

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last forty years, there has been a strong migration trend towards urbanization. Cities continue to grow as Canadians leave the countryside in search of opportunity in metropolitan areas. However, there is one segment of our society that resists this rush to make it big in the city: the elderly. The rate of urbanization amongst persons over the age of 65 is slower than average; there is even a significant migration stream of young, active and wealthy senior citizens from metropolitan areas to nonmetropolitan destinations.

For small towns, elderly migration brings new opportunities to diversify what often is a narrow economic base. Some commentators have labeled elderly migration as the "small town growth industry of the 1990s". Nowhere is economic diversification needed more than in the numerous single-industry communities scattered across Canada. These communities are extremely vulnerable and any economic downswing could spell the end of their existence.

Elliot Lake (1996 population 13,585) is a community that was on the brink. In 1990, it was faced with the complete closure of its sole industry as Ontario Hydro cancelled its contracts with the various uranium mining companies operating out of Elliot Lake. In response to the threat, the community transformed itself into a retirement destination. A non-profit organization, Elliot Lake Retirement Living Inc., was created to market the community to seniors in other areas, particularly in southern Ontario. Retirement Living Inc. bought a number of vacant dwellings in the city, from apartment blocks to single and semi-detached houses, to rent to seniors willing to migrate to Elliot Lake. Various facilities, especially the Renaissance Seniors' Centre, were developed to cater to the needs of seniors. As it became apparent from the success of Retirement Living Inc. that Elliot Lake could successfully attract elderly migrants, other private organizations, like Active Living Inc. and the Izumi Brothers, bought a number of homes to sell to seniors and contributed to the marketing of the community. A decade later, Elliot Lake has attracted approximately 4,000 elderly migrants, and has stabilized its population and economy despite the loss of 3,000 over the last decade.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the determinants of elderly migration to Elliot Lake. Five main questions are discussed; the questions are:

1. Who moves to Elliot Lake? What are their characteristics? Where do they come from?
2. How have the elderly migrants gathered information about the destination?
3. What are the reasons for moving from their previous place of residence?
4. What are the reasons for moving to Elliot Lake?
5. Are the migrants satisfied with their move? Do they participate in recreational and social activities? Are they developing social ties with the community and making new friendships?

The questions are answered through both a literature review and data collected from a questionnaire that was distributed to elderly migrants in Elliot Lake.

In the literature review, a hypothesis, based on the current research on elderly migration, is developed for the five questions. The analysis results reveal the following conclusions:

- Most of the migrants are young, healthy, white and married, with above average incomes and education. Most of the migrants come from Ontario;
- The migrants gather information about Elliot Lake through selective recruitment;
- Migrants from urban areas leave their previous place of residence because of the high cost of housing and the negative features of urban life, like crime and pollution. Recently retired migrants will also leave to reduce the amount of housing they consume;
- Migrants are attracted by a number of attributes of Elliot Lake: environmental amenities (nature, clean air), small town atmosphere (friendly people, quiet, clean, safe community), and the dwellings (modest size and maintenance by the landlord). The most important attribute is hypothesized to be the affordability of the housing;
- Finally, the migrants are satisfied with their decision to move and quickly develop social ties with the community.

The second part of the paper reviews the results from the questionnaire and compares the results to the hypothesis from the literature review. There were 144 elderly migrants from Elliot Lake who filled out the survey. The respondents came from two high-rise apartment complexes owned by Retirement Living (36.1% of the total sample) and from migrants living in single and semi-detached houses in the Porridge Lake subdivision that are mostly owned by Retirement Living.

The survey results confirm most of the hypotheses developed in the literature review. Elderly migrants were primarily young, married (except for the respondents from the apartment complexes), well educated and came from other places in Ontario. Furthermore, the respondents gathered information through selective recruiting, as most respondents used the marketing and advertising of Retirement Living to investigate Elliot Lake. The hypothesis from the literature review also identified correctly the factors that pushed the migrants from their previous homes. These factors include the high cost of housing, negative feature of urban living for respondents from urban areas and the desire of the respondents to reduce their housing.

The results of the survey indicate that the hypothesis was correct in predicting a number of attributes that make Elliot Lake a successful retirement destination. Probably the most important attribute is the affordable housing. Seniors can save more than \$2,000 a year by renting a dwelling in Elliot Lake. Since most elderly are on fixed incomes, any saving on rent is an increase in real income. Other important attributes include environmental amenities, a small town atmosphere, recreational opportunities, social opportunities, and appropriate housing for seniors. Finally, the hypothesis that seniors would be satisfied and would successfully develop social ties with the community were also confirmed by the survey results.

There were a number of cross-tabulations done on the sample of respondents to determine significant differences between different subgroups. The subgroups are as follows:

- Comparing respondents who came from urban areas vs. rural areas;
- Respondents from southern Ontario vs. northern Ontario;
- "Old" migrants vs. "young" migrants;
- Respondents who are now "old" vs. "young";
- Respondents who are married vs. single;
- male respondents vs. female respondents;
- satisfied respondents vs. dissatisfied respondents.

The main differences between satisfied and dissatisfied respondents were that satisfied respondents were more active and participated in more recreational and social activities, they developed more new friendships, and they are more satisfied with the level of services in Elliot Lake.

The last chapter of the paper presents a model of elderly migration to Elliot Lake. The model identifies five conditions in Elliot Lake that were instrumental to its success as a retirement destination. The conditions are a supply of affordable, modest housing, an organization to market the community to seniors, locational attributes, adequate services and a small town atmosphere.