, as well as possibilities for internal mobility and advancement within the company, could also contribute to attenuating the constraints felt by many engineers during the restrictive permit period. Especially at first, supervision by an OIQ member can seem to constrain and give these engineers the impression that they are losing valuable time for their professional integration. Furthermore, while an engineer's salary raise in France is related to their title and level of academic credentials/studies, in Quebec as elsewhere in North America, their performance in the firm is the main determinant on their revenue. For instance, a Master's degree acquired in France has little relevance to an employee's initial salary level. However, pending use of these skills in engineer's tasks and mandates, performance should be valued and rewarded with time.

Besides, for these migrant workers, one of the key factors for integrating socio-professionally is their proactivity in formal, informal and social arenas. While only a minority of the interviewed engineers utilised the services of organisations that assist immigrants, those who did stress their effectiveness in terms of increasing their understanding of Quebec society and how it functions, as well as job search strategies.

She (my wife) went to see the neighbourhood associations and others, and in particular, next to where we lived, there were workshops, a kind of community association where she went, and where she came to know a lot of people. So very quickly, yes, she met people who became friends. (Denis, engineer)

Skilled workers coming from France must also learn the particularities of the job search process in Quebec. While in France a worker searches for a job mainly by sending their CV to firms, in Quebec one's job search is based more on networking - through attending information sessions and networking events, through social media online, and so forth. In this context, a worker's individual proactivity becomes essential to finding a job in Quebec. Accordingly, the majority of our interviewees stressed the effectiveness of social media such as LinkedIn for their job searches, as well as networking events and information sessions with potential employers.

Lastly, the French-trained engineers note that the Quebec job market is more flexible and entails more mobility than in France. The mobility of workers throughout their careers is valued more than in France, which is a much-appreciated aspect that French professionals acknowledge as they experience socio-professional integration in Quebec.

## CONCLUSIONS

French engineers seem to initially underestimate the differences when adapting to their profession in Quebec. This study demonstrates that it is much a more difficult and complex process.

Most differences concern academic training, the context of professional practice, and work regulations. The processes put in place by the OIQ for obtaining a professional permit reflects these considerations. They seek to aid French professionals' adaptation to working in Quebec, while at the same time upholding the Order's primary reason for existence: protecting public safety.

The socio-professional integration of engineers under the France-Quebec MRA, and by extension their retention in the host country, results from a combination of structural, socio-cultural and relational dimensions. Concerning the structural dimension, as shown elsewhere (Gabriel 2013), our analysis of the France-Quebec MRA for engineers demonstrates that such arrangements facilitate admission to regulating the body's role but do not provide mechanisms to facilitate the social integration of these workers and their families into the host society. These agreements are designed solely in terms of integrating an individual worker into the labour market, considering only its economic dimension, leaving behind social and civic aspects of their integration. However, such a "labour division" between institutional levels has secondary effects, as we have tried to show from our data. The international movement of regulated professionals has implications that reach beyond the strictly economic sphere. Above all, once admitted into a profession through its regulating body, the retention of these professionals is linked to their capacity – and most often that of their families – to integrate into the host society in many different ways (related to housing, schools, etc.). Therefore, a technocratic treatment of professionals' admission into practice seems counter-productive or at the very least, because of its blindness regarding other dimensions of integration. In turn, these neglected dimensions can put in jeopardy the whole project of practising a regulated profession in the host country.

In this context, the absence of an international body for regulating labour markets leaves this regulation to national governments. This implies a reconfiguration at the state level, with new forms of governance and new stakeholders involved. In the case of Quebec, the professional orders have taken on an important role in governing the admission of foreign-trained professionals (FTPs). These organisations need to consider various interests: those of their professional field, the pressures of both public and private sectors, as well as the government, to admit FTPs, and their principal mandate of protecting public safety. In regulating the recognition of foreign qualifications, they seek to benefit firms, professionals and the public, both at local and international levels. Thus in this context, the notion of protecting public safety takes on great importance. The result is the implementation of measures encouraging mobility that are linked with enhancing the efficiency of the labour market on the one hand, and protecting local interests (essentially the public) on the other hand (Hawthorne 2013).

In contrast, public and media discourse advocate for admission of more foreign-trained professionals (FTPs), where the professional orders are often seen as primarily defending their members' interests. Owing to the principle of protecting public safety, the regulations restricting the admission of FTPs are often perceived as excessive constraints, leading them to experience underemployment, exemplified by the image of the foreign-trained professional working as a taxi driver.

As this study demonstrates, for engineers benefitting from the France-Quebec MRA the legal notion of protecting public safety is expressed by the OIQ's imposition of rules, responsibilities, obligations and limits to professional practice. In the eyes of these newly arrived migrants, such measures seem contradictory to the spirit of mutual recognition arrangements.

Many of the OIQ's requirements for admission to the order seem to create obstacles for entering professional practices for these MRA professionals, particularly through the need to present their academic transcripts from France and proof concerning their prior work experience. The OIQ has identified these problems and is proceeding to revise the compensatory measures they will require. This article notes the absence of measures within the MRA providing for the cultural and relational dimensions of engineers' socio-professional integration.

Firstly, the Agreement does not provide measures to assist the family members who accompany these engineers (mainly partners and children) with their social and professional integration. This especially discourages their partners, which can lead to a reconsideration of their initial plan to migrate and establish a new life in Quebec. As noted above, for most of the engineers interviewed, their plan to migrate is part of an overall plan for the future that includes their entire family. Employers' services for welcoming and integrating French professionals, when present, play a very important role in the process of integrating these professionals and their family members. Employment assistance organisations and community organisations working with immigrants are also valuable/interesting resources for these professionals and their families, even if – as this study has shown – French-trained professionals are less likely to access these services/organisations than are other FTPs who immigrate to Quebec.

Secondly, the logic underlying international agreements such as the France-Quebec MRA neglects to consider other effects on FTPs, such as the culture shock that they may experience upon migrating. Many of the engineers interviewed in this study discussed experiencing such culture shock, due to often-unsuspected differences in cultural codes for the profession and the workplace.

In addition, the MRA (at least at the start) did not consider the impacts of professional deskilling – whether real or symbolic – for these workers during the time they hold a restrictive temporary permit. Nevertheless, our interviewees have noted that several other factors specific to work in Quebec can alleviate the constraints created by the MRA requirements: a job market with greater flexibility and mobility than in France, the existence of better salary conditions, less hierarchical dynamics in the workplace, and greater possibilities for advancement within companies.

These professionals' skills that are required to access engineers' labour market are not linked to competencies associated with mainstream cultural codes in their host society. In other words, success in being admitted in a regulated profession offers no indication of retention, as failures in other dimensions of integration might void this initial success. Since the process of socio-professional integration ideally goes both ways, involving interaction between migrants and the host society (Béji, Pellerin 2010), it would be useful to further develop this investigation with the non-governmental actors involved in this process (employers, community organisations working with immigrants, organisations representing the interests of FTPs, etc.). It will also be important to compare with other jurisdictions (provinces, states) and professions (architects, nurses, doctors, etc.), considering the recent implementation of the engineers' MRA. This will enhance understanding about what elements of socio-professional integration are specific to engineers and what overlaps are found with FTPs in other professions.

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