

**SPACES AND INTEGRATION:
THE EXPERIENCE OF FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRANTS IN A
MINORITY CONTEXT**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Masters in Sociology

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Declaration

In accordance with Academic Regulation II-7 of the University of Ottawa concerning theses, I affirm that I am the primary author of this research. This thesis does not contain any material that has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any institution. To the best of my knowledge, it does not include content previously published or authored by others, except where appropriately cited within the text.

In the preparation of this thesis, I used artificial intelligence tools (Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT and Perplexity) solely to support the editorial process. These tools were employed to enhance clarity, phrasing, conciseness, and the overall flow of ideas and sentences, as well as the overall flow of some sections of the manuscript. At no point were they used to generate content, conduct data analysis, formulate arguments, or interpret findings. The use of AI did not replace critical thinking or scholarly judgment and was limited strictly to language editing and stylistic refinement.

Abstract

ENG

Francophone Minority Communities (FMCs) in Canada face distinct challenges as they increasingly assume the role of immigrant-receiving communities. To sustain their demographic and cultural vitality, FMCs have turned to immigration, making the role of spaces in supporting integration more critical than ever. Drawing on scholarship that highlights the importance of Francophone spaces in fostering linguistic continuity, social inclusion, and intercultural exchange, this study examines how French-speaking immigrants experience and navigate everyday spaces in Ottawa, Canada's largest and most institutionally dense FMC.

Using a qualitative methodology based on semi-directed interviews and framed by the theory of interculturality and the concept of intercultural spaces, this research examines how physical and symbolic spaces—such as restaurants, schools, places of worship, and cultural centres—serve as entry points for integration. Findings reveal that these spaces often function beyond their formal mandates, offering immigrants a sense of belonging, cultural affirmation, and access to broader social networks. While language was not the primary focus, it emerged as a central theme: Francophone spaces were sought not only for linguistic reasons but also for the emotional security and identity continuity they provided. The study further identifies bilingualism and multilingualism as key markers of openness and diversity within these spaces, reinforcing their potential as sites of intercultural engagement. Ultimately, this research underscores the dual role of spaces and more specifically FMC spaces in preserving linguistic identity and fostering integration, while also revealing the complexities and intersectional barriers that shape immigrant experiences in minority Francophone contexts.

FR

Les communautés francophones en situation minoritaire (CFSM) au Canada sont confrontées à des défis particuliers, car elles assument de plus en plus le rôle de communautés d'accueil pour les immigrants. Afin de maintenir leur vitalité démographique et culturelle, les CFSM se sont tournées vers l'immigration, rendant le rôle des espaces dans le soutien à l'intégration plus crucial que jamais. S'appuyant sur des travaux universitaires qui soulignent l'importance des espaces francophones dans la promotion de la continuité linguistique, de l'inclusion sociale et des échanges interculturels, cette étude examine comment les immigrants francophones vivent et évoluent dans les espaces quotidiens à Ottawa, la plus grande CFSM du Canada et celle qui compte le plus grand nombre d'institutions.

À l'aide d'une méthodologie qualitative fondée sur des entretiens semi-dirigés et encadrée par la théorie de l'interculturalité et le concept d'espaces interculturels, cette recherche examine comment les espaces physiques et symboliques – tels que les restaurants, les écoles, les lieux de culte et les centres culturels – servent de points d'entrée pour l'intégration. Les résultats révèlent que ces espaces fonctionnent souvent au-delà de leur mandat officiel, offrant aux immigrants un sentiment d'appartenance, une affirmation culturelle et l'accès à des réseaux sociaux plus larges. Bien que la langue n'ait pas été le sujet principal, elle est apparue comme un thème central : les espaces francophones étaient recherchés non seulement pour des raisons linguistiques, mais aussi pour la sécurité émotionnelle et la continuité identitaire qu'ils procuraient. L'étude identifie en outre le bilinguisme et le multilinguisme comme des marqueurs clés de l'ouverture et de la diversité au sein de ces espaces, renforçant ainsi leur potentiel en tant que lieux d'engagement interculturel. En fin de compte, cette recherche souligne le double rôle des espaces, et plus particulièrement des espaces des CFMS, dans la préservation de l'identité linguistique et la promotion de l'intégration, tout en révélant les complexités et les obstacles intersectionnels qui façonnent les expériences des immigrants dans les contextes francophones minoritaire

Chapter 1: Introduction

Canada is a bilingual country, with English and French as the two official languages. This fact plays a crucial role in shaping the nation's linguistic landscape, and its government's immigration policies—which currently include target percentages for Francophone immigrants. Outside Quebec, however, English remains the dominant language of all provinces and territories (only New Brunswick is officially bilingual). So, although Francophone Minority Communities (FMCs) exist in many places throughout the country, their vitality often feels threatened by this English-language dominance. Over the last half-century, Francophone communities outside Quebec have faced significant decline, with their share of the Canadian population shrinking from approximately 6.1% in 1971 to 3.8% in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022; Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2021). This decline reflects broader demographic challenges in Canada, including aging populations, low birth rates, youth outmigration to urban centres, and linguistic assimilation pressures that threaten the long-term health of these communities.

In response to these challenges, in the early 2000s leaders of the FMCs began working with the Canadian government to encourage Francophone immigration outside of Québec (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2023). Beginning with federal commitments in 2003, specifically by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), this approach gradually evolved to include steering committees, strategic plans, and numerical targets for immigration (IRCC, 2024; Veronis & Huot, 2017). Today, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Ontario have specific targets for the proportion of Francophone immigrants, recognizing the fact that immigration is now a key strategy for maintaining Francophone communities beyond Quebec. This reinforces the current role of FMCs as primary receivers for French-speaking newcomers (Government of Canada, 2018; IRCC, 2024).

However, the task is not without its challenges. Historically, FMCs focused on securing autonomy in areas such as education and health services (Cardinal & Forgues, 2015; Huot et al., 2023). FMCs have had to expand their priorities to include attracting, welcoming, integrating, and retaining

French-speaking immigrants (Iacovino & Léger, 2012; IRCC, 2024). This shift in immigration has been influenced by both global migratory flows, and the federalization of Canadian immigration policies (Paquet, 2016); and it has created new challenges for FMCs, as they have needed to develop their capacity for reception services, settlement assistance, and institutions to support the integration of newcomers (Veronis & Huot, 2018).

But even with these policy efforts and institutional developments, research indicates that French-speaking immigrants often experience significant challenges integrating into FMCs (Huot & Veronis, 2018; Piquemal et al., 2011; Sall, 2019; Huot & Veronis (2019); Sall et al., 2023). Such integration is particularly complex, because it involves a dual process: immigrants must simultaneously manage to join in with both the FMCs, and with the broader Canadian society. This creates unique pressures, as FMCs themselves often have limited visibility within predominantly Anglophone environments (Veronis & Huot, 2019).

Some studies have even suggested that newcomer inclusion can also be complicated by divisions that exist within the FMCs themselves—divisions that may be based on socio-cultural factors such as ethnicity or country of origin, among other things (Sall et al., 2021; Veronis & Couton, 2017; Delaisse et al., 2023). In some cases, immigrants report finding it easier to participate in Anglophone spaces than in FMCs, raising concerns about the effectiveness of Francophone community integration efforts (Veronis & Huot, 2019).

However, research also demonstrates that French-speaking immigrants actively engage with both formal community institutions and informal networks. These include physical Francophone spaces—institutions and organizations such as settlement agencies, community centres, cultural associations, and schools—as well as virtual spaces, including social media and ethnic or community media that operate primarily in French (Mulatris et al., 2018; Veronis & Couton, 2017). These spaces serve multiple functions for minority groups: they provide environments where French is the primary language; they facilitate access to Francophone services; and they create opportunities for social networking and cultural expression.

As FMCs increasingly turn to immigration to sustain their demographic and cultural presence, the role of such community spaces in supporting integration becomes ever more significant. Successful integration relies not only on the merely numerical growth of French-speaking newcomers, but also on the ready availability of welcoming environments that support language retention, social engagement, and cultural continuity. Francophone community spaces operate not merely as service hubs, but as socially produced sites of negotiation where new immigrants and established members co-construct belonging, social capital, and cultural continuity.

1.1 Research Problem

Efforts to support Francophone newcomers begin with their initial reception, and extend to settlement assistance, access to services, and opportunities for education and employment (Huot et al., 2023). But despite these initiatives, many challenges persist: immigrants often find it difficult to achieve full integration, inclusion, and meaningful participation in Canadian society. Recent research highlights the crucial role of community cohesion in immigrant retention (Huot et al., 2020), with Francophone community spaces serving as key sites for engagement and interaction (Veronis & Huot, 2017; Veronis & Huot 2018; Huot et al., 2023). They foster linguistic continuity and social inclusion, permit cultural retention, and facilitate interpersonal connections and social integration (Farmer & da Silva, 2012; Belkhodja & Traisnel, 2014). Additionally, they function as bridging mechanisms, linking immigrants to mainstream services and broader social networks (Veronis & Huot, 2018; Delaisse et al., 2024). Recent research by Delaisse et al. (2024), specifically in the context of Metro Vancouver, identifies linguistic minority sites as crucial for immigrants. They describe them as “third spaces,” a concept introduced by Homi K. Bhabha in 1994: places where newcomers negotiate their identity within ethnolinguistic and multicultural frameworks. I refer to these repeatedly in this study, since such spaces play an “in-between” role that link the immigrants’ own communities, and mainstream Anglophone society.

However, it’s also clear that French-speaking immigrants struggle with full participation in FMCs—not just in Ottawa, but all across Canada (Huot & Veronis, 2018; Veronis & Huot, 2019; Piquemal et al., 2011; Sall, 2019). Studies highlight separations between groups based on ethnicity

and country of origin that shape social dynamics within FMCs (Sall et al., 2021; Delaisse et al., 2023). For this reason, some immigrants find it more difficult to participate and be included in FMCs than in the broader Anglophone community (Veronis & Huot, 2019). So, despite the recognized significance of Francophone community spaces, further investigation is needed into their role as sites of intercultural interaction—particularly from the perspective of the immigrants themselves. Examining how they experience these spaces can provide insights into how linguistic and cultural exchanges occur, influencing experiences of belonging, identity negotiation, and participation (Teräs, 2012; Huot & Veronis, 2018; Veronis & Huot, 2018).

Accordingly, in this study I aim to investigate Francophone immigrants' experiences of integration (or not) in a variety of everyday spaces. Ottawa, as host to the largest FMC outside Quebec, serves as an ideal case study, since it contains a well-developed network of educational, cultural, and community institutions (Cardinal & Léger, 2017). The University of Ottawa, and the French-language public college La Cité, play central roles in fostering Francophone identity, while the city's policy of bilingualism aims to ensure access to French-language services. Despite this, however, some Francophones still report facing barriers to accessing services (Statistics Canada, 2016).

My study uses the lens of the interculturality theory to identify spaces that enable Francophone intercultural exchange—identifying their defining characteristics, their potential for cross-cultural exchange and sharing of experiences, and their role in fostering integration within FMCs. By focusing specifically on the perceptions and experiences of French-speaking immigrants, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how intercultural dynamics shape their integration processes. In doing so, I hope to contribute to broader discussions on immigrant inclusion, community participation, and the evolving role of Francophone spaces in supporting minority-language integration.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

Building on the importance of Francophone community spaces in the goal of fostering integration in Ottawa, I aim to examine the role of everyday spaces within the minority Francophone context. Specifically, I examine how French-speaking immigrants experience and use these spaces; and also how they analyze their potential as sites of intercultural exchange, and assess their contribution to their goal of integration, and gaining a sense of belonging. Additionally, I try to highlight the everyday geographies that define their experiences. as French-speaking immigrants in Ottawa.

1.2.1 Objectives

The following sub-objectives guide this study's exploration of Francophone immigrant integration, focusing on everyday spaces, community institutions, and intercultural dynamics; I propose to:

- 1) Examining francophone immigrants' experiences of integration through a variety of everyday spaces,
- 2) Investigating more specifically francophone immigrants' experiences of integration in Francophone community spaces.
- 3) Use an intercultural lens to identify spaces that facilitate intercultural exchange, communication and sharing of experiences whilst also supporting immigrants' integration.

1.2.2 Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study's inquiry into Francophone immigrant integration in Ottawa:

1. How do French-speaking immigrants' access, experience, and perceive everyday spaces in Ottawa?
2. In what ways do these spaces facilitate intercultural exchange and interaction among diverse community members?

3. What role do these spaces play in supporting immigrant integration and sense of belonging within the Francophone minority community?

1.3 Conceptual Framework: Theory of Interculturality and Concept of Intercultural Spaces

In general terms, the theory of interculturality addresses how people relate to one another, and how these interactions are framed, shaped, and enacted in everyday situations (Elias & Mansouri, 2020). Other key issues are how individuals and groups of people from different cultures interact with one another; how they can live harmoniously together despite differences of language, culture, religion, ethnicity, and other socio-cultural orientations; how they resolve any conflicts arising from cross-cultural misunderstandings; and how their daily encounters with diversity shape their attitudes, behaviours, and experiences (Elias & Mansouri, 2020). Interculturality emphasizes the phenomenon of “in-betweenness,” characterized by contact and reciprocity between members of different cultural groups (Chen & Borsari, 2024). According to Lüsebrink (2019), the concept of interculturality encompasses all forms of interaction between cultures and individuals, and is deeply rooted in both the practices of social life, and in interdisciplinary studies.

Interculturality reflects a dual dynamic: it highlights both reciprocity in cultural exchanges, and the complexity of relationships between cultures. The prefix “inter-” signifies not only connection and mutual influence, but also moments of disjunction (Lüsebrink, 2019). At its core, interculturality entails a continuous process of interplay, interaction, and questioning, creating a dynamic and evolving space for cultural exchange.

What makes these spaces “intercultural” is not just the presence of diverse groups, but the engagement across cultural boundaries. According to Chen & Borsari (2024), intercultural spaces are characterized by their capacity to allow cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and the sharing of experiences—which can be particularly important for immigrants, as they seek to integrate into new environments. But in a different conceptualization, intercultural space can also be viewed as a dynamic transitional zone between people and cultures that is characterized by fluidity and flexibility (Teräs, 2012).

This study applies the framework of intercultural spaces to examine how Francophone community spaces in Ottawa function as sites of cultural interaction and exchange. Rather than just assuming that these spaces do, in fact, facilitate intercultural dynamics, my research aims to investigate the conditions under which meaningful cross-cultural interaction occurs. I also examine what other factors either support, or hinder, immigrant integration.

1.4 Overview of the Methodology

To achieve these objectives, I adopted a qualitative methodology to analyze French-speaking immigrants' perceptions and experiences of Francophone community spaces in Ottawa. The study was conducted as part of the SSHRC-funded project "Fostering cohesion within diversifying communities: Immigration to Francophone minority communities from coast to coast" (2021–2025). Led by Dr. Suzanne Huot, of the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at the University of British Columbia, the project examines social cohesion in FMCs across Canada as they diversify through immigration. This study is based on the Ottawa site of this project, led by Dr. Luisa Veronis, from the department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics. The research design and instruments were designed by the SSHRC team as well as the recruitment materials and strategies however, I was a participant in both the recruitment process and the data collection as part of the team in Ottawa. The analysis is entirely my own as I developed my own conceptual framework that is not linked to the project.

The dozen French-speaking participants were recruited with attention to various factors—age, gender, country of origin, and time spent in Canada—in order to ensure a balanced representation of diverse perspectives and experiences. This selection criteria was determined by the SSHRC project, as well as the methods of data collection. As part of the research team I was able to help in the recruitment and interview process. The semi-structured interviews covered topics such as perceptions of diversity, social participation, and interactions within FMC spaces; these were complemented by socio-demographic questionnaires. Finally, Cartographies of Everyday Geographies documented the participants' daily interactions with various spaces, offering a visual addition to the narratives.

I also used a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyze data, with key themes such as cultural exchange, communication, and participation guiding the process. Emergent themes were also incorporated that reflected the participants' personal insights. This mixed methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of the role of community spaces—specifically in Ottawa, the location studied in this project. As host to a large and well-developed FMC, the city offers a unique viewpoint on how community infrastructure and spatial dynamics shape immigrant experiences (Veronis & Couton, 2017).

Ottawa is characterized by many unique features. Foremost among these is its geography: the larger community straddles both Ontario and Quebec, being located on either side of the river separating the two provinces. With Ottawa on the one side, and Gatineau on the other, the city arguably has a greater cross-cultural awareness than towns that exist further away from the Quebecoise influence. For Francophone immigrants living in the historic bastions of Ottawa's minority community—areas such as Vanier and parts of Lowertown—the nearby presence of the French-speaking province must surely be some comfort to them. (Being located in the province of Quebec, Gatineau itself does not qualify for the definition of an FMC.) In addition, Ottawa has a dense network of Francophone institutions, including schools, cultural centres and service organizations—as well as physical spaces such as community centres and places of worship, which serve as critical entry points for immigrants.

1.5 Significance of the Study

My goal is for this study to advance our understanding of how Francophone community spaces influence the integration experiences of French-speaking immigrants. I highlight the importance of inclusive practices and approaches that support the cohesion and resilience of minority-language communities. My aim is to use an intercultural lens to provide insights into how such communities can better integrate newcomers, while still maintaining their own linguistic and cultural strengths.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis Chapters

My dissertation is structured into five chapters, of which this introduction is the first. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on Francophone minority communities, community spaces, and immigrant integration. It also develops my conceptual framework of interculturality and the concept of intercultural spaces, which serve as the analytical framework for the study. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, describing the research design, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies, and explaining how the study was conducted and how the data were interpreted. Chapter 4 presents the first set of findings, focusing on how participants access and experience everyday spaces in their everyday lives. Chapter 5 explores how Francophone immigrants navigate language, space, and identity, focusing on their everyday spaces and lived experiences. Chapter 6 synthesizes the main findings, linking them to broader discussions on immigration and community spaces. It also outlines key implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the existing scholarship on the subject of Francophone immigrants' experiences of integration. This review is organized into three sections, according to the theoretical framework that guides my research. First, I examine the broader context of FMCs in Canada, along with their demographic challenges and policy contexts. Second, I examine existing research on community spaces, and their role in immigrant integration—both generally, and specifically within FMC contexts. Analyzing policy architectures allows me to assess the tensions that arise from efforts to sustain linguistic vitality. And third, I present the conceptual framework of interculturality that provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing how Francophone immigrants experience everyday spaces in Ottawa.

Next, I map the community spaces that undergird immigrant integration, moving from ethnic and Francophone neighbourhoods to the operational core of FMCs: schools, settlement agencies, community centres, and places of worship. These institutional spaces broker access, enable participation, and nurture belonging. I also investigate the role of “third spaces” and contact zones that foster intercultural dialogue, showing how these environments can advance integration and mutual recognition across boundaries. Finally, I develop an conceptual framework tailored to the minority context. I also clarify why interculturality is a central theory here; how the framework functions; and how it guides my research positioning and synthesis.

2.1 Francophone Minority Communities and Immigration

As noted earlier, FMCs consist of French-speaking populations residing outside Quebec, officially recognized by the federal government as Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs). These communities face persistent challenges that threaten their sustainability. Among the most pressing issues are the decline of their membership, the aging of their populations, and the ever-present risk of linguistic assimilation into the Anglophone majority (Belkhodja, Traisnel, & Wade,

2012). According to Statistics Canada (2022), the proportion of Canadians living outside Quebec, whose first official language is French, has decreased from 6.6% in 1971, to 4.6% in 2021. Despite modest growth in absolute numbers, that proportion represents a more than 30% decline.

Since the early 2000s, FMCs have experienced significant social and demographic transformations. The demographic challenges these communities face are multifaceted and interconnected. Life there is marked by aging populations, shifts in linguistic transmission, and new patterns of geographic mobility. These demographic pressures affect the vigour of communities, along with their ability to properly allocate resources, and maintain their linguistic and cultural continuity (Landry, 2014). Population aging has accelerated due to low birth rates, and the frequent outmigration of young people to non-Francophone urban centres. This youth exodus (mostly to large Anglophone metropolitan areas such as Toronto), combined with increasing life expectancy, has created an aging demographic that threatens the sustainability of communities (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2018). As well, marriage outside of the linguistic group (exogamy), with its subsequent linguistic assimilation, have contributed to the erosion of French language transmission across generations (Castonguay, 2002).

2.1.1 Challenges and rationales for immigration

From an economic perspective, FMCs face challenges in ensuring succession planning for both entrepreneurs and workers, as older community members retire without sufficient French-speaking replacements (Sall, 2015). These demographic and economic pressures have created a context in which FMCs increasingly view immigration as essential to their survival. Widespread labour shortages—particularly in teaching, early childhood, and health—have intensified the urgency for targeted Francophone immigration, with thousands of critical vacancies threatening the very foundation of French-language services across the country. Many federal bodies, plus the a non-governmental Federation of Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada (Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA), emphasize that immigration is now indispensable in minority communities, both as a demographic and an economic driver, This

underscores the need for a more responsive immigration policy, and for better recognition of foreign qualifications (FCFA, 2024).

In response to these trends, since the early 2000s federal and provincial governments have increasingly emphasized immigration as a strategy to strengthen FMCs. However, efforts to meet the 2001 target of 4.4% French-speaking immigrant admissions outside Quebec have consistently fallen short, with annual rates averaging around 2% between 2001 and 2020 (IRCC, 2021). Scholars such as Belkhodja et al. (2012) and Veronis and Couton (2017) highlight the critical role of community institutions—schools, cultural centres, and associations—in fostering linguistic continuity and social integration. Yet disparities in access, representation, and funding continue to limit the impact of these institutions, underscoring the need for more inclusive and responsive community-building strategies.

2.1.2 Policy architecture and its tensions

The development of Francophone immigration as a strategic policy response began in earnest in the early 2000s (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003, 2006). Public policy interventions aimed at supporting FMCs have become increasingly institutionalized—a process that Belkhodja (2011) describes as an “instrumental” conception of immigration, where newcomers are primarily valued for their potential to reinforce the demographics of minority language communities. This approach is evident in the creation of steering committees that unite federal, provincial, and community actors, the adoption of strategic plans, and the establishment of numerical targets (such as the federal goal of 4.4% French-speaking immigrant admissions outside Quebec). While these measures reflect a proactive stance on linguistic diversity, they also risk reducing actual people to demographic solutions ... rather than recognizing their full capacity for social, cultural, and civic contributions.

Two major initiatives exemplify this institutional framework. First was the 2003 establishment by IRCC of Francophone Immigration Networks (known as RIFs, for Réseaux en immigration francophone). There are now 13 RIFs in Canada, in nine provinces and two territories; three are

located in Ontario (East, North and Centre-South-West). They serve as collaborative platforms that bring together over 300 organizations working to attract, welcome, and integrate French-speaking newcomers—all with the goal of strengthening the capacity of communities.

The second initiative, part of IRCC's Policy on Francophone Immigration, was Welcoming Francophone Communities, better known as Communautés Francophones Accueillantes (CFA). Announced in 2018, and launched in 2019–2020, it designated 14 selected FMCs as pilot communities for enhanced immigrant reception and integration services. Though its rollout unfortunately coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CFA program represented a shift toward place-based strategies that emphasized community readiness and immigrant engagement. The pilot program was a success; and in January 2024, IRCC renewed and expanded the initiative. Later that year, in August 2024, the department announced the selection of 10 additional communities (IRCC, 2024).

Meanwhile, Garant and Labrèche (2018) argue that this instrumental approach has created tensions, as immigration has become both a solution for FMCs, and a source of new challenges. The policy focus on numerical targets and demographic outcomes has sometimes overshadowed attention to the complex processes of integration and community acceptance—the factors that truly determine whether immigration strengthens FMCs.

Currently, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Ontario are the only provinces that have established specific numerical targets for the proportion of Francophone immigrants settling outside Quebec. Ontario, for instance, has committed to increasing the number of French-speaking immigrants through its Provincial Nominee Program; and also through its broader Francophone immigration strategy, aligning with federal goals to increase the demographic weight of FMCs. Specifically, Ontario set a 5% target in its 2012 strategy, and managed to exceed this in 2023 and 2024, reaching nearly 10% of all new permanent residents (Ontario, 2023; Ontario, 2025). The Ontario government reports a one-year retention rate of 94.6% for newcomers admitted in 2021, but highlights a lack of comprehensive, long-term tracking regarding whether these immigrants become consistently active in FMCs, or whether they shift toward Anglophone institutions over

time. Recent syntheses also emphasize the importance of retention and integration beyond arrival—for example, through continued use of French, participation in cultural life, and engagement with Francophone institutions, though specific long-term data remain limited (Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities, 2022).

New Brunswick set an ambitious goal to award 32–33% of its provincial nominations to French-speaking candidates by 2024 (New Brunswick, 2024), while Manitoba continued to align its objectives with the federal 4.4% benchmark, tracking proportional increases in Francophone admissions annually (Manitoba, 2023). The federal government’s Immigration Levels Plan 2025–2027 sets ambitious targets of 8.5% in 2025, 9.5% in 2026, and 10% in 2027 for French-speaking permanent residents outside Quebec.

According to Statistics Canada, the number of immigrants reporting French as their mother tongue (or primary language spoken at home) has been steadily climbing. The census data from 2021 shows that 102,000 immigrants had French as their first official language spoken in Canada outside Quebec, 1.4% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2024). Furthermore, in Ontario 591,855 Ontarians (4.2% of the population) had French as one of their mother tongues. While this number varied little from 1991 to 2006 (+11,065 people), it increased steadily from 2006 to 2021 (+58,995 people) (Auclair, Frigon, & St-Amant, 2023), though their share of the provincial population remains steady at around 4.6% (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Retention rates also present a mixed picture: while 94.6% of immigrants admitted to Ontario in 2021 remained in the province one year after admission, questions persist about long-term engagement and integration into FMCs. Many French-speaking immigrants report challenges in accessing services, navigating bilingual environments, and participating fully in community life—especially when they arrive without English proficiency (IRCC, 2024; Veronis & Couton, 2017; Veronis & Huot, 2017). These realities underscore the need for more inclusive policies that go beyond recruitment targets to address retention, linguistic support, and meaningful participation in Francophone institutions.

2.1.3 Integration in minority-language settings

Research consistently shows that French-speaking immigrants face a range of specific challenges when settling into Canadian society in general, and into FMCs specifically—despite sharing a common language with the latter (Huot et al., 2023). Furthermore, Veronis and Huot (2017) demonstrate that many newcomers experience cultural dissonance, limited access to culturally appropriate services, and feelings of exclusion within established Francophone institutions. Their study of Ottawa and London, Ontario, reveals that linguistic commonality does not automatically translate into social belonging or institutional inclusion. On the contrary, immigrants often struggle to navigate systems that prioritize dominant Francophone norms—which may differ significantly from their own cultural backgrounds. These challenges are heightened by a lack of targeted support services, and by insufficient recognition of the diversity within immigrant populations.

Access to services remains a critical concern, particularly for French-speaking immigrants who arrive under the assumption that speaking French will, by itself, suffice for daily life and employment. Studies have shown that many newcomers are surprised to discover that greater English proficiency is often necessary to access public services, secure work, and participate fully in civic life, especially in bilingual or predominantly Anglophone regions (Deschênes-Thériault, Forest, & Cimon, 2025; Veronis & Couton, 2017). This linguistic gap can lead to barriers in accessing healthcare, education, and employment services, adding to the vulnerability of those who lack English skills (Statistics Canada, 2023).

This reality reflects what is referred to as asymmetrical bilingualism: where Francophones are expected to operate fluently in both official languages, while Anglophones can generally function monolingually (Jezak, 2019). Such dynamics not only reinforce systemic inequities, but also marginalize French-speaking newcomers within FMCs. Addressing these challenges requires a more nuanced understanding of linguistic inclusion, and a commitment to bilingual service provision that genuinely reflects the needs of various Francophone populations.

For immigrants, participation in community life is constrained by these linguistic and institutional barriers. While many FMCs may offer French-language services and cultural programming, these are not always accessible to immigrants, or inclusive of their perspectives. As Veronis and Couton (2017) note, newcomers often feel excluded from leadership roles and strategic planning processes, reinforcing a sense of symbolic and practical distance from the host community. Addressing these challenges requires a shift toward more equitable models of bilingualism and service provision—ones that acknowledge linguistic diversity within FMCs, and work to support immigrant inclusion.

Building on this, the study team—led by Huot et al., (2023)—argue that community cohesion within FMCs is often undermined by tensions between long-standing Francophone residents and newly arrived immigrants. Their multi-site study across Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Moncton highlights how issues of belonging and representation shape immigrants’ experiences of integration. While language may serve as a point of entry, it is not sufficient to overcome structural and cultural barriers that limit full participation. Immigrants frequently report feeling peripheral to the core Francophone community, facing implicit exclusion from decision-making spaces and community networks. The authors emphasize the need for inclusive policies and practices that recognize the pluralism of Francophone identities, and that work to foster intercultural dialogue.

These challenges reflect the unique position of FMCs within Canada’s linguistic landscape and the complex dynamics of immigrant integration. In addition to the general barriers that all immigrants across Canada face—such as non-recognition of foreign credentials, underemployment, limited access to affordable housing, and systemic discrimination (Statistics Canada, 2016; IRCC, 2024)—many Francophone immigrants encounter a distinct set of issues shaped by their linguistic and cultural positioning. These include what scholars have termed “triple minoritization”: being immigrants, racialized individuals, and members of a linguistic minority (Madibbo, 2006; Mianda, 2018; Huot et al., 2023). This layered marginalization affects access to services, representation in community institutions, and opportunities for civic participation.

Huot, Dodson, and Laliberte Rudman (2014) examine the integration experiences of French-speaking immigrants from visible minority groups, highlighting how shifts in place and identity following international migration influence newcomers' negotiation of belonging within host communities. Their findings reveal tensions between Canada's official bilingualism policy and the lived reality of asymmetrical bilingualism within FMCs. Participants in this study framed integration as an ongoing process of "starting over," characterized by feelings of displacement and exclusion that they must overcome.

The study demonstrates that French-speaking newcomers from visible minority groups must contend not only with challenges associated with minority-language contexts, but also with the intersection of linguistic, racial, and other identity markers within these communities. The study emphasizes how migrants' sense of belonging is influenced by the discourses and practices they encounter in particular places, with socially constructed identity markers (including language and race) serving to differentiate those who are considered to "belong" in specific spaces. Other scholars, including Sall (2019) and colleagues (Sall et al., 2021; see also Delaisse et al., 2023), have documented separations between groups within FMCs based on ethnicity, country of origin, and other socio-cultural factors that shape social dynamics, and affect newcomer inclusion. These divisions can create barriers to full participation, as different groups may have varying levels of access to community resources and social networks.

Perhaps most significantly, Veronis and Huot (2019) found that some immigrants feel it is *more* difficult to participate and be included in FMCs than in the broader Anglophone community. This finding raises important questions about the capacity of FMCs to serve as welcoming and inclusive environments for newcomers, despite sharing a common language.

2.2 Community Spaces and Immigrant Integration

Community spaces play a critical role in shaping the integration experiences of immigrants by providing essential venues for social interaction, cultural expression, and access to support services. This section examines the importance of these spaces in facilitating immigrant belonging and participation, with a particular focus on FMCs in Ottawa. The discussion is organized around three key dimensions:

1. ethnic and Francophone neighbourhoods;
2. institutional spaces such as schools, settlement agencies, community centres, and places of worship that serve as social infrastructure within Francophone communities;
3. the concept of “third spaces,” or intercultural contact zones, which offer dynamic environments for cultural exchange and identity negotiation.

By exploring these interrelated spatial and institutional contexts, this section contributes to a deeper understanding of how community environments influence immigrant integration processes, highlighting both opportunities and challenges within minority language settings.

2.2.1 Ethnic and Francophone neighbourhoods

Ethnic neighbourhoods have long been recognized as critical sites for immigrant settlement, identity formation, and community-building. These spaces offer cultural familiarity, linguistic continuity, and social networks that make possible both everyday survival, and long-term integration. However, as Veronis (2010) argues in her study of Latin-American migrants in Toronto, participation in host societies is shaped by a complex interplay of social and spatial processes. Ethnic enclaves do not merely reflect cultural clustering; they are dynamic environments where immigrants must come to terms with the tasks of belonging, visibility, and access to resources.

The spatial dimension of immigrant integration is further elaborated in Veronis and Huot (2024), who examine FMCs in Metro Vancouver as “third spaces” for French-speaking immigrants. Their research shows that many immigrants live in or near ethnic neighbourhoods that reflect their cultural backgrounds; and yet these spaces are not always linguistically aligned with the Francophone institutions they engage with. This spatial disconnect can generate tensions between cultural familiarity and linguistic access, particularly in regions where French-language services are geographically distant or institutionally fragmented. The concept of third space is especially relevant here, since Francophone institutions do not replace ethnocultural neighbourhoods. Rather, they offer alternative sites where immigrants can maintain linguistic identity while seeking integration.

Veronis (2007) also explores how immigrant groups reconstruct collective identity through spatial practices. Her study of Latin American immigrants in Toronto reveals that newcomers often “essentialize” their identities via physical spaces, in order to make themselves more politically visible. This spatial reconfiguration is not merely symbolic—it’s a form of agency that allows marginalized groups to assert their presence, and advocate for inclusion.

Moreover, ethnic neighbourhoods serve not only as cultural sanctuaries, but also as platforms for political mobilization. Veronis (2013) emphasizes the role of immigrant community organizations and their networks in fostering political participation. Her research shows that partnerships within the nonprofit sector can be instrumental in advocacy efforts, and can have the potential to influence public policy. These collaborations often emerge from within ethnic enclaves, where community organizations are embedded in the lived realities of immigrant populations and are thus well-positioned to articulate their needs and aspirations.

Taken together, this body of work underscores the importance of ethnic neighbourhoods as multifaceted spaces of belonging, negotiation, and resistance. They are not passive backdrops to integration; they are the terrains where immigrants vigorously engage with, and reshape, the social, linguistic, and political contours of Canadian cities.

As mentioned earlier, Ottawa is geographically distinctive in many ways, with many neighbourhoods that skew heavily Francophone. These neighbourhoods are richly documented in the 2017 essay collection by Anne Gilbert and others, *Ottawa, lieu de vie français*; and also in the research of Kenza Benali and Caroline Ramirez, who trace the longstanding significance of Vanier and Lowertown as anchors of French language and institutions within the city (Benali, 2020; Benali & Ramirez, 2023). Their analyses highlight how these places have intersected with Ottawa's evolving immigrant diversity, bilingual service regimes, and community infrastructures (Gilbert et al., 2018; Benali & Ramirez, 2023). The historic-spatial distinctiveness of these areas offers a unique vantage point for studying contemporary immigrant integration. For newcomers, proximity to such Francophone enclaves shapes everyday decisions around schooling, employment, faith-based participation, and access to both formal services and informal social support. The ByWard/Lowertown area today operates as a “contact edge,” where tourist commerce, ethnocultural businesses, and Francophone community spaces converge, creating a rich site for intercultural interaction (Benali & Ramirez, 2023).

2.2.2 Institutional spaces as Francophone social infrastructure

Here, I examine institutional spaces as critical components of FMC social infrastructure, focusing on schools, settlement agencies, community centres, and places of worship. I argue that these institutions are key sites where policy is translated into practice through programming, recognition, and leadership opportunities that sustain immigrant integration into communities. My analysis highlights the multifaceted roles these spaces play in fostering language maintenance, social networking, and intergenerational continuity, with particular attention to how institutional policies and practices shape immigrant inclusion. I consider several aspects of these factors: the governance of transition in schools; the brokering functions of settlement agencies and community centres, in facilitating access to essential resources; and the capacities for mutual aid of churches, which are well placed to build trust and bridging ethnocultural identities. I also address persistent issues such as challenges in representation, linguistic accommodation, and spatial accessibility, all of which are necessary for these institutions to promote equitable participation and intercultural contact.

Schools

Veronis and Couton (2017) examine the role of post-secondary institutions in Ottawa, highlighting the city's distinctive position within the broader landscape of FMCs in Canada. Unlike many other, Ottawa is home to a pair of prominent Francophone and bilingual educational institutions, notably the University of Ottawa and Collège La Cité. The authors argue that these institutions exert a significant influence on Francophone immigration by attracting a substantial number of international students. Furthermore, they emphasize the growing importance of these institutions for immigrants who seek to complete or continue their education in Canada, thereby contributing to their social and economic integration.

Building on this context, Wu and Veronis (2022) investigate the experiences of English-speaking international students at the University of Ottawa through the viewpoint of “linguistic capital”—a concept that, the authors claim, can be converted into cultural and economic capital. Their findings reveal the nuanced and multifaceted nature of linguistic dynamics in the Ottawa-Gatineau region, underscoring the importance of context and power relations in shaping students' experiences. The research also highlights how different social spaces mediate the process of capital conversion, with some participants encountering language-related barriers that hindered their academic success and economic integration.

Ottawa is also home to two major French-language school boards, the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est (CECC), and the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEPEO), which between them are responsible for administering primary and secondary education for Catholic schools in the area. They also offer subsidized childcare services in French and bilingual formats. Large postsecondary institutions such as Collège La Cité and the University of Ottawa attract international Francophone students, particularly from France and Africa, and have implemented some tuition-reform policies to enhance accessibility (Farmer & Labrie, 2013). These studies suggest that educational institutions in Ottawa FMCs function as more than merely academic environments—they are dynamic “third spaces” where immigrants can engage with new cultural norms, build social capital, and reinvent their identities. These spaces can either make

integration easier, or hinder it—depending on factors like the inclusivity of linguistic policies, the accessibility of support systems, and the recognition of the wide diversity of immigrant experiences.

Settlement agencies, community centres and associations

Building on Couton's 2014 analysis of ethno-specific organizational capacity, recent scholarship has focused on the role of community organizations within Canadian FMCs. These institutions serve as critical nodes of social infrastructure, fostering cultural cohesion and integration. Huot et al., (2025) examine how FMCs engage with formal and informal Francophone spaces to sustain community cohesion amid increasing demographic diversity. Their study, which maps spatial and dialogic engagement across Metro Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Moncton, reveals that such organizations play a pivotal role in shaping socio-geographical mobilities, and in fostering a sense of belonging among both native-born and immigrant Francophones. These organizations not only preserve linguistic and cultural identity but also enable access to services, networks, and opportunities that support broader social integration.

Similarly, Fourot (2021) explores the governance dynamics between municipalities and FMCs, examining how community associations navigate social and political ambiguities in mandates and resource allocation. Her research points out that while FMC organizations often operate within collaborative governance frameworks, they face persistent challenges related to funding, accountability, and power asymmetries. However, these ambiguities—rather than hampering action—can foster adaptive strategies that allow FMC organizations to respond to shifting community needs.

Similarly, Lauer et al., (2024) contributes to this discourse by framing community organizations as essential components of local social infrastructure. The authors identify structured programs, informal interaction spaces, and emergent mutuality as key situational dynamics that enable relationship-building and community resilience within FMCs. These findings resonate with Couton's (2014) emphasis on the integrative potential of ethno-specific organizations, suggesting

that FMC associations are uniquely positioned to bridge cultural preservation with economic and social participation.

Places of worship

Religious institutions have long been recognized as vital spaces for immigrant integration, offering both spiritual sustenance and tangible support. In the context of FMCs, such places often serve as multifunctional hubs that reinforce linguistic identity, enable social cohesion, and provide critical settlement services. Machuhi (2019) explores the integration experiences of African Christian immigrants in Canada, examining how churches act as platforms for identity formation, social networking, and community engagement. Her study reveals that they not only offer spiritual guidance, but often also serve as informal service providers—offering newcomers assistance with housing, employment, and the frustrating task of dealing with local bureaucracies. These functions are particularly important in FMCs, where linguistic and cultural barriers may compound the challenges of integration.

Hoernig (2006) adds to this discussion by examining the development of places of worship in suburban areas of the Greater Toronto Area. Her findings underscore the adaptive strategies employed by immigrant religious communities in negotiating land-use policies and urban planning constraints. For FMCs, such strategies are crucial in establishing religious spaces that reflect both cultural heritage and community needs. These spaces often double as cultural centres, hosting events such as language classes and youth programs—events that reinforce Francophone identity while promoting intercultural dialogue.

Moreover, places of worship in FMCs frequently act as mediators between immigrants and the broader host society. They foster what Gélinas and Vatz-Laaroussi (2012) term “symmetric relationships,” enabling mutual trust and reciprocity between newcomers and established residents. This relational dynamic is essential in minority-language contexts, where religious institutions may be among the few stable and accessible community anchors. Furthermore, Veronis and Huot (2017) propose that churches seem to be an important space for immigrants not only

because they help people with their spiritual needs, but because they also provide an accessible, inclusive environment that offers the same kind of support as some settlement agencies. Their role in immigrants' experience is thus multidimensional.

2.2.3 Third spaces and intercultural contact zones

“The ‘Third Space’ displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives...” — *Bhabha, 1994/2012*

The concept of Third Space as conceptualized by Bhabha refers to a lineal space of cultural hybridity. A space where there are constant negotiations of identities through the interaction between different cultures. Delaisse, Veronis, and Huot (2024) use the notion of ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 2012) in the context of Metro Vancouver, identifying linguistic minority sites as crucial for immigrants' integration. Their study concentrates on the role of the Francophone minority community in Metro Vancouver as a ‘third space’ for French-speaking immigrants' integration, examining how FMCs support immigrants by playing an ‘in-between’ role in relation to mainstream Anglophone society and participants' ethnocultural communities. The findings suggest that FMCs constitute ‘third spaces’ that support immigrants' integration by providing spaces that are more accessible than mainstream Anglophone spaces because of French language use, while also facilitating engagement with broader Canadian society.

This research is particularly important because it moves beyond simple descriptions of service provision to examine how spaces function as sites of identity negotiation and cultural boundary-crossing. The third space concept helps explain how immigrants use Francophone community spaces not just for practical support but to navigate in multiple communities simultaneously. The authors identify a range of Francophone spaces in Metro Vancouver, including places of worship, community centers, and post-secondary institutions that serve as “in-between” zones where French-speaking immigrants engage with both their ethnocultural networks and the broader Anglophone society. Places of worship, for instance, offer spiritual grounding while also facilitating social interaction and informal settlement support, often bridging linguistic and cultural

divides. Community centers provide access to services and programming in French, but their effectiveness depends on geographic proximity and cultural responsiveness. Post-secondary institutions, meanwhile, are highlighted as key sites for linguistic affirmation and professional development, though they may also reproduce exclusionary dynamics if immigrant students face barriers related to language proficiency or institutional culture. These findings underscore the importance of viewing Francophone spaces not as static service points but as dynamic arenas of negotiation, where identity, language, and belonging are continuously shaped through everyday interactions.

2.3 Conceptual Framework: Interculturality in Minority Contexts

2.3.1 Interculturality theory

This study is informed by the theory of interculturality, which examines how individuals and groups from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds engage in interaction, exchange, and negotiation. When cultures meet and change through contact and interaction with one another, the result is the phenomenon referred to as “in-betweenness.” In the following section, I use interculturality theory as the primary lens through which to view these dynamics.

According to Lüsebrink (2019), interculturality broadly designates forms of contact between different cultures and their members, rooted in practices of social life and interdisciplinary studies. This notion highlights the importance of recognizing that we live in multicultural societies, where many diverse ethnic and cultural groups assert their right to exist and maintain their own identities—while at the same time engaging in processes of mutual influence and exchange. Interculturality reflects a dual dynamic: it emphasizes both reciprocity in cultural exchanges and the complexity of relationships between cultures. This recognition is crucial for understanding immigrant experiences in FMCs, where cultural contact occurs within the context of minority language dynamics and existing community power structures.

Elias and Mansouri (2020) argue that interculturality should not be viewed as a replacement for multiculturalism, but as a complementary framework that foregrounds dialogue, mutual

transformation, and shared civic engagement. Their research demonstrates that intercultural approaches are most effective when they move beyond symbolic inclusion, to foster meaningful participation and co-construction of community norms. This insight is particularly relevant in FMCs, where linguistic and cultural minorities must navigate layered systems of inclusion and exclusion.

At its core, interculturality entails a continuous process of interference, interaction, and questioning, creating dynamic and evolving spaces for cultural exchange. This process orientation is particularly relevant for understanding immigrant integration, which involves ongoing negotiation of identities and relationships rather than simple one-way adaptation to receiving communities

For this study, interculturality theory provides a framework for understanding interactions between French-speaking immigrants and established FMC members, recognizing that both groups may undergo changes through their contact. It also helps analyze how minority context dynamics including unequal power relations, limited access to opportunities in French, and pressures toward English language use shape intercultural processes in ways that may differ from majority context integration.

2.3.2 Intercultural spaces: Concepts and applications

The concept of intercultural spaces provides a framework for analyzing how physical and social environments can encourage, or hinder, cross-cultural interaction and mutual understanding. Chen and Borsari (2024) contribute to the growing literature on intercultural spaces by examining their conceptual foundations, practical applications, and relevance in migration contexts. Intercultural spaces are characterized by their capacity to facilitate meaningful cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and sharing of experiences (Arasaratnam-Smith & Smith, 2024). What distinguishes intercultural spaces is their active engagement across cultural boundaries, and their creation of opportunities for mutual learning and exchange. Intercultural spaces are useful in helping

individuals from a variety of backgrounds to achieve inclusion, belonging, acceptance, and recognition.

Teräs (2012) emphasizes that intercultural spaces are not static or neutral; they are shaped by power relations, institutional structures, and the lived experiences of those who occupy them. Her work highlights how immigrants engage in ongoing negotiation of identity and belonging within these spaces, often encountering both opportunities for connection and barriers to participation. This dynamic highlights the importance of designing spaces that are not only inclusive in intent but also responsive to the complexities of cultural interaction.

Essential characteristics of intercultural spaces include: accessibility to diverse groups; opportunities for meaningful interaction, programming or activities that bring different groups together; and inclusive leadership and governance structures (Agyeman, 2017). The spaces are designed to encourage cross-cultural communication and collaboration, which can be particularly important for immigrants as they navigate new environments and seek to integrate into society.

Chen and Borsari's 2024 analysis of 42 studies demonstrates how intercultural spaces facilitate meaningful interactions and social integration, particularly when designed to enhance accessibility, safety, and flexibility. Public spaces such as parks, markets, and plazas generally encourage high levels of participation, though private and virtual spaces can also serve as effective environments for intercultural exchange under certain conditions. Wood and Landry (2008) similarly argue that intercultural spaces must be intentionally cultivated, through inclusive urban design and community engagement strategies. They note that spontaneous diversity does not automatically lead to meaningful interaction. The research further identifies art and cultural activities as powerful tools for transforming public spaces into inclusive environments. Their study shows that incorporating music, exhibitions, and performances into spaces strengthens intercultural bonds, and facilitates dialogue across communities. However, barriers such as language differences and social reluctance can hinder engagement, underscoring the need for adaptive designs that promote accessibility and trust.

2.3.3 Application to Francophone community spaces and everyday spaces

How do community spaces function as sites of cultural interaction and integration? Rather than just assuming that these spaces enable intercultural dynamics, I investigate the conditions under which meaningful cross-cultural interaction actually occurs—as well as the factors that support, or hinder, integration. Francophone community spaces have the potential to function as intercultural spaces when they perform certain functions: when they create opportunities for interaction between new immigrants from diverse backgrounds, and established FMC members; when they facilitate cultural exchange, while maintaining French-language centrality; and when they address power imbalances between different groups within the community. However, the extent to which any particular space functions interculturally depends on a variety of factors, including institutional policies, programming approaches, leadership diversity, and community attitudes toward inclusion.

The intercultural framework also recognizes that interactions can involve both positive exchanges, and tensions or conflicts. In FMC contexts, such tensions may relate to a number of things: different understandings of Francophone identity, varying levels of linguistic competence, different cultural practices and values, or competition for limited resources and opportunities within the communities.

2.3.4 Making the framework operational

For this study, the framework of intercultural spaces provides a lens for examining how everyday spaces and francophone community spaces operate. By applying the intercultural spaces concept this research examines how immigrants experience cultural exchange (or lack thereof) in these environments, what factors enable, or hinder, intercultural interaction, how space design, programming, and leadership affect intercultural dynamics, and the role of these experiences in immigrant integration and belonging within FMCs.

2.3.5 Synthesis and research positioning

The literature review reveals three important themes relevant to understanding immigrant experiences in Francophone communities. First, FMCs face ongoing demographic and cultural challenges, which have led them to embrace immigration as a strategic response; but implementing that policy has created new challenges, related to community capacity and inclusive practices. Second, research (Sall, 2015; Huot et al., 2025) demonstrates that integration in minority-language contexts involves complex accommodations for immigrants: they must pursue the goal of belonging both in the FMCs and in the broader Canadian society, while dealing with both the opportunities and constraints of the minority context. And third, while Francophone community spaces play important roles in the integration processes, their effectiveness depends on how actively inclusive they are—rather than merely places where immigrants happen to be present.

While existing research has established the importance of community spaces and identified a range of challenges and opportunities, further work is needed to deepen our understanding of how immigrants use and experience community spaces in their everyday lives, particularly with regard to the quality, processes, and outcomes of cross-cultural interactions. Building on this body of literature, this study focuses on immigrants' experiences and perceptions of everyday spaces and Francophone community spaces in Ottawa. By centring immigrant voices and lived experiences, it seeks to offer new insights into how such spaces can better support newcomer integration.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach employed to examine how French-speaking immigrants experience everyday spaces in Ottawa as sites of cultural interaction. The aim of the study was threefold:

- 1) To examine Francophone immigrants' experiences of integration through a variety of everyday spaces.
- 2) To investigate the Francophone immigrants' experiences of integration in specifically Francophone community spaces.
- 3) To use an intercultural lens to identify spaces that facilitate intercultural exchange, communication sharing of experiences and whilst also supporting immigrants' integration.

My study adopts a qualitative methodology designed to capture the participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and spatial practices within Ottawa's Francophone Minority Community (FMC). This research was conducted as part of the broader SSHRC-funded project "Fostering cohesion within diversifying communities: Immigration to Francophone minority communities from coast to coast" (2021–2025). While that project was much broader (it included four different FMCs: Moncton, New Brunswick; Ottawa, Ontario; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Vancouver, British Columbia), this project focuses specifically on Ottawa, the largest FMC outside Quebec. The study in Ottawa was led by Dr. Luisa Veronis, from the Department of Geography, Environment, and Geomatics at the University of Ottawa. I contributed to the project as one of two research assistants, alongside Dr. Aba Sadki, postdoctoral researcher. As a result, in the material below, I often reference the work of the team on the broader project:

In this chapter, I outline the research design, data collection methods, participant selection, and analytical approaches used to investigate immigrant experiences within everyday spaces through an intercultural lens. Specifically, I detail eight key stages of the research process:

In this chapter, I outline the research design, data collection methods, participant selection, and analytical approaches used to investigate immigrant experiences within everyday spaces through an intercultural lens. Specifically, I detail eight key stages of the research process. I begin by presenting the research design, followed by an explanation of the methods of data collection. I then describe the criteria used for participant selection before addressing the study's ethical considerations and consent procedures. The chapter proceeds with an account of the data-collection process and an overview of participant profiles to contextualize the perspectives shared. I subsequently outline the procedures used for data analysis, and I conclude with a reflection on my positionality as a researcher and its influence on the study.

3.1 Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative methodological approach, which is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and the meanings they ascribe to their interactions with Ottawa's different community and everyday spaces. As Creswell (2013) notes, qualitative approaches begin with assumptions and interpretive frameworks that address the meaning that individuals and groups ascribe to social or human problems. As a result, these data-collection methods are sensitive to the people and places under study. This study's particular focus on the role of everyday spaces in immigrant integration through an intercultural lens, requires an understanding not only of what participants actually do in various spaces; it also requires perceptiveness about how they experience and make meaning of their interactions within these environments. This aligns well with the emphasis of the qualitative approach on capturing the authentic voices of the participants; on the requirement for researchers to assess their own reflexivity; and on the careful description and interpretation of social phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Situated within the larger SSHRC-funded project examining community cohesion in diversifying FMCs, this study follows the same broad methodological approach established by the overarching design. As such, certain elements of my methodology were predetermined by the larger project, including the use of semi-structured interviews, cartographies of everyday life, and demographic questionnaires with immigrant participants. However, this thesis focuses exclusively on newcomers, rather than including Canadian-born participants. While the data collection aligned with the overarching SSHRC project, the theoretical framework and analytical approach adopted in this thesis are entirely my own.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

The study utilizes three distinct yet interrelated data collection sources: semi-structured interviews, socio-demographic questionnaires, and cartographies of everyday geographies. This three-pronged strategy allows for the acquisition of varied, complementary insights into the participants' experiences, thereby enriching the overall research.

3.2.1 Socio-demographic questionnaires

In addition to the interviews, we administered socio-demographic questionnaires (see Appendix 2) to gather standardized information about each participant's background, such as age, gender, country of origin, education level, time spent in Ottawa, and other relevant characteristics. This data enabled me to provide important context for analyzing the participants' narratives, and to better understand the ways in which various factors might shape their spatial experiences. We also used these questionnaires to monitor recruitment and ensure diversity across the sample, in order to represent a broad range of immigrant experiences within Ottawa's FMC. These questionnaires were completed after each semi-structured interview.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

The central component of data collection was the use of semi-structured interviews, which we selected because they allowed for flexible, open-ended conversation while ensuring that all key questions and themes were addressed consistently across participants. According to Paillé (2021),

this interview type is semi-prepared, semi-structured, and semi-directed. It provides guidance to researchers, while still giving them the freedom to develop open conversations; and it allows participants to take the lead in directing the discussion. This approach helped to quickly identify emerging themes, while minimizing any irrelevant information.

In interviews, we tried to elicit a number of nuanced details from the participants. We asked about their perceptions of their community's openness to diversity; we examined their social participation within Ottawa's Francophone spaces; we considered their interactions with other community members; and we gathered information about their daily lived experiences.

The interviews focused on the participants' perceptions of their community's openness to diversity; their social participation in everyday spaces; and their interactions with other community members. The interview guide (see Appendix 1) was designed to ensure that our questions did address these key themes—as well as other topics, such as the participants' introductions to the Francophone community; their interactions with other Ottawa residents; their experiences of diversity and inclusion; and the trajectory of their immigration journey. This approach was meant to enable an in-depth examination of how participants navigate the processes of integration within both FMCs and the wider Canadian society.

3.2.3 Cartographies of everyday geographies

The study also incorporated cartographies (also known as occupational mapping; Powell, 2010) by inviting participants to create visual maps that outlined their spatial daily routines (Gould & White, 1986). Participants were provided with paper and drawing materials, and we explained to them that they could draw a map or a diagram—whichever format they preferred—to represent the places they went in a given week, encouraging them to use any style or level of detail they felt was most authentic to them. As they worked, we would often ask questions about their modes of transportation, and the frequency with which they visited particular locations. We also asked about other sites that they frequented less regularly, such as gyms, restaurants, or occasional social venues—places that might be part of their broader routine but did not necessarily occur every week.

Participants sometimes specified places by name, such as a favourite market or café; at other times they merely referenced broader categories, like grocery stores or public parks. The sessions were recorded; and the audio data thus generated was especially valuable, since participants were encouraged to narrate and explain their choices, providing context and insight in real time.

As a result of this exercise, I was able to generate complementary data that enriched the interview narratives. The maps illustrated not only where the participants engaged socially; they also revealed the formal and informal spaces that characterize Ottawa's Francophone community and provided valuable insight into the participants' interactions within diverse spaces, and specifically to identify intercultural spaces. An additional benefit to this method is that it helps to build rapport between researcher and participant by providing insights into the latter's everyday life, beyond the interview conversations (McLees, 2013). The "interactiveness" of this exercise came from the participants telling stories to the researchers as they created their maps. The aesthetic flexibility of the drawings (maps need not be to scale) also enabled multisensory expression of lived experience (Ball & Gilligan, 2010; den Besten, 2010; Powell, 2010).

These cartographies allowed me to establish direct connections between specific spaces, and immigrants' experiences within those environments. This enabled a nuanced spatial analysis that complemented the verbal narratives, one that enabled me to compare and connect key locations and spatial practices between the participants.

3.3 Recruitment and Participant Selection

3.3.1 Selection criteria

For the purposes of this research, we recruited twelve French-speaking immigrants residing in Ottawa who self-identified as Francophones, Francophiles, or French-speaking individuals. Selection criteria were deliberately broad, without restrictions on age, gender, country of origin, immigration category, or length of residence in Canada, in order to capture a diverse array of perspectives and experiences within Ottawa's Francophone Minority Community. The criteria for participation focused on self-identification as French-speaking, rather than on birth in a

Francophone country—since French competence can be acquired through various means. This approach acknowledges the linguistic basis of participation in Francophone communities, rather than the purely geographic. As well, another criterion for eligibility was willingness to participate in a French-language interview, and to complete both the cartographic exercise and the socio-demographic questionnaire.

3.3.2 Recruitment strategies

The recruitment process employed multiple strategies to reach potential participants. Initial recruitment was conducted by Professor Veronis and Dr. Sadki in June 2023. After joining the project in January 2023, I became actively involved in ongoing recruitment efforts. Three primary methods were used: various personal academic and professional networks, followed by posters, community networks, and “snowball sampling.” (This is a technique in which existing study participants recruit others from among their acquaintance. The method is particularly useful for reaching hard-to-find populations, such as those in marginalized groups or with niche experiences.)

First, early participants were recruited through professional, academic and social networks, including the University of Ottawa, La Cité, various sport leagues, and Government of Canada networks. We then followed up with the snowball method, encouraging participants to refer other eligible individuals within their social networks. Despite the fact that it duplicated some nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds, this method proved particularly effective—likely as a result of social networks within Ottawa’s FMCs.

Second, to maximize community visibility, we designed and distributed recruitment posters across a range of strategic locations, including Francophone community centres, residential buildings, cultural organizations, and the University of Ottawa campus. Specific sites included the Vanier Community Service Centre, La Renaissance residential building in Vanier, and the university’s Faculty of Social Sciences, and the Department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics. These locations were selected for their high visibility and accessibility to Francophone residents and

students. Recognizing the potential of digital platforms, I also shared the poster through social media channels such as Instagram and Facebook, with the goal of engaging a broader audience beyond physical spaces.

Third, I disseminated recruitment materials via email through a variety of networks associated with Francophone organizations and services in Ottawa. Information was also circulated among various academic, professional, and personal networks, including the University of Ottawa's *Collège des chaires de recherche sur le monde francophone*. (Unfortunately, this method and networks proved to be the least successful in recruiting participants.)

Throughout the recruitment process, my goal was gender parity: the final participant group comprised six men and six women. I also tried for a diverse range of age groups, countries of origin, and length of residence in Ottawa, with the goal of capturing varied integration experiences and perspectives.

3.3.3 Recruitment challenges

Recruitment proved challenging, resulting in some limitations of the final participant sample. While snowball sampling proved to be an effective strategy for broadening participation, significant difficulties in recruiting male participants, which required persistent effort to maintain gender parity. Additionally, targeted steps were taken to avoid an over-concentration of students, and former students, from the University of Ottawa, as these groups were heavily represented in the early phases of recruitment through university-affiliated channels. This was intended to ensure broader perspectives on immigrant experiences, and to better reflect the diversity of Ottawa's Francophone community. However, proximity to the university, and reliance on academic networks, did contribute to an overrepresentation of individuals with higher education credentials—which may not fully reflect the demographic reality of Francophone immigrants across the city. Also, as a result of the university context, there was an abundance of participants in the 18–35 age bracket. In sum, while gender parity was achieved, other objectives—such as capturing a wider range of ages and educational backgrounds—proved impossible to realize. This

was likely due to low overall interest in the project, and the inherent challenges of accessing a broader pool of participants.

3.4 Ethics and Informed Consent

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, in accordance with its principles and guidelines for research involving participants (see Appendix 3). I was added to the ethics submission.

The research followed all institutional requirements for protecting the welfare of participants, for transparent and accountable processes, and for ensuring ethical conduct throughout the study. Before participants became involved, and before any data collection began, the research team provided everyone with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. They were asked for written informed consent, which included an explanation of the interview process, the demographic questionnaire, and the cartographic exercise. As a gesture of appreciation for their time, participants were offered a \$50 gift card upon completion of their contributions.

Throughout the research process, the research team took deliberate measures to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. All participants were assigned a pseudonym for their interviews, and were also assured that their information would be kept confidential. We safeguarded personal information by ensuring that any identifying details were removed, or anonymized, during data analysis and reporting. In presenting the findings, I referred to participants only by the pseudonyms, and by demographic categories, to protect their privacy. The data captured was stored in a safe, password-protected device.

3.5 The Data-Collection Process

3.5.1 Interview procedures

All interviews were conducted in French, with each session typically lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Many interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the university's Department of

Geography, Environment and Geomatics, which was a consistent and accessible site. However, we often offered participants the choice to meet at other locations that might be more accessible and comfortable for them: alternatives such as local cafés, community spaces, and other buildings across the campus (such as the Faculty of Social Sciences Hall). This flexibility was a deliberate part of the recruitment strategy: I moved around the city to accommodate participants' preferences when needed, with the goal of ensuring that travel problems, or unfamiliarity with the campus, would not become a barrier to participation. Prioritizing accessibility and participant comfort helped foster a more inclusive and responsive research environment.

The interview guide which was developed for the SSHRC project provided structure for the conversations, while also allowing for organic development based on the participants' experiences and interests. All interviews were audio-recorded (with participant permission) to ensure accurate data collection, and to enable detailed analysis. The interviews were conducted collaboratively by Professor Veronis, Dr. Sadki, and myself. At the initial stage of the project, Professor Veronis and Dr. Sadki led the interview process and conducted a number of interviews. After joining the project as a research assistant, I first accompanied Dr. Sadki for several interviews in order to observe the interview process and become familiar with the research protocol. I subsequently assumed responsibility for conducting interviews independently, completing approximately half of the total interviews. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by me to ensure the accurate preservation of participants' responses and contextual nuances. All recordings were transcribed verbatim by me to ensure the preservation of participants' full responses and contextual nuances.

3.5.2 Demographic questionnaire administration

The socio-demographic questionnaires were completed either at the beginning or at the conclusion of each interview, and participants were encouraged to complete it in whatever format they deemed easier: on paper, given to the researcher, or online, submitted via email or to the online platform. The timing ensured that rapport had been established through the conversation, potentially encouraging more complete responses to demographic questions. The questionnaires captured standardized information while allowing for follow-up clarification when needed. They were

processed in two ways: either given directly to the researcher, or else submitted to an online survey platform associated with Dr. Huot, in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at the University of British Columbia. Either way, the results remained anonymous.

3.5.3 Cartographic exercises

As mentioned earlier, the cartographies were completed during the interview sessions, with participants drawing maps to illustrate their spatial practices, daily routines, and significant spaces. The maps enabled participants to show the spaces they frequented in the space of a week, from Monday to Sunday. I guided the exercise by asking questions about specific locations, travel patterns, modes of transport, and the significance of different places. I also asked questions about spaces that were less frequented; about who they close to go to places with; about the reasoning behind their choices; and also about their use of virtual spaces. Participants were encouraged to draw and/or write on the map as they chose, to better illustrate their spaces of their day-to-day lives. This interactive approach made possible a discussion of spatial practices that might not have emerged through interview questions alone.

3.5.4 Data collection timeline

Recruitment for this study began in May 2023 and targeted French-speaking immigrant participants residing in Ottawa. To ensure full accessibility, interviews were scheduled based on each participant's availability and conducted in French, thereby allowing for ease of dialogue about their experiences. The data-collection phase continued until May 2025—a timeline designed to accommodate all the participants' work, study, and family commitments, thus minimizing barriers to participation.

3.6 Participant Profiles

The sample of twelve participants reflected a broad spectrum of immigrant backgrounds, which enabled me to gather valuable insights into a wide range of experiences within Ottawa's FMC. As shown in Table 3.1, below, participants hailed from eight different countries: Côte d'Ivoire (4), Morocco (2), Tunisia (1), Burundi (1), Guinea Conakry (1), Cameroon (1), Poland (1), and Congo-

Brazzaville (1). This diversity spans sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and Europe, offering perspectives from different contexts and migration experiences.

Table 3.1: Participant Demographic Composition

| Participant ID | Country of Origin | Age Group | Gender | Time in Ottawa | Education Level |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------|--------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Roman | Morocco | 34–44 | Male | 5 years | Masters/PhD |
| Salomon | Congo-Brazzaville | 25–34 | Male | More than 5 years | Masters/PhD |
| Soumaila | Guinea Conakry | 18–24 | Male | 6 months+ | Masters/PhD |
| Ibrahim | Morocco | 18–24 | Male | A couple of weeks | High school |
| Melanie | Côte d’Ivoire | 25-34 | Female | 5 years | High school |
| Corinne | Burundi | 18-24 | Female | 3 years | High school |
| Nessib | Côte d’Ivoire | 18-24 | Female | 8 months | High school |
| Amelie | Côte d’Ivoire | 25-34 | Female | 9 years | Bachelors |
| Melvine | Poland | 45+ | Female | 7 years | High school |
| Elimane | Cameroon | 18-24 | Male | 3 years | Masters/PhD |
| Samira | Tunisia | 45+ | Female | 3 years | Masters/PhD |
| Kylian | Côte d’Ivoire | 25-34 | Male | 5 years | Masters/PhD |

The sample achieved balanced gender representation, with six male and six female participants. There was significant variation in their length of residence in Ottawa, ranging from a few weeks to over nine years; this was helpful in providing insights into different stages of the integration processes, from initial settlement experiences to longer-term community participation patterns. The majority of participants fell within the age groups of 18–24 years (5) and 25–34 years (4), with fewer participants over 45 (3). This reflected the younger demographic profile often associated with recent immigration.

Educational attainment among participants was notably high, with five participants having achieved Masters or PhD degrees, while three participants held college diplomas. This likely resulted from recruitment in proximity to the University of Ottawa. Several younger participants were students at the time of the study, which may explain the prevalence of high-school credentials among this group. Additionally, the variety of immigration backgrounds included international students at undergrad and graduate levels, as well as skilled workers. Some people had even immigrated in childhood. Their time spent in Ottawa was also quite diverse, ranging from a few weeks to almost a decade. Geographically, the overrepresentation of participants from Côte d’Ivoire (33% of the total) reflects the effect of snowball sampling. This demographic diversity provides a foundation for understanding varying experiences of integration and intercultural exchange; while the range in residence duration captures both newcomer perspectives, and those of more established immigrants.

3.7 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, I adopted a thematic analysis approach informed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) six-step framework that involved (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This approach emphasized the organic development of coding and themes, as well as maintaining systematic analytical procedures. All interviews were transcribed verbatim,

and pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to ensure confidentiality. Because the interviews were conducted in French, the quotes used for this paper were then translated into English.

The analysis began with a thorough reading of the interview transcripts, to identify and highlight significant and recurring themes, and to gain a general understanding of the participants' narratives. My initial coding was guided by pre-established themes linked to the study's focus on intercultural spaces, including shared and open environments, cross-cultural communication, collaboration, sharing of experiences, third-space dynamics, and diversity. However, the analysis also remained open to emergent themes reflecting participants' unique insights and experiences.

Key pre-established themes included:

- 1) shared and open environment characteristics,
- 2) cross-cultural communication patterns,
- 3) collaboration and cooperation,
- 4) sharing of experiences across cultural groups,
- 5) third space functions and dynamics,
- 6) diversity experiences and perceptions.

3.7.1 Multiple reading strategy

In conducting my analysis, I engaged in multiple, purposeful reading cycles with different foci. The first reading gathered themes pertinent to chosen concepts, as well as emerging and common themes across interviews. During the second reading, I paid particular attention to the spatial dimensions of participants' experiences. Third and fourth readings enabled transversal analysis of how different participants approached similar themes such as diversity, spaces, language, and identity. This iterative approach allowed for both vertical analysis (examining each participant's responses in depth) and horizontal analysis: drawing connections across participants and themes (Gaudet & Robert, 2018). The process captured individual experiences while synthesizing overarching patterns that emerged from the data.

3.7.2 Semantic condensation

In addition to thematic analysis, my study employed semantic condensation (following Gaudet and Robert, 2018). This approach involves multiple readings with open curiosity to gather general thoughts on content, links to known concepts and references, answers to factual questions, and preliminary thoughts about formal aspects of the material. This complementary analytical method provided additional depth by focusing on links between several factors: spaces, diversity, identity, language, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion as well as the francophonie and Francophone community in Ottawa.

3.7.3 Cartography analysis

I analyzed the cartographies of everyday geographies both as standalone visual data, and also in conjunction with the interview transcripts. These maps enabled me to identify a number of meaningful spatial patterns. These included: how often, and why, certain locations featured in participants' routines; the connections they drew between spaces; and the distinct ways they represented their environments in relation to their social lives. Each map highlighted unique choices in routine, distance travelled, and preferred places—revealing not just the diversity of lifestyles, but also the personal logic behind each person's movements.

This visual analysis was deepened by comparing the maps with participants' verbal descriptions, looking for recurring themes, differences in frequency and significance of various spaces, and the reasoning behind these choices. Particularly insightful were the audio-recorded explanations given during the cartographic exercises, where participants spoke in detail about their routes, their activities, and the personal significance of each space—often uncovering layers of meaning that either conversation or mapping alone might have missed.

Bringing together the visual and narrative data allowed me to link physical mobility and spatial practices with lived perceptions, noticing patterns and connections that verbal accounts alone could not fully capture. The theoretical perspective of interculturality and the concept of intercultural spaces also helped me to bring together the different themes with the physical places and the

accounts of the participants; the geographical location was important, but so were the compositions of the spaces, and the experiences revealed by the cartographies. The latter also provided useful insights into the ethnic and linguistic compositions of different spaces, which in turn helped me to relate the concept of intercultural spaces to the different spaces shared by participants.

3.7.4 Triangulation between data sources

In my analysis, I adopted a methodological triangulation approach, systematically comparing findings across the three data-collection methods: interviews, cartographies, and demographic questionnaires. By cross-examining what participants reported about their spatial practices in interviews, how they visually mapped their relationships to space in cartographies, and what demographic factors might influence these patterns, I was able to identify both consistencies and contradictions across data sources.

Triangulation enhanced the validity and reliability of findings by providing multiple perspectives on participants' experiences. When patterns emerged across data sources, this strengthened confidence in the findings. It also helped to shape different themes, since often participants would mention certain spaces only in passing during the interview—but, during the cartography portion, they would do a deeper dive when asked about their everyday practices and spaces they frequented. I treated these disjunctions not as errors, but as meaningful opportunities to explore the complexity of how participants perceived and prioritized different spaces in their lives.

3.7.5 Theoretical analysis integration

Throughout my analysis, I consistently interpreted the findings through the lens of interculturality theory and the concept of intercultural spaces, allowing me to critically assess how participants' experiences related to concepts of cultural exchange, identity negotiation, and cross-cultural interaction within minority language contexts. By foregrounding these theoretical perspectives, I was able to move beyond simple descriptive analysis toward a more interpretive understanding of how intercultural dynamics shape immigrant experiences.

3.8 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

My interest in this research stems from my personal experience as an immigrant who arrived in Canada from Colombia, and became integrated into a Francophone Minority Community in Moncton, NB. This background has shaped my understanding of immigration complexities and integration processes, particularly within Francophone contexts. While my experiences with FMCs provide valuable insights, my recent relocation to Ottawa (a different FMC from my previous experience) introduces both opportunities and limitations for understanding these communities. I recognize that my understanding of Ottawa's FMC is not entirely grounded in first-hand experience, and this awareness informed my approach to the study. My interest in spaces is influenced by both personal experience, and by academic literature demonstrating that spaces are crucial to the integration processes. Physical environments and symbolic sites are places where social interactions, cultural exchanges, and community building can occur.

This dual perspective as both insider (previous FMC experience) and outsider (limited Ottawa experience) influenced my research approach. I made sure to prioritize the participants' narratives, to ensure that their voices shaped my analysis, while seeking to minimize the impact of my own preconceptions or assumptions. By emphasizing the participants' own lived realities, I aimed to reduce potential bias from my personal background.

To address potential biases, I employed reflexive practices throughout the research process, consistently examining how my own background informed my interpretations. The use of multiple qualitative methods (the semi-structured interviews, cartographic exercises, and socio-demographic questionnaires) allowed for a process of triangulation that provided a well-rounded analysis. Additionally, applying the theoretical lens of interculturality—which was not part of my previous research experience—helped to remove any possible personal biases by focusing the analysis on theoretical concepts, rather than on any personal assumptions.

During the interviews, my own experiences as an immigrant helped me relate to the participants to different degrees. I had some personal familiarity with the experiences of moving to a different

country to attend university, of living in a minority language, of struggling with language proficiency, and of coping with the job market. This helped me to guide the conversation, often by asking follow-up questions, to allow for participants to share all their experiences, and to give more depth to their stories. Throughout the research process, I maintained critical awareness of how my own personal experiences and background might shape my interpretation of the data. My goal was to approach the study with full awareness of positionality, while ensuring that the participants' voices remained in the foreground of my analysis.

3.9 Study Limitations

It is important to acknowledge several limitations in interpreting this study's findings. The relatively small sample size of twelve participants—while appropriate for a qualitative research project—necessarily limits the breadth of data captured. Furthermore, the difficulty of recruiting enough people resulted in disproportionate number of highly-educated participants.

Despite these limitations, however, I believe that my research provides rich insights into the subject of how French-speaking immigrants navigate intercultural spaces. The depth of data collection, through multiple methods, and the focus on detailed experiential accounts, counterbalance any limitations; and these primarily affect the broad applicability of my research, rather than the validity of the insights gained.

Chapter 4: Immigrants and Everyday Spaces

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the diverse types of everyday spaces that participants referenced during interviews, alongside the cartographies of their everyday geographies. The analysis centres on three main factors: the role these spaces play in the participants' daily lives; the languages used within them; and the participants' experiences in them. I also pay close attention to the participants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion, along with their sense of belonging; and to their overall experience of living within an FMC.

As mentioned earlier, my analysis draws on the theory of interculturality and the concept of intercultural spaces, which serve to conceptualize the meeting and mutual transformation of cultures through interaction and contact (Lüsebrink, 2019). The intercultural perspective emphasizes the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups in multicultural societies, with the goal of capturing both reciprocity and complexity in their cultural relations. Intercultural spaces are characterized by their capacity to encourage cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and sharing of experiences (Arasaratnam-Smith & Smith, 2024). As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in my discussion of interculturality theory, what distinguishes “intercultural” spaces, from ones that are simply diverse, is both their active engagement across cultural boundaries, and their creation of opportunities for mutual learning and exchange. My findings reaffirm the crucial role that intercultural spaces play for immigrants, as they try to integrate into Canadian society.

This chapter is organized into five sections, reflecting the five key categories of public everyday spaces with which participants engaged. I present these spaces in order of the frequency they were mentioned by the participants: hence everyday spaces are the most common, and virtual spaces the least. The categories are:

- 1) Everyday spaces of socialization: Informal places such as parks, streets, and public-transit areas, together with commercial establishments such as shops, restaurants, cafés, and markets. These all serve as sites for ordinary socializing and interaction.
- 2) Educational institutions, including primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools: As well as offering formal learning, these also facilitate integration. They include French-language public and Catholic schools, in both Ottawa and Gatineau; and bilingual institutions of higher learning, such as the University of Ottawa and Collège La Cité.
- 3) Community organizations and associations: mostly non-profit agencies with mandates to serve Francophone populations, provide structured programming, and offer social support. These include the Centre d'établissement, de soutien et d'orientation communautaire (CÉSOC), and the Vanier Community Service Centre (VCSC).
- 4) Places of worship: primarily churches, these function not only as spiritual sanctuaries, but also as community hubs that bridge ethnocultural and Francophone affiliations.
- 5) Virtual spaces: these offer online venues for transnational communication, cultural maintenance, and digital information-sharing—including social-media groups and messaging platforms.

My analysis focuses on three principal dimensions of these various everyday spaces: their role in the participants' lives; the social dynamics they foster; and their significance for the participants' sense of belonging. Central to this discussion is the role of these spaces as intercultural environments where diverse groups meet, communicate, and share experiences. The concluding section synthesizes findings across the five types of spaces, with the goal of assessing how interculturality is enacted in everyday life. It compares the conditions under which meaningful contact occurs, focusing on three enabling dimensions: representation, accessibility, and sustained participation. As well, I looked at four indicators of interculturality: communication, exchange, diversity, and bi/multilingualism. Melanie explains well in the following quote the different spaces in which immigrants might connect with FMCs:

When you arrive here in Ottawa, there isn't necessarily a list you can sign up for to receive information that can help the French-speaking community, find out where the French-speaking community can meet, or learn about services that can help the community. There isn't really anything like that. So communities are groups that are created based on the opportunities that each person has. It could be around school, or around religion, or around something else.¹

The following sections follow their experiences in a variety of spaces.

The role of spaces in participants lives

The five categories of spaces are differentiated by their functions and the roles they play in participants' lives—and by the frequency and depth of their experiences within those spaces, which indicates their intrinsic value to the participants. Another important methodological consideration is the distinction between superficial and in-depth mentions of these spaces. The former involve only brief, surface-level references, without elaboration or personal relevance—for instance, talking about occasional visits to Francophone community centres, with no further details given. In-depth discussions, by contrast, include reflective analyses, personal experiences, and broader connections: a passing mention may lead to a deeper discussion about integration challenges and opportunities. This distinction illuminates how levels of engagement may correlate with the spaces' significance to in the participants' experiences. Table 4.1, below, presents the frequency and depth with which participants mentioned these various spaces.

¹ Quand on arrive ici à Ottawa, il n'y a pas forcément une liste où on s'inscrit pour par exemple recevoir des informations qui peuvent aider la communauté francophone, savoir où la communauté francophone peut se retrouver, savoir quels sont les services qui peuvent aider la communauté. Il n'y a pas vraiment ça. Donc les communautés, après, c'est des groupes qui se créent selon les opportunités que chacun a. Ça peut être autour de l'école ou bien autour de la religion ou bien autour de ceci.

Table 4.1: Frequency and Depth of Mentions of Everyday Spaces in Participant Narratives

| Space | Superficial Mentions | In-Depth Mentions |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Everyday spaces | 2 | 10 |
| Educational institutions | 0 | 8 |
| Community spaces and associations | 1 | 6 |
| Places of worship | 1 | 6 |
| Virtual spaces | 4 | 3 |

4.1. Everyday Spaces of Socialization

Informal environments such as parks, cafés, markets, and public-transit areas are spaces where spontaneous social interactions between strangers or acquaintances may occur. These spaces, although neither institutional nor organized, play a crucial role in fostering casual relationships, language use, and a sense of urban belonging—defined as feeling a connection to a city and its people. In Ottawa, everyday spaces are typified by both public venues, such as plazas and neighbourhoods, as well as by private enterprises, including cafés and ethnic stores—the latter serving as particularly effective cultural and social hubs. This section focuses on three key types of commercial establishments: the ByWard Market, various restaurants and cafés, and specialty grocery stores.

4.1.1 The ByWard Market: Much more than convenience

The ByWard Market is unique in Ottawa for being not only a bustling commercial area— popular with residents and tourists alike for its charm and funkiness, its architecture and food, and its upscale shopping—but also for being a complex public space where Francophone immigrants can

negotiate language, identity, and belonging. For many Francophone immigrants, the Market operates as both a vibrant hub, and a symbolically layered space. Apart from its historic significance and central location, the Market is described by participants as a crossroads where practical needs, social encounters, and linguistic negotiations intertwine. As well as simply serving as a place to shop or dine, the Market is experienced as a site where identity, inclusion, and belonging are shaped by multilingual interaction and evolving community dynamics.

For this reason, the area is one of the most meaningful everyday spaces for Francophone immigrants—mentioned by all participants, and discussed in depth by most. The area is more than just a commercial hub—it is a symbolically rich space where everyday life, cultural identity, and multilingual realities converge. For many in the linguistic minority community, the Market is a vibrant meeting point where practical activities—shopping, dining, socializing—intersect with ongoing processes of identity formation, inclusion, and belonging.

While convenience and proximity were the main reasons cited by participants for frequenting the Market, these factors do not operate in isolation from the market's broader social and linguistic realities. Several participants noted living within walking distance, making the Market a default space for daily errands, but also a hub for socialization—sometimes with friends, sometimes alone and in spontaneous encounters.

A noteworthy pattern emerged regarding language choice: even Francophone immigrants often used English when speaking with vendors and shopkeepers. For instance, several participants—including Ibrahim—reported that, regardless of their comfort with French, they would often switch to English. This pattern was echoed by others, who described adopting English as their public language; in part, due to widespread perceptions about Ottawa's linguistic landscape (a topic that I discuss further in Chapter 5). In addition to practical concerns, these linguistic shifts reflect broader social negotiations, highlighting the ways Francophone newcomers navigate visibility, comfort, and inclusion in a multilingual urban space.

Participants emphasized the importance of proximity and convenience in choosing the Market as a destination. Ibrahim, who lives nearby, described it as almost an extension of his home:

My house is near the ByWard Market, where there's a lot of grocery stores, shops, etc. It's a very "going out" kind of place, whether I go alone or with friends. And when I interact with the shopkeepers, the employees, I speak in English—it's my default language, especially when I don't know a person.²

Ibrahim's presence there highlights not only the physical closeness of the area, but also the linguistic dynamics at play. Though a Francophone immigrant, he switches to English in interactions, mirroring a broader trend among participants who sense that English dominates public life in Ottawa's urban spaces. Essentially, he considers all spaces Anglophone by default. This indicates the realities of FMCs, and the ways Francophones perceive their environments. Ibrahim's linguistic perception is less about ease or habit than it is a socially negotiated adaptation, shaped by perceptions of the prevailing language norms and power structures. Such experiences underscore how everyday language use, in spaces like the Market, reflects complex social realities around visibility, belonging, and minority status. I elaborate on this phenomenon in Chapter 5, as part of a broader discussion on language negotiation.

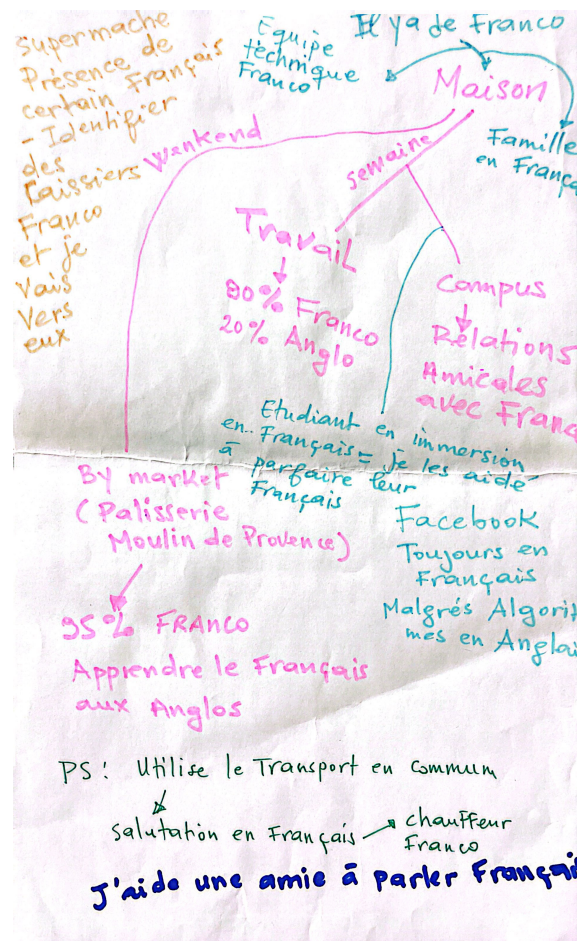
Beyond proximity and language, the ByWard Market is characterized by its linguistic and cultural diversity. Salomon described working there, and encountering people from Francophone, Anglophone, and other linguistic backgrounds (such as Portuguese):

When I first came to Ottawa, I worked in a restaurant and in a pastry shop: the Moulin de Provence. I had colleagues who were also Francophones, either from

² The English translation of Ibrahim's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: "En fait, ma maison est aux alentours de ByWard Market, et c'est un endroit très... Genre qui sort de ta maison peut-être. Ben oui, il y en a plein de places.... Et autour, il y a pas mal forcément d'épiceries, de commerces, etc. Et soit je vais y aller seul, soit je vais y aller avec des amis... Mais généralement, quand je vais là-bas, quand j'interagis avec... Les commerçants. Les commerçants, les employés, je vais parler en anglais. Parce que c'est ma langue par défaut."

France or from Africa; but sometimes there were Anglophones from other countries, who spoke English, and allophones too.³

Graphic : Salomon's Cartography⁴



³ The English translation of Salomon's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: Parce que quand je venais d'arriver à Ottawa, au début je travaillais dans un restaurant et dans une pâtisserie là-bas. Je me souviens, j'avais des collègues qui sont aussi Francophones, qui venaient de France, qui venaient d'Afrique, mais j'avais des anglophones aussi, par exemple, qui venaient des pays, des allophones ou des lusophones, mais parfois qui parlent anglais.

Graphic 1 presents Salomon’s cartography. In his drawing, he identifies the ByWard Market—and more specifically, the Moulin de Provence Bakery—as 95% Francophone. While narrating his map, he also mentions that he and his colleagues often spend time teaching French to the few anglophone co-workers at the bakery.

Salomon also commented on how businesses adapt linguistically to serve their diverse clientele:

I think there’s a real effort being made to create the right conditions for Francophones to understand. Some stores in Ottawa label the products in French and English. And very often, in the ByWard Market, there’s at least someone who speaks French.⁵

These accommodations illustrate how the ByWard Market functions as an intercultural space, responsive not only to cultural diversity but also to economic incentives. The Market’s location, just across the Ottawa River from the largely Francophone city of Gatineau—and a major tourist attraction as well—certainly motivates businesses to engage with Francophone customers. As a result, linguistic openness arises as much from the demands of the market as from efforts at cultural inclusion—reflecting the intertwined social and economic dimensions of urban spaces. But despite the general multilingualism and accommodation, many participants expressed a yearning for more distinctly Francophone spaces in the Market. Kylian, for instance, voiced his desire for “a restaurant, a bar, a place where you know as soon as you get there that it’s French. There’s only the Moulin de Provence, but a few more would be good.”⁶

⁵ The English translation of Salomon’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: “Je trouve qu’il y a quand même un effort à vraiment créer des conditions pour que les Francophones comprennent. Il y a aussi certaines boutiques à Ottawa où ils vont mettre les produits en français, en anglais. Et très souvent, parfois, dans certaines boutiques quand tu vas à By Market, là, très souvent, tu verras au moins qu’il y a quelqu’un qui parle français.”

⁶ The English translation of Kylian’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: “Un endroit où tu sais que, par exemple, un restaurant, un bar, tu sais que quand tu arrives, c’est français. À part le Moulin de Provence, mais quand même, s’il y en a un peu plus, ça pourrait faire du bien.”

This comment encapsulates a longing for cultural familiarity and communal reassurance that goes deeper than language alone. It hints at the stakes of identity and emotional belonging that go hand-in-hand with the presence of Francophone institutions and businesses. This aligns with Veronis and Huot's (2018) findings on the vital emotional and social roles Francophone spaces serve for immigrants navigating largely Anglophone environments. The study further showed how both physical and virtual spaces helped immigrants navigate Anglophone environments. Spaces were able to facilitate social inclusion, by offering opportunities for interaction, support identity negotiation, by allowing immigrant to express their intersecting identities and promote community cohesion.

While the Market does offer such moments of comfort linked to linguistic and cultural connection, participants also report experiences of exclusion and marginalization. Some noted difficulties accessing services in French, and others felt social pressure to adapt to English-normalized settings. These tensions illustrate the dynamic, sometimes contradictory, nature of intercultural spaces: they simultaneously bridge and demarcate differences, offering inclusion alongside exclusion (Lüsebrink, 2019).

As a result, the ByWard Market exemplifies an intercultural space where representation, accessibility, and participation converge. The Market's role extends beyond commerce to serve as a context where Francophone immigrants engage with, and perhaps reshape, the social fabric of Ottawa. In this, my study findings align closely with the idea of everyday spaces as important sites of interculturality and migrant integration. Urban places often become translucent arenas where inclusion and exclusion, cultural affirmation, and social belonging are continuously enacted and contested. The Market functions as a microcosm of Ottawa's Francophone minority community, revealing both the challenges and opportunities of plural urban environments.

4.1.2 Specialty grocery stores

Specialty grocery stores emerged as significant, if less frequently discussed, nodes of community life for Francophone immigrants and other newcomers in Ottawa. While most participants

referenced grocery shopping in their daily routines, only three out of ten provided detailed narratives about specific specialty or ethnic stores and their experiences within them. These accounts centred both on mainstream stores, such as Independent, Loblaws, Food Basics, and Shoppers Drug Mart; and on specialty stores such as African outlets, and the Middle-Eastern Adonis supermarkets. Geographically, some participants mentioned Francophone areas such as Vanier and Lowertown; and there was also one reference to a Gatineau-area Maxi supermarket.

Ottawa is home to a variety of specialty and ethnic grocery stores, particularly concentrated in and around Vanier, a historically Francophone neighbourhood east of downtown. Vanier itself is marked by significant immigrant diversity, with over 27% of its population born outside Canada. Samira's account of her visits to Adonis, a Lebanese market in Vanier, shows how such stores function both as practical sites, and rich spaces for cultural and linguistic connection: "It's very Mediterranean, and I go there quite often—not only for the products, but also because I like the fact that people speak in French or Arabic or English."⁷

Samira's description underscores two central dimensions of specialty grocery stores. First, they provide access to the practical comfort of specific food items—responding to all immigrants' desire for familiar tastes and products from their country of origin. Second, and perhaps more important, is the linguistic flexibility of these spaces. Samira's ability to speak French, Arabic, or English signals a context where no single language is prioritized or expected, enabling an environment of trilingual comfort. For Samira, and likely for the other customers, this freedom supports a sense of authenticity and belonging that rarely occurs in mainstream retail environments.

Another participant, Soumaila, said that he prefers to go to the Maxi in Gatineau for grocery shopping—even though he has other, more convenient, options closer to where he lives in

⁷ The English translation of Samira's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: "Oui c'est très méditerranéen et j'y vais assez souvent. C'est à côté de Food Basics, et pourquoi j'y vais, non seulement pour les produits, mais je pourrais aussi prendre les produits séparément ailleurs, je vais là-bas aussi parce que j'aime bien ce côté, c'est un marché puis de parler indifféremment français ou arabe ou anglais."

downtown Ottawa. There are specialty African stores on both sides of the bridge, but he knows and goes to the one in Gatineau more frequently. Soumaila was the only participant who specifically mentioned choosing a space that was less convenient geographically, but that met his needs linguistically. I address this point more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Other participants also referenced similar stores, though less directly associating them with the capacity to use multiple languages or interact with staff and customers in a way that felt organic and unforced. For instance, mentions of the Independent near Sandy Hill suggested that French, English, and sometimes other languages (like Arabic) could be heard both among both shoppers and staff. This ties in with Soumaila's comment about Maxi and the African specialty stores in Gatineau area: the store was his preference because he could comfortably use French.

The organic language dynamics found in some small specialty stores contrast with the more regulated (or politicized) environments of most large supermarkets, where signage, service languages, and expectations are formalized and standardized—often reflecting broader provincial or federal policies. In these institutional contexts, language can become a site of negotiation and sometimes tension, as participants wonder which language to use, or whether their linguistic needs will be met. By comparison, in specialty or ethnic stores, language choice can align more closely with personal relationships, community knowledge, and shared understandings. Staff often respond seamlessly to linguistic cues, and customers code-switch naturally, resulting in a “lived multilingualism” that is not necessarily grounded in policy.

This dynamic illustrates a core aspect of intercultural spaces: such diverse environments are excellent for accommodating differences and fostering reciprocal exchanges. Echoing the points made by Acero (2022), and the theory of interculturality, specialty grocery stores exemplify contexts in which cultures and languages are not kept separate or hierarchized, but instead engaged in everyday negotiation and co-existence. These spaces promote ongoing processes of belonging, identity affirmation, and inclusion—providing an alternative to the constraint and exclusion that can mark more formal public arenas.

In summary, while specialty grocery stores may not dominate the everyday maps of all participants, their role as sites of cultural and linguistic diversity is significant. These stores serve as vital intercultural spaces—enabling both practical access to heritage foods and the flexible, everyday use of multiple languages—and thus illustrate the concept of lived interculturality.

4.1.3. Everyday spaces as intercultural environments

The ByWard Market is more than a collection of different cultures; it is an arena for interaction, communication, and mutual transformation. These findings illustrate that the area is not just a commercial backdrop, but a dynamic intercultural space in which participants negotiate their feelings of identity, communication, and belonging. Through interactions with diverse groups, meaningful linguistic exchanges, and the navigation of inclusion/exclusion, participants both experience and enact the theory of interculturality. The Market emerges as a microcosm of Ottawa's Francophone minority community, highlighting the challenges and opportunities inherent in urban environments. By focusing on representation, accessibility, and sustained participation, the analysis connects individual experience to broader processes of integration and community-building, as theorized in the frameworks of intercultural and urban space.

These everyday experiences at the Market reflect the living reality of intercultural spaces: frequent and meaningful contact, linguistic and cultural exchange, and the negotiation of inclusion—all of which are central to theories of interculturality and migrant integration. The Market's role as a site of representation, accessibility, and participation enables Francophone immigrants to both shape, and be shaped by, Ottawa's evolving social fabric. This connects their personal journeys to the broader processes discussed in this chapter. As well, the Market illustrates how urban spaces become intercultural environments: through everyday negotiation of language, visible and invisible practices of inclusion/exclusion, and opportunities for reciprocal exchange and community-building. This not only reaffirms the conceptual importance of intercultural spaces in migrant integration, but also exemplifies the emotional and practical dimensions through which Francophone immigrants experience belonging.

This analysis of the ByWard Market and specialty grocery stores reveals how everyday spaces in Ottawa serve as vital intercultural environments for Francophone immigrants and other newcomers. These sites are much more than mere venues for commerce; they operate as dynamic zones of interaction, characterized by cultural and linguistic exchanges. The Market exemplifies this quality, providing a flexible, fluid environment where Anglophone, Francophone, and other communities routinely intersect and negotiate differences—often through informal and spontaneous socialization, rather than formalized multicultural policies or institutional frameworks. Specialty grocery stores, meanwhile, offer additional dimensions of interculturality by enabling organic multilingual practices. They foster a sense of comfort and belonging not just through access to culturally specific products, but also through linguistic flexibility.

Participants’ narratives consistently highlight the “inevitable contact” that unfolds in these spaces—contact that is everyday, informal, and rooted in practical routine rather than official programs. These findings affirm the conceptual framework of interculturality, drawing on scholars like Teräs (2012), Acero (2022), and Borsari (2024). These authors understand intercultural spaces as dynamic zones, where cultural boundaries are fluid and flexible, and where social and linguistic exchanges continually negotiate difference. Rather than functioning only as static backdrops, or as sites for passive coexistence, everyday spaces like the Market enable meaningful reciprocal contact for immigrants, and enable the processes of belonging and identity formation. The presence of spaces where cultural identities are visible and affirmed—such as Francophone bakeries, or ethnic grocery stores—also shows how particular sites become associated with specific linguistic and cultural communities, even within broader multicultural environments.

These empirical accounts align with research by Veronis and Huot (2018), which highlights the critical importance of informal, everyday spaces in promoting immigrant integration, and a sense of belonging. The impact of these spaces often rivals, or even surpasses, that of formal institutions. Participants’ experiences of navigating the bilingual and multilingual landscapes of Ottawa’s everyday spaces illustrate not only how integration occurs at street level; it also shows how immigrants find their place both in the wider city, and in their specific linguistic sub-communities.

4.2. Educational Institutions

Educational institutions arise as a common theme in the participants' experiences. Eight out of the twelve (66%) attended some sort of post-secondary institution, either for undergraduate or graduate studies, or for a college diploma. The most commonly mentioned places were Francophone or bilingual institutions like Collège La Cité and the University of Ottawa. Another subset (one out of twelve, or roughly 10%) attended secondary school; while one participant mentioned his children's school experiences. These institutions play a role in the integration of Francophone immigrants, since research shows that schools and universities are often important sites of immigrant integration (Veronis & Huot, 2018). La Cité and the University of Ottawa attract significant numbers of francophone international students, and might continue to play an even bigger role as the federal and provincial government grows in interest for international students (Veronis & Couton, 2017)

In this section, I discuss the role of secondary schools and postsecondary institutions as significant spaces for the integration of Francophone immigrants. To do so, I draw on participant experiences to shed light on the support mechanisms that ease transitions and promote meaningful community connections.

4.2.1 Secondary schools

Only one participant attended secondary school in Canada: Melvine did her last two years of schooling in Canada. Her insights offer a compelling perspective on the potential for successful integration through schools. She specifically mentioned a newcomer support program offered then at her school: the Programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants (PANA). Its mandate was to help students to familiarize themselves with their new environment, integrate into Canadian society, and (if necessary) catch up on any delays in oral communication, reading, and writing. Their programs and workshops included meetings with students and families, in which help was offered to orient both kids and parents to adapt to the Ontario school system in particular, and to life in Canada in general. (The program also offered financial support from IRCC; but sadly, it is no longer running.)

Melvine noted her lack of involvement in any formal newcomer programs. outside of the school environment—an observation that raises important questions about the accessibility of integration efforts. She arrived in Ottawa when she still had two years of secondary education left, and graduated from a Francophone school in Ottawa:

I was in high school when I left, so I was integrated into a Francophone school. There was an institution called PANA, which was like a centre for new arrivals. It was meant to include us in the culture—not just Francophone, but also Franco-Ontarian culture.⁸

Elimane is another participant who mentioned Ottawa secondary schools in depth; but in his case, as a parent, he was more concerned about his children’s experiences. On the subject of their integration, he had this to say:

It was quicker for the kids, because at the age of ten they adapt very quickly. They had a week of difficulty at school; but after that everything fell into place, and they were in the same boat as the rest of the kids. For us adults, it hasn’t been that easy.⁹

Elimane also said that his biggest involvement with the Francophone community was because of his children: “All contact with the school administration is in French, as are meetings at the school.”¹⁰

⁸ The English translation of Melvine’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Puis, moi, je dirais pas que... J’entends toujours des personnes qui disent « Oh, j’ai participé à des centres, j’ai été intégrée dans des centres de nouveaux arrivants. » Moi, j’ai pas fait ce processus. Vu que j’étais au secondaire, que je suis partie, j’ai été intégrée dans une école Francophone..... À l’école, il y avait une institution qu’on appelait PANA. C’était comme des centres de nouveaux arrivants. C’était pour nous inclure à la culture, pas Francophone, mais ontarienne, aussi franco-ontarienne, vu que c’était une école française. »

⁹ The English translation of Elimane’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Déjà pour les enfants, ça a été rapide parce qu’eux à l’âge de 10 ans et moins, ils s’adaptent très rapidement. Ils ont eu une semaine de difficultés à l’école, mais après ça, tout a été mis en place et puis ils sont rentrés dans le bateau. Pour nous les adultes, par contre, ce n’est pas évident jusqu’à maintenant. »

¹⁰ The English translation of Elimane’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version:

The focus on newcomer integration is common in schools across Ontario, where there are often staff specifically tasked with helping ensure a smooth transition for both students and their families. As well, programs like PANA had the potential to help with the different dimensions of integration into FMCs, including the school system. While the primary mandate of school may not be to integrate immigrants directly, efforts towards diversity and inclusion remain part of the institutional framework, and as a result, they are able to assist in parts of newcomer integration. However, the presence of these resources does not necessarily make the transition easier; rather, it encourages a concerted effort toward integration. As Melvine and Elimane noted, this alone can make a significant difference in both the integration process, and in the overall experience of immigrants. Lastly, participants acknowledged that accessing French-language services helped them enormously in their settlement and integration process, especially since some of them spoke little or no English upon arrival. They also said the system of collaboration between organizations is very effective, as are the service providers' systems for referrals and information-sharing.

4.2.2 Post-secondary institutions

Post-secondary institutions were among the most frequently mentioned spaces in our study, with more than half of the participants sharing their experiences within these institutions. The most mentioned was the University of Ottawa, followed closely by La Cité. Some participants, such as Ibrahim and Soumaila, currently attend post-secondary institutions in Ottawa; others finished their university studies in Ottawa; and others, like Roman, are employed at the University.

Post-secondary institutions in Ottawa attract a significant number of international students (Macleans, 2024). The University of Ottawa is biggest bilingual university in Canada, with a student population of over 48,000. Proudly Francophone, part of the university's mandate is to further bilingualism and biculturalism, and to preserve and develop Francophone culture in Ontario (University of Ottawa Act, 1964). And La Cité, the biggest Francophone college in Ontario. has

« J'ai dit j'ai en commençant par les enfants les enfants sont dans des écoles francophones vous voyez si bien que à ce niveau tous les contacts avec l'école la direction ça se fait en français nous allons dans les réunions dans les écoles tout ça ça se passe en français. »

over 6,000 students. Its mission is to contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of Ontario Francophonie.

The degree of connection to these institutions varied, but one common theme among participants was the diversity and inclusiveness of post-secondary environments. Diversity was a central topic in the interviews, with participants sharing their perceptions of how various Francophone spaces engaged with diversity, and whether they felt included or excluded there. For some, like Corinne, diversity of origin was an important point:

Most of the Francophone spaces I come into contact with are at university, where we're lucky to have a really diverse Francophone community. We have people from Europe, from the West, from the Maghreb, and students from Black Africa—Cameroonians, Burkinabés, Congolese. There are Haitians too, and even people from South America.¹¹

Corinne said she had the opportunity to interact with a community that felt very diverse to her—it included “toute type de personne” (all kinds of people), from many different places in the world—with peers from many national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. This reflection emphasizes the potential for diversity at universities, which act as privileged zones of interaction.

Beyond formal education, these spaces also provide opportunities for shared experiences, networking, and cultural retention—reinforcing the idea that interculturality (as theorized by Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink in 2019) is a multidimensional concept. It encompasses the dynamic interaction

¹¹ The English translation of Corinne's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui, parce que la majorité des espaces Francophones que je côtoie, c'est à l'université. À l'université, on a la chance d'avoir vraiment une communauté Francophone très diversifiée. On a des maghrébins, des gens qui viennent de l'Afrique noire, on a des gens qui viennent d'Europe, de l'Ouest, on a même des personnes qui viennent d'Amérique du Sud. Ok, l'université, bien sûr, il y a... Ici, il y a plein d'étudiants, il y a des Camerounais, il y a des Burkinabés, il y a des Congolais, il y a des Haïtiens, c'est vraiment diversifié, même à l'église, c'est la même chose. Il y a des... tout type de personnes, tout type de Francophones, donc je dirais que oui. »

between cultures, emphasizing reciprocity, negotiation, and mutual transformation ; and it is best sustained through everyday encounters, rather than merely by institutional mandates.

Most participants seemed to agree on the diverse and welcoming nature of post-secondary institutions, though some did feel that some events were a bit lacking in . Roman had this to say:

There was a Ramadan Fair at La Cité, that had some sense of community. But I think that if there had been more communication with the locals—with Franco-Ontarians, people who have been here for however many generations—maybe we’d have seen more diversity at the fair.¹²

The fair, like other activities at La Cité, aimed to bring together members of the community to celebrate the spirit of Ramadan. This would not necessarily mean that a variety of cultures would converge; but Roman saw it as an opportunity to bring people together from different origins and even different religions. He felt that, if shared appropriately, the event could have resembled other such community celebrations—like a Mexican “Dia de los Muertos” (Day of the Dead), held in the ByWard market, which attracted a variety of people from all ages, nationalities, and religions.

On the other hand, some activities organized by the university did feel more community-based, and perhaps had a better chance of spurring intercultural interactions. Kylian recalled his sports experience at the University of Ottawa:

We played a lot of soccer at university, with teams in several different tournaments that were often held in French-speaking communities. In 2015 we played in a

¹² The English translation of Roman’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Je pense qu’il y a plus ou moins de communautarisme, par exemple, alors, par exemple, à la cité, il y avait un Ramadan Fair, et je trouve que Ramadan Fair, s’il y avait un peu plus de communication auprès de, par exemple, des locaux, on va dire des personnes qui sont allées ici, je ne sais pas de combien de générations ici, de franco-ontariens, peut-être qu’on aurait vu beaucoup plus de mixité dans le Ramadan Fair. »

Gatineau tournament for African communities, which was mainly organized by French speakers.¹³

Kylian’s perspective—which echoes Soumaila’s experience on the basketball court at La Cité where he felt like language and differences felt like less of a barrier— illustrates the potential for sporting activities to feel more community-based and inclusive. In fact, the actual *raison d’être* of such activities is usually community-building; so in a way, sport is positioned as central to the institution’s purpose. The University of Ottawa, for example, has a bilingual mandate, which enables constant contact and interaction between the Anglophone and Francophone communities on campus. This creates opportunities for greater intercultural exchange and communication, and plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of international students. For instance, many Francophone students at the university plan to move on to school or work opportunities in Quebec; and one of Quebec’s requirements for newcomers is that they obtain a “Certificat de Selection du Quebec” (CSQ), a document stating that an applicant has officially been selected for immigration by the province. This is a factor for many foreign students, as Salomon points out:

At the university there were integration centres for foreign students, which helped me to find out things. As well, I appreciated the integration sessions organized by the university—for example, with the Ministère de l’immigration du Québec, about how to get your CSQ. I also integrated a lot through volunteer work.¹⁴

¹³ The English translation of Kylian’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui, à l’université, on jouait au foot beaucoup. Donc, on avait plusieurs équipes de différents tournois. Et des tournois souvent dans les communautés francophones. Je me rappelle en 2015, on a joué un tournoi qui était un tournoi pour les communautés africaines à Gatineau, mais c’était majoritairement organisé par des francophones. »

¹⁴ The English translation of Salomon’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Mais quand je suis arrivé à l’université, il y avait les centres d’intégration des étudiants étrangers, ce genre de choses....Donc, ça, ça m’a beaucoup aidé aussi de découvrir petit à petit, mais aussi les séances d’intégration que l’université organisait, par exemple, avec le ministère de l’Immigration du Québec, pour avoir son CSQ, ce genre de choses. Donc ça, j’ai assisté à ça de temps à autre, pour avoir l’information. Mais je me suis aussi beaucoup intégré, parce que j’ai eu la chance à travailler, à faire comme du bénévolat. »

Another major factor pointed out by participants was their choice of post-secondary institution, and what things were when they were deciding what institution to attend (or work at, in the case of Samira). In some cases, the language of instruction was the key deciding factor. Like Nessib, Samira said that she chose La Cité because it was a Francophone institution.

I work at La Cité, which is a stronghold of the Francophonie here; so on a daily basis I have the chance to talk, and work, and do projects, with people who are only Francophone, or just slightly Anglophone. That's my first link to the francophone speaking world, a valuable professional link.¹⁵

Samira's opinion illustrates how professional spaces often function as linguistic and cultural anchors. Her reference to La Cité as a "stronghold of Francophonie" highlights its institutional role in maintaining Francophone identity and networks—not only through education, but also within its professional environment. Nessib's choice of La Cité was also tied to language:

As well as La Cité, I also looked at the Cordon Bleu chef school. But in the end I chose La Cité, because I said to myself, "Well, it gets me out a bit, I'm going a bit further afield, and it's in French."¹⁶

Her decision to attend La Cité reflects the importance of language in shaping educational choices and integration experiences for Francophone immigrants. Her preference for a Francophone institution underscores how linguistic continuity plays a role in navigating new environments,

¹⁵ The English translation of Samira's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version:
« Un très gros lien, deux liens, il y a un très gros lien qui est le lien professionnel, puisque ayant fait connaissance avec connexion Francophone je me suis intéressée donc à toute la chaîne de valeur autour de ça, donc j'ai postulé à la cité, puis je travaille à la cité qui est un fief de la francophonie ici, donc au quotidien j'ai la chance de parler et de travailler et de faire des projets avec des gens qui parfois ne sont que Francophones ou légèrement anglophone. Ca c'est le premier lien avec la francophonie, le lien professionnel. »

¹⁶ The English translation of Nessib's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version:
« J'ai regardé la cité, j'ai regardé aussi l'école Cordon Bleu, sur Laurier. Finalement, j'ai choisi la cité, parce que je me suis dit, bon, ça me fait sortir un peu, je vais un peu plus loin, et ça m'a... c'est en français »

reinforcing a sense of belonging within Ottawa's broader Francophone minority community. Other participants also chose to attend the University of Ottawa, partly because of their language preferences—though Amelie recalled being most impressed by the institution's connection with a former Governor General:

I applied to Sudbury and Laurentian universities; but in the end, I think it was this university's history with Michaëlle Jean that most appealed to me. Also, how the branding was positioned—and the partnerships and collaborations within the Francophone community.¹⁷

Similarly, Salomon had shared how important the choice of classes in English and French¹⁸

But then I asked the teacher and she told me she was from New Brunswick. So the class was in English, but the teacher was French-speaking. So sometimes, when I didn't understand something in English, I knew I could ask the teacher at the end and she could explain it to me. ¹⁹

He describes this as very important to him in his early days, by the end of his diploma, he was much more comfortable in English but nonetheless appreciated when classes were offered in English or when teachers could speak French, this equally speaks to the importance given to French which is further explored in the next chapter.

¹⁷ The English translation of Amelie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: «J'ai vu à Sudbury, la Laurentienne, etc. J'ai même candidaté là-bas. Au final, je pense que c'était l'histoire de l'université avec Michael Jean, avec les partenaires et les collaborations qui ont été créées au niveau de la francophonie et comment le branding se positionnait qui m'a aussi interpellée. »

¹⁹The English translation of Salomon's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version Mais après, j'avais demandé au prof et elle m'avait dit qu'elle venait du Nouveau-Brunswick. Et donc, ce cours était en anglais, mais le prof était francophone. Donc, parfois, quand je ne comprenais pas les affaires en anglais, je sais que je pouvais demander le prof à la fin, qu'il pouvait m'expliquer »

Ibrahim who at the time of the interview was very involved in the University of Ottawa community, and participated in many activities and initiatives there—including some at the International House (Maison internationale), a service provided by the Students' Union for international students. He said of his experience there:

The Bilingualism Centre's French-speaking service is the one I use the most, because it allows us to organize events and hold discussion workshops. Those let us connect with the French-speaking community.²⁰

Ibrahim, this was a way for him to connect with the Francophone community, through activities and discussions, he himself was already involved in many of the things from the student Union, but explained that those services were also among those most used by other students. As a Francophone with good English, he was not necessarily looking to interact only in Francophone spaces; still, it was an important aspect for him. The Maison activities included events to allow newcomers to meet each other, and also to help them integrate into Canadian society. His experience illustrates the capacity for various university clubs, committees, and associations to actively create inclusive spaces. Such campus-based initiatives not only foster a sense of belonging; they also serve as entry points for intercultural exchange, community engagement, and institutional support.

4.2.3 Educational institutions as intercultural environments

Ottawa's Francophone post-secondary institutions, the University of Ottawa and La Cité, serve as key intercultural environments, where linguistic and cultural identities intersect. Their role extends beyond academic learning to include fostering communication, diversity, and shared experiences—all essential characteristics of intercultural spaces, as described by Teräs (2012).

²⁰ The English translation of Ibrahim's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Le service de la maison internationale et le centre du bilinguisme, qui est le service le plus francophone et que j'utilise le plus, parce que ça nous permet d'organiser des événements, etc. Et on fait aussi des ateliers de discussion qui nous permettent de plus nous connecter à la communauté francophone. »

These institutions encourage cross-cultural encounters, allowing Francophone students from Ontario and beyond to engage in a linguistically supportive yet diverse setting.

The institutionalization of integration within universities aligns with their broader mandate to promote inclusion and accessibility, reinforcing their function as privileged spaces for immigrant and minority communities. Borsari (2024) describes intercultural spaces as environments shaped by organic exchanges, a feature evident in universities where formal support structures coexist with informal interactions among students and faculty. The “island of Francophonie” within these institutions reflects both language preservation and cross-cultural adaptation, highlighting their ability to bridge communities and foster meaningful integration. Strengthening these dynamics can further solidify their role as key hubs of intercultural engagement within Francophone minority contexts.

4.3. Community Organizations and Associations

Community organizations include non-profit agencies, cultural associations, and settlement services—all of which can provide programs to support immigrant populations. In Ottawa, such places are crucial for Francophone immigrants’ social integration: they offer support networks, promote intercultural exchange, and enable active engagement (Veronis & Huot, 2018). Their mission centres on welcoming newcomers, fostering belonging, and strengthening social cohesion through diversity. In this study, seven out of the twelve participants mentioned community organizations, and six shared in-depth experiences with them (though not all participated actively). In this section, I examine those participants’ experiences—particularly their emphasis that these spaces have the potential to build intercultural connections, and to bridge immigrant and host communities.

4.3.1 The role of community spaces

In academic literature, community spaces and associations are often considered primary sites for immigrant integration (Veronis & Huot, 2018; Valtz-Laroussi, Bernier, & Guilbert, 2013). Their role in facilitating social inclusion is deeply connected to their mandate to welcome, retain, and

support immigrants through various services and activities. These spaces aim to foster belonging and social cohesion, by promoting diverse interactions and encouraging the exchange of cultural experiences. Despite this, our findings indicate that only half of the study’s participants actively engaged with community centres. Among those who did, their experiences were shaped by varying degrees of interculturality, accessibility, and diversity. While some described these spaces as valuable sites for cross-cultural interactions, others—like Melvine—noted the limited presence of the host community: “The associations I visited were French, but it was all immigrants who participated in them. So it wasn’t really Canadians, born in Canada.”²¹

Melvine’s comment underscores a key concern among participants: while community associations serve as important spaces for immigrant socialization, their reach may be limited in terms of engaging members of the broader Canadian society. This highlights the need for greater visibility and accessibility, ensuring that these spaces foster interaction between immigrant and non-immigrant populations. However, despite the seeming absence of native Canadians, these spaces still present a diversity of nationalities, and hence could be potentially considered as intercultural.

4.3.2 Diversity and engagement in community activities

While *national* diversity was frequently discussed by participants, some also emphasized the importance of *generational* diversity at community events. Roman, for example, described this experience:

There was an event called Flocons de Neige, which helped to raise funds to help the predominantly Francophone communities that lived in Vanier. I met Franco-Ontarians there of almost every generation, and talked to them about their historical

²¹ The English translation of Melvine’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: «Mais toutes les associations que j’ai visitées, c’était en français, mais c’est tous les immigrants qui participaient dedans. Donc c’est pas... il n’y avait pas vraiment les Canadiens, les Canadiens de... de souche, on va dire. »

background and their struggle for their identity. I came to understand a lot of new things.²²

Roman's experience reflects the rich intercultural and intergenerational exchange that can occur in everyday spaces. These events not only provide opportunities for social networking and cultural learning, but also allow newcomers to develop a deeper understanding of historical and linguistic identities within Ottawa's Francophone minority communities. Roman also mentioned the diversity of the Vanier neighbourhood, indicating his belief that a crowd of different nationalities can be brought together by speaking French:

You could find people who came from El Salvador, Cuba, Morocco, Tunisia, Haiti, France, Italy, and I don't know where else. And there were people from Portugal who spoke French. When we talk about pluralistic Francophonie,²³ we've seen more of it in Vanier than anywhere else.²⁴

Similarly, Samira attended employment-related programs with the Community Settlement, Support and Orientation Centre (Centre d'établissement, de soutien et d'orientation communautaire, or CÉSOC). She described the diversity she found there, and emphasized how such initiatives help immigrants to connect with others:

²² The English translation of Roman's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: "Il y avait un événement aussi qui s'appelait Flocons de neige qui aidait à collecter des fonds pour Partage Vanier, qui aidait les communautés qui vivaient à Vanier et qui étaient majoritairement Francophones à Ottawa. J'en ai rencontré des franco-ontariens de toutes les générations, presque. Et c'est en échangeant avec eux et en essayant de comprendre leur background historique et leur lutte pour leur identité, que j'ai compris beaucoup de choses."

²⁴ The English translation of Roman's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Quand j'étais à Vanier, c'était plus de diversité. On cherchait plus de diversité...À Vanier, par exemple, tu peux trouver des gens qui venaient de Salvador, de Cuba, du Maroc, de la Tunisie, de Haïti, de France, d'Italie, de je ne sais pas quoi. Et qui étaient de Portugal et qui parlaient français. Moi, je trouve ça... Quand on parle de francophonie plurielle, c'est plus à Vanier que j'ai vu ça, en fait. »

I took part in a CESOC workshop to prepare for the job, and over two days we shared quite a lot about our lives and our issues. I kept in touch with that group for a time.²⁵

These insights indicate that while community centres and associations provide diverse environments, their success in connecting different cultural groups depends on their ability to create accessible opportunities for meaningful engagement.

4.3.3 Fostering social cohesion

Beyond their primary function of supporting integration, community spaces were described by some participants as environments with the capacity to foster openness and generosity. Samira highlighted the inclusive nature of the communities she engaged with:

It's wonderful that we're not in competition. People help each other out; it's not like there's a feeling that I'm going to take someone else's place, or that I risk someone else taking my place—even when everyone is waiting for their confirmation of permanent residency. Everyone's generous, everyone's in the same boat. That spirit of sharing is really beautiful.²⁶

²⁵ The English translation of Samira's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « J'avais participé à un atelier avec le CESOC sur l'emploi pour se préparer à l'emploi et cetera, et donc c'était sur deux jours on partage quand même pas mal de sa vie et tout et pas mal de ses enjeux donc là aussi je suis restée en contact avec ce groupe-là de temps en temps je balance. »

²⁶ The English translation of Samira's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Ce qui est beau c'est qu'on est pas en concurrence. C'est ça qui est vraiment beau, c'est ça cet esprit-là, j'ai vu ça depuis que quand tout le monde attendait sa confirmation de résidence permanente sur les réseaux sociaux. Les gens s'entraident c'est pas comme si c'était quelque chose où moi je vais prendre la place de quelqu'un d'autre, ou quelqu'un d'autre risque de prendre la place. Tout le monde est dans la générosité, tout le monde est dans le même bateau et c'est non exclusif voilà. »

However, despite the positive contributions of these spaces, some participants pointed out challenges in their accessibility and visibility. Kylian, for example, emphasized the need for more effective outreach and awareness:

At the Vanier Community Centre, there are Francophones you can go to if you're having trouble finding work or housing. But we need a lot more visibility, so it can really be seen by everyone.²⁷

Participants also mentioned concerns about limited awareness of free or accessible activities, suggesting that increasing outreach could improve participation rates and further strengthen social cohesion among Francophone immigrants in Ottawa. This echoes the findings of the 2017 report by Luisa Veronis and Suzanne Huot, which covered both Ottawa and London, Ontario: that study concluded that Francophone institutions suffered from a sense of invisibility. For that reason, participants in that study had difficulty finding and accessing Francophone services.

4.3.4 Intercultural environments

Everyday spaces can serve as potential intercultural zones, where immigrants and the host community interact through shared activities, linguistic exchanges, and social networks. However, the extent to which these spaces function as truly intercultural environments depends on their accessibility, diversity, and degree of engagement. According to Teräs (2012), intercultural spaces are characterized by fluid boundaries, allowing individuals from different backgrounds to negotiate cultural identities in dynamic ways. While the everyday spaces described by participants exhibit some of these characteristics, they also reveal limitations in cross-cultural participation.

For example, Melvine's observation that immigrant associations tend to be predominantly attended by immigrants themselves suggests that these spaces may not always fulfill their intercultural

²⁷ The English translation of Kylian's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Il y en a même un sur Vanier ici qui s'appelle Vanier Community Centre. Il y a des Francophones dedans qui... Quand tu as du mal, par exemple, à trouver du travail ou un logement, etc., tu peux aller les voir et puis ils vont t'aider. Comme je t'ai dit, il faut beaucoup plus de visibilité pour que ce soit vraiment perçu par tout le monde. »

potential. Instead of serving as contact zones between immigrants and non-immigrants, these associations sometimes function as closed networks, reinforcing connections within immigrant groups while lacking engagement from the broader host society. In other words, they lack what Borsari (2024) called “inevitable contact”—suggesting that the most successful intercultural spaces rely on organic interactions, rather than formalized structures.

In contrast, Roman’s experience at Flocons de Neige illustrates how community events can foster intergenerational and cross-cultural exchanges. His interactions with Franco-Ontarians of various generations highlighted the potential for shared identity-building, where newcomers gain insight into local linguistic and historical struggles. Similarly, Samira’s engagement with CESOC reflects intercultural collaboration, as the employment workshop brought together people from different national backgrounds, facilitating shared experiences and mutual support.

This analysis shows that while everyday spaces do potentially possess elements of intercultural exchange, their actual success depends on representation, accessibility, and sustained engagement. Strengthening these factors can help transform them into truly dynamic and inclusive environments, where diverse linguistic and cultural communities can interact in meaningful ways.

4.4. Places of Worship

Religious institutions such as churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues function as both spiritual sanctuaries and community hubs. In FMCs, places of worship often reinforce linguistic identity and cultural cohesion, while also bridging ethnocultural and Francophone affiliations (Gélinas & Vatz-Laaroussi, 2012). Six of the twelve participants mentioned places of worship, none mentioned superficially: all participants who spoke of going to church talked in depth about their experiences. Half of the participants described them as welcoming places where they were able to build connections, engage in activities, and find support. Often serving as first points of contact with the local community, these spaces promoted a sense of togetherness, making them vital for integration and social cohesion.

4.4.1 Open and inclusive spaces

Perhaps one of the clearest findings in this research was how open and inclusive certain places were perceived by immigrants—particularly places of worship. The language of their perceptions was very similar. Churches seemed to be spaces in which the participants felt a sense of community, and also where they were most likely to participate in activities. The religious environment seemed to organically promote a sense of togetherness. Several participants specifically mentioned the Sacré-Cœur church, situated in Sandy Hill (close to the university campus). Corinne talked about the inclusion she felt at church:

Everyone is united, no matter where you come from, no matter what you do in life—we are all together, there is no exclusion, everyone is there together. We come from the same culture, the same ethnic group. And they do activities, they organize things.²⁸

Churches help to foster a sense of togetherness, and fight feeling of isolation. Participants recounted similar stories of how the church made them feel welcome—either through the performance of common religious beliefs, or by activities beyond the service that fostered community. Melanie explains this sense of togetherness:

Some activities are important to me at a basic level, and so I need to be able to commit to them, whether I'm in Senegal or Canada. I don't lose touch, I'm not isolated, and I can do what corresponds to my values, my faith. But it would be really difficult for me to do it entirely in English.²⁹

²⁸ The English translation of Corinne's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui, comme à l'église, là où je prie, il y a... je dirais, oui, c'est particulier pour les Francophones, mais après toutes les personnes, ils sont en cohésion, peu importe d'où tu viens, peu importe de ce que tu fais dans ta vie, on est ensemble, ils font des activités ensemble, ils organisent des choses ensemble, il n'y a pas d'exclusion, toute personne est là. Oui, on peut être ensemble, mais en provenant d'une même culture, d'une même ethnité. Moi, je veux dire, si on prend par exemple l'exemple de l'église, c'est un très bon exemple. »

²⁹ The English translation of Melanie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Parce que ce sont des activités qui sont importantes pour moi à la base et donc de pouvoir m'y engager, que je sois au Sénégal ou au Canada, c'est important pour moi. Je ne perds pas le fil, je ne suis pas isolée, c'est vraiment

Melanie also talks about the sense of inclusion at her place of worship, where people connect through the things they have in common: language and religion. They feel welcomed, in a space that is traditionally open to all groups of people. She says:

But to say that there are many purely French-speaking spaces, in a diverse way, I'm not so sure.... I think the parish is a place where everyone feels welcome. So we're really united by something. We have French in common, and I don't see any particular distinction. Well, I also go to Mass.³⁰

Melanie's experience highlights the inclusiveness and potential for openness that places of worship offer, especially since they often host social activities as well as just the religious services. These additional activities help participants feel a sense of belonging to a community and introduce them to other members.

There is also a strong community aspect around churches, which sometimes aligns with the different ethnic groups in the city. Nessib mentions that many members of her church are from Haiti, but she also notes that the church attracts people from outside that community, particularly from other Francophone groups. This dynamic, she says, makes the church a space that is naturally inclined to diversity and inclusion:

I think our church was originally founded by the Haitian community, but now it's open to everyone—other cultures and races are welcome. But it also attracts a lot of Francophones from elsewhere, mainly immigrants. There are Haitians, Africans, Europeans, Americans. Sometimes, usually at the end of Mass, the priest asks who's new. And every time, there

important pour moi et je fais ce qui me plaît, qui correspond à mes valeurs, à ma foi et c'est vraiment important pour moi. Et bien entendu, ça aurait été difficile pour moi de le faire entièrement en anglais. »

³⁰ The English translation of Melanie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Mais dire qu'il y a des espaces purement Francophones, en grand nombre, de façon diversifiée, je ne suis pas sûre... Je pense que la paroisse est un lieu où tout le monde se sent bien accueilli. Donc, on ne sent pas spécialement de distinction....On est vraiment unis par quelque chose. On a le français en commun et je ne vois pas de distinction particulière. Bon, je participe aussi à des messes »

are several people of different nationalities. Last Sunday, there was an American, some Rwandans, and many Haitians—as always, because their community is quite large here.³¹

This comment illustrates the type of diversity that Nessib found in her church. She also says that the church succeeds in attracting immigrants from other origins: “They also attract a lot of Francophones from elsewhere. When the weather’s nice in the summer, there are picnics.”²⁷ Her comments reflect how traditional social activities such as summer picnics can foster a stronger sense of belonging among immigrants. Rather than viewing the church solely as a site of spiritual worship, Nessib points to its role as a social and cultural gathering place—one that attracts not only Haitian nationals, but also Francophones from diverse backgrounds. These informal seasonal activities appear to enable intergroup connection and community cohesion, suggesting that culturally resonant programming plays a vital role in making Francophone spaces inclusive and engaging. This observation aligns with Huot et al. (2023), who argue that everyday spaces must actively cultivate inclusion through accessible and meaningful practices—practices that reflect the lived realities of increasingly diverse Francophone minority communities.

Like other participants, as a student Kylian was involved with the university campus church; and his experience echoed those of people like Nessib and Melanie. Kylian remembered:

When I was at the University of Ottawa I went to Sacré Coeur, where they have a Francophone community that does a lot of prayer sessions and activities. There was a lot of diversity—not just black Francophones, there was a bit of everyone there.³²

³¹ The English translation of Nessib’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: “L’Église, par exemple, c’est ça, je pense que ça a été fondé originellement par la communauté haïtienne, mais là, ils sont ouverts, ils accueillent d’autres groupes. Est-ce que c’est surtout des immigrants, africains ou haïtiens, ou est-ce qu’il y a aussi d’autres cultures ou races ? Il y a de tout, il y a tout le monde. Il y a des haïtiens, il y a des africains, il y a des européens, il y a des américains, des fois, généralement à chaque fin de messe, le prêtre demande qui est nouveau.....Et à chaque fois, il y a plusieurs gens de plusieurs nationalités, plusieurs pays. Le dimanche dernier, c’était un américain, des rwandais, des haïtiens, toujours, parce que la communauté est assez grande ici. Oui, les haïtiens, ici, sont là depuis très très longtemps.”

³² The English translation of Kylian’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui, il y a beaucoup de diversité. Je sais que même quand j’étais... Il y a une église que je fréquentais à l’université, qui est

Participants who mentioned places of worship mostly believed the spaces were diverse and inclusive. Nessib notes that although many of her friends from church are from Haiti, there are people from many different communities in that space:

I have a lot of friends at the church who are Haitian, and also I have a lot of friends who come from African countries, and even from South America. I respect all cultures, I respect all religions in the world.³³

Similarly, Corinne talked about her church's inclusiveness, and their efforts towards diversity "The church is always recruiting people, promoting the French language, encouraging French speakers to help each other, being open to various types of activities."³⁴

Both Corinne's experience and Nessib's illustrate the potential of religious spaces to foster inclusion and diversity, and to help immigrants settle in. Most of the participants who attended church found that they were characterized by being open and inclusive, and encouraged a sense of community. This account echoes much of the research literature on places of worship, in which these spaces are often mentioned as preferred places of integration for newcomers. Gélinas and Vatz-Laaroussi (2012) studied places of worship as integration spaces for newcomers, focusing on the welcoming character of such places—primarily because of their strong sense of community,

dans l'université d'Ottawa, Notre-Dame, je crois que c'est Notre-Dame, où ils ont une communauté Francophone qui fait beaucoup de séances de prière, d'activités, et puis c'était bien représenté, parce qu'il n'y avait pas seulement nécessairement que des Francophones, il n'y avait pas nécessairement que des noirs Francophones, comme il y avait un peu de tout le monde, et puis les gens venaient, et puis ça, c'était bien »

³³ The English translation of Nessib's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Non, j'ai beaucoup d'amis qui sont haïtiens, j'ai beaucoup d'amis, oui, c'est vrai, j'ai beaucoup d'amis qui viennent plutôt des pays d'Afrique, de l'Amérique du Sud, mais c'est sûr qu'ils sont toujours dans l'organisation, c'est sûr qu'ils côtoient toujours l'église, peut-être que c'est ça aussi, moi je suis vraiment laïque, je respecte toutes les cultures, je respecte toutes les religions du monde, mais je n'ai pas vraiment besoin de participer. »

³⁴ The English translation of Corinne's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: Oui, surtout à l'église, c'est des personnes qui sont toujours en train de recruter des personnes, ils promouvoient la langue francophone, ils promouvoient que les personnes francophones s'entraident entre eux, oui, c'est vraiment très promoteur, oui, ils recrutent à chaque fois des personnes, ils sont ouverts à divers types d'activités

and their ability to forge links both between immigrants, and between immigrants and locals. This aligns well with participants' experiences of a sense of community and inclusion in Francophone churches, to which they initially gravitated because they already had something in common: faith, and the French language.

4.4.2 Churches as intercultural environments

While primarily serving religious functions, places of worship can also embody characteristics of intercultural spaces, as defined by Teräs (2012), by facilitating interaction across cultural and linguistic differences. In my study, churches emerged as pivotal spaces for participant—not only as sites of religious practice, but as entry points into broader community networks.

The preference for services in French underscores the linguistic dimension of interculturality, allowing Francophone immigrants to maintain their linguistic identity while engaging in religious practices with others from different backgrounds. However, Borsari's 2024 concept of "inevitable contact" suggests that successful intercultural spaces rely on organic interactions—ones that go further than mere structured community initiatives. While churches provide opportunities for exchange, their role in fostering deep intercultural engagement depends on the extent to which non-Francophone and non-immigrant communities also participate in these spaces.

Additionally, Veronis and Huot (2018) suggest that places of worship serve not just as religious institutions but also as hubs for social cohesion. Participants' descriptions of these spaces as welcoming and diverse indicate that they allow interpersonal connections to form—thereby reinforcing the idea that intercultural environments thrive where open communication and shared experiences are encouraged. Strengthening engagement between newcomers and established communities within these spaces could further enhance their function as sites of integration and cultural exchange.

4.5. Virtual Spaces

Digital platforms—including social media networks, messaging applications, and online forums—have become integral to everyone’s lives, facilitating both local and transnational communication, cultural preservation, and timely access to information. Virtual spaces range from intimate messaging circles to broader online communities; and they operate as vital extensions of physical communities, enabling immigrants not just to obtain and exchange useful information, but also to maintain social networks. However, only four of the twelve participants mentioned virtual spaces in depth, or as noteworthy in their weekly schedules.

4.5.1 Extensions of everyday geographies

Alongside physical spaces, virtual environments emerged as an important aspect of participants’ daily interactions and social integration. Many described online platforms as essential tools for navigating life in Ottawa, helping them to maintain connections with their linguistic and cultural communities while also engaging with the broader city. Although virtual spaces were often initially used for family communication, they gradually expanded into tangible social networks, playing a significant role in shaping participants’ experiences in both Francophone minority communities and their host society.

For some, digital spaces provided a sense of belonging, allowing them to interact with others who shared their background or language. These online communities varied in size, nationality, and purpose, creating diverse forms of engagement that some participants relied on. Salomon said this:

With my Francophone colleagues, we often formed a virtual space, exchanging emails, sharing phone numbers, and creating WhatsApp groups to discuss and exchange tips, for example after I got a job at the government, I then helped them get similar jobs³⁵

³⁵ The English translation of Salomon’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version:

Souad shared her experience with Facebook groups, both with the Tunisian community as shared here:

We have a normal Facebook messenger group called Tunisian community here in Ottawa, we have a Facebook group; and we also use Messenger to communicate with family in Ottawa, and back in Tunis.³⁶

Souad also shared her belonging to a Facebook group in Orleans, a community group, engagement in Facebook groups for communities in Orléans can illustrate how virtual spaces can extend beyond ethnolinguistic boundaries to foster broader connections. She further shared the language dynamics of this neighborhood group³⁷

I'm also very active in Facebook groups for communities in Orleans... and sometimes it's funny, I post something in French, and sometimes I add an English translation underneath for those who don't understand French, especially when it's a joke.³⁸

This account demonstrates the way Francophone immigrants use virtual spaces to build informal networks that encourage everyday interactions but also their presence in local established virtual spaces such as neighborhood groups. These digital connections are not only functional, in terms of sharing information; they also reinforce a sense of solidarity and mutual support. So online spaces have a dual function: while some virtual communities are closely tied to cultural or

“Mais j’ai constaté qu’avec mes collègues Francophones, on formait souvent un espace virtuel, on s’échangeait des courriers, des numéros pour échanger dans des groupes WhatsApp, ce genre de choses où on se partageait parfois des astuces..

³⁶ The English translation of Souad’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: Oui donc groupe Facebook, Messenger avec communauté tunisienne, avec famille à Ottawa et Tunis. Dans la communauté tunisienne on s’entend ici à Ottawa.

³⁸ The English translation of Souad’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Je suis aussi beaucoup dans les groupes Facebook communautés d'Orléans..et des fois c'est drôle, je poste un truc en français, puis parfois je mets surtout quand c'est une blague et puis je mets une traduction en anglais en dessous ce qui comprennent pas le français »

linguistic identities, others serve as bridges between different groups. Souad's comment underscores the multifaceted nature of virtual spaces, which allow immigrants to maintain transnational connections while engaging in local networks. By participating in digital communities that span both geographic and cultural boundaries, Francophone immigrants can navigate their integration process in ways that accommodate their linguistic preferences and social needs.

Souad also describes how the Tunisian community in Ottawa both actively supported her, and enabled her to support others in their own integration:

I was guided a lot by other Tunisians—both those who were already settled here, and those who arrived at the same time as me. We created a kind of bonding and task force—every time someone had information, they shared it with the others. I created a Messenger group for people to use³⁹⁴⁰

This example illustrates how digital communities often replicate real-world support networks, reinforcing participants' sense of connection with others navigating similar experiences. Virtual spaces, therefore, not only help individuals settle into their new environment but also serve as ongoing networks for communication and shared resources.

4.5.2 Linguistic and cultural diversity in virtual spaces

Beyond their function as tools for socialization, virtual spaces play an essential role in helping Francophone immigrants to navigate linguistic and cultural diversity—both within their own communities, and in the broader Canadian context. Many participants described online spaces as

⁴⁰ The English translation of Souad's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « J'ai été beaucoup guidée par des Tunisiens qui étaient déjà installés ici ou qui sont arrivés en même temps que moi. Nous avons créé une sorte de lien et de groupe de travail - chaque fois que quelqu'un avait une information, il la partageait avec les autres, et cela continuait. J'avais créé un groupe Messenger où j'ajoutais des gens au fur et à mesure.

points of contact between different language speakers, cultural backgrounds, and networks, allowing them to interact with both Francophone and Anglophone communities.

Souad's experience highlights how virtual spaces enable information exchange and mutual support, particularly among newcomers adjusting to life in Ottawa. These spaces are not only platforms for sharing practical advice but also sites for community-building, where immigrants develop social networks that extend beyond their immediate physical environments.

Participants such as Melanie also described the dual function of online spaces: while some virtual spaces are closely tied to cultural identities, others serve as bridges between different groups and linguistic communities. This fosters a broader sense of belonging.

I also follow a page on Instagram called “Ottawa is not boring,” which I forgot to mention. This lady lists lots of activities that take place every weekend in Ottawa. So I see things that aren't necessarily French-speaking.⁴¹

Such experiences allow Francophones to engage with Ottawa's broader social landscape. While some online spaces reinforce cultural identity within a Francophone framework, others make it possible for newcomers to explore beyond linguistic boundaries—thereby helping them to access the city's diverse offerings.

These findings reinforce the argument that virtual spaces serve as critical contact zones, where language, cultural exchange, and community-building intersect. As Veronis, Tabler, and Ahmed (2018) suggest, social media platforms act as mechanisms for cultural and linguistic “translation,” enabling immigrants to bridge cultural differences, foster new relationships, and negotiate their sense of belonging within Canadian society.

⁴¹ The English translation of Melanie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Et puis oui, je suis aussi abonnée à une page, j'ai oublié de mentionner, sur Instagram qui s'appelle “Ottawa is not boring”. Donc cette dame-là, elle liste plein d'activités qui se passent chaque week-end à Ottawa. Donc je vois passer des choses qui ne sont pas forcément Francophones »

The diverse ways in which participants interact within these spaces illustrate their dual role as sites for cultural preservation and integration. Salomon says:

Yes, I think there is spaces, not just physical spaces but virtual space is starting to take on quite an important role. Because when I first arrived in Ottawa, I worked in a restaurant.. I remember I had colleagues who were also French speakers, who came from France, who came from Africa, but I also had English speakers. I noticed that with my French-speaking coworkers, we often formed a virtual space, we exchanged emails, numbers to chat in WhatsApp groups.⁴²

Although a short subset of participants shared in-depth their experiences with diverse channels,⁴³ These virtual interactions not only reinforce a shared cultural identity but also serve as informal support networks.

4.5.2 Virtual spaces as intercultural environments

Virtual spaces serve as critical sites of intercultural interaction, allowing Francophone immigrants to maintain cultural ties while engaging with broader linguistic and social networks. As digital environments transcend physical boundaries, they provide opportunities for language retention, cultural exchange, and integration, shaping the experiences of minority communities in Ottawa. While some virtual spaces reinforce existing cultural identities, others enable more cross-cultural

⁴² The English translation of Salomon's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui, je pense qu'il y a l'espace, pas seulement physique, mais l'espace virtuel commence à prendre une place assez importante. Parce que quand je venais d'arriver à Ottawa, au début je travaillais dans un restaurant et dans une pâtisserie là-bas. Je me souviens, j'avais des collègues qui sont aussi francophones, qui venaient de France, qui venaient d'Afrique, mais j'avais des anglophones aussi, par exemple, qui venaient des pays, des allophones ou des lusophones, mais parfois qui parlent anglais. Mais j'ai constaté qu'avec mes collègues francophones, on formait souvent un espace virtuel, on s'échangeait des courriers, des numéros pour échanger dans des groupes WhatsApp, »

encounters, functioning as flexible platforms for negotiation and adaptation (Veronis, Tabler, & Ahmed, 2018).

The dual role of virtual spaces reflects key aspects of intercultural environments, as outlined by Teräs (2012), where individuals adjust their interactions based on fluid and evolving connections rather than fixed social structures. Social media platforms, messaging groups, and online communities enable immigrants to engage with both their heritage culture and the host society, helping them to bridge linguistic differences, share knowledge, and establish support networks. However, the effectiveness of these spaces in fostering deep intercultural exchange depends on accessibility, participation, and engagement across diverse social groups. Strengthening these interactions can enhance the role of virtual spaces as dynamic intercultural hubs, supporting both cultural preservation and broader integration within Francophone minority communities.

4.6 Summary: Intercultural Components Across Different Spaces

This section offered a cross-space synthesis of how interculturality is enacted in Ottawa's Francophone Minority Communities, comparing five settings—everyday spaces, educational institutions, community centres or associations, places of worship, and virtual spaces—to identify their distinct contributions to belonging and integration. This chapter addresses the experiences of immigrants across different spaces and more specifically in community spaces both anglophone and francophone. It also was able to highlight the intercultural components across different spaces, effectively addressing the main objectives of this research.

Everyday spaces such as markets, restaurants, and specialty stores serve as dynamic zones of intercultural interaction, where linguistic and cultural diversity are negotiated through everyday exchanges. The Market, for example, exemplifies this fluidity, acting as a space where Francophone and Anglophone communities routinely interact. As Teräs (2012) describes, intercultural spaces are characterized by flexibility and fluid boundaries, which are evident in participants' experiences navigating multilingual environments in commercial and social settings.

However, the degree of meaningful intercultural engagement within these spaces depends on accessibility and representation, as some areas remain more culturally segmented than others.

Post-secondary institutions, specifically the University of Ottawa and Collège La Cité, function as privileged intercultural spaces, offering structured opportunities for integration and exchange. Their institutional mandate to promote inclusion and accessibility creates environments where linguistic diversity is actively fostered, helping Francophone immigrants engage in bilingual or multilingual interactions. Borsari (2024) describes intercultural spaces as being shaped by organic exchanges, a feature evident in university life, where formal support structures coexist with informal interactions among students and faculty. These institutions bridge cultural and linguistic differences, reinforcing both language preservation and cross-cultural adaptation.

Community centres serve as potential contact zones between immigrants and the broader host society, providing resources for social engagement, employment, and cultural programming. While some associations enable cross-cultural interaction, others primarily serve immigrant populations, which may limit broader intercultural participation. The concept of “inevitable contact” (Borsari, 2024) suggests that intercultural spaces must rely on organic, everyday interactions rather than structured policies alone. Increasing visibility and accessibility in everyday spaces could strengthen their role as inclusive hubs that foster intercultural dialogue beyond immigrant networks.

Religious institutions such as churches function as key spaces of inclusion, offering Francophone immigrants a familiar environment for community-building. These spaces enable linguistic continuity, as many services are conducted in French, allowing newcomers to engage with people from diverse Francophone backgrounds while maintaining their cultural identity. However, the extent of intercultural engagement within places of worship is shaped by whether non-Francophone and non-immigrant communities actively participate in religious spaces. The ability of places of worship to serve as intercultural spaces depends on their openness to shared experiences and mutual exchange (Veronis & Huot, 2018).

Virtual spaces provide alternative platforms for intercultural engagement, allowing immigrants to maintain cultural ties while accessing broader social networks. As digital environments transcend physical and geographical boundaries, they encourage multilingual interactions, cultural adaptation, and community-building. While some online spaces reinforce existing cultural identities, others enable cross-cultural encounters, reflecting the fluid nature of interculturality (Teräs, 2012). However, the ability of virtual spaces to foster deep intercultural exchange depends on their accessibility, participation, and engagement across diverse social groups. Strengthening these interactions could enhance their role as dynamic intercultural hubs, supporting both cultural preservation and broader integration within Francophone minority communities.

This analysis illuminates the fact that, while all these spaces possess intercultural dimensions, their ability to foster meaningful engagement and integration depends on representation, accessibility, and sustained participation. Strengthening these components could enhance their role as inclusive environments, reinforcing social cohesion within Ottawa's Francophone minority communities.

Overall, the findings highlight the multifaceted nature of intercultural spaces, where Francophone immigrants engage in varying degrees of cultural exchange and integration. Everyday spaces, such as markets and restaurants, provide fluid and informal contact zones, facilitating everyday interactions across linguistic boundaries. Educational institutions stand out as structured intercultural environments, where bilingualism and diversity are actively promoted. Community centres serve as potential hubs for engagement, though their impact depends on accessibility and participation from the broader host society. Places of worship function as anchors for linguistic and cultural continuity, offering a sense of belonging while enabling interaction between different Francophone groups. And virtual spaces expand intercultural possibilities beyond physical settings, reinforcing connections between heritage cultures and broader social networks. Together, these spaces illustrate the varied pathways through which immigrants experience integration, underscoring the importance of representation, accessibility, and sustained participation in fostering meaningful intercultural exchange.

Table 4.2, below, presents the various indicators of interculturality and their mention by participants. Communication emerged as the most frequently referenced indicator, with all spaces, except virtual ones, being acknowledged by at least one participant. Exchange and diversity followed closely, similarly absent only in virtual spaces. Bilingualism and multilingualism, however, were mentioned less frequently, indicating that while language plays a role, other aspects of intercultural interactions, such as engagement and social dynamics, are more prominent in shaping participants’ experiences.

Table 4.2: Frequency of spaces and indicators of interculturality.

| Space | Diversity | Communication | Exchange | Bilingualism/multilingualism |
|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Public spaces | Mentioned | Mentioned | Mentioned | Mentioned |
| Everyday spaces | Mentioned | Mentioned | Mentioned | Mentioned |
| Places of worship | Mentioned | Mentioned | Mentioned | Not mentioned |
| Post-secondary institutions | Mentioned | Mentioned | Mentioned | Mentioned |
| Virtual spaces | Not mentioned | Mentioned | Not mentioned | Not mentioned |

Given this emphasis on communication, the next chapter will explore the role of language in shaping immigrant experiences in FMCs. Language goes beyond basic interaction—it is a marker of identity, inclusion, and accessibility, influencing social participation, economic mobility, and community cohesion. Understanding how linguistic minorities navigate Francophone and

Anglophone environments provides deeper insights into the complexities of integration, reinforcing the importance of linguistic accessibility and cultural negotiation in everyday life.

Chapter 5: Immigrants' Experiences with Language

In this chapter, I explore how Francophone immigrants navigate language, space, and identity within Ottawa Francophone Minority Communities, and how they experience integration. Additionally, it aims to use an intercultural lens to identify how spaces can facilitate intercultural exchange, communication and sharing of experiences. Drawing on interview data and cartographies, I examine how the participants' language profiles shape their spatial choices; how they engage with French-speaking environments; and how these interactions influence their sense of belonging.

As I mentioned earlier, the Ottawa-Gatineau region provides a unique linguistic context that informs participants' everyday movements and spatial preferences. While English is predominant—59.5% of people reported English as their mother tongue, compared to only 13.5% reporting French (Statistics Canada, 2021)—French is the majority language in Gatineau (Gilbert et al., 2014). Participants frequently crossed the interprovincial bridge from the Ottawa side to the Gatineau side, to access services and spaces that they felt aligned better with their linguistic and cultural needs. Switching from English to French allowed participants to maintain their French-language continuity, and to foster emotional security.

This chapter is organized around six interrelated themes that emerged from the analysis of participant interviews:

- 1) I examine participants' use of everyday spaces in relation to their language profiles, focusing on how linguistic background and distance/proximity to everyday necessities (such as schools, grocery stores, and places of leisure) shape engagement with their environment.
- 2) I investigate how much the spaces they choose to frequent are based on the language(s) prevalent there—showing how access to French-speaking environments influences decisions about where to live, work, and socialize.

- 3) I consider what it means to live in French in Ottawa, focusing on efforts to sustain linguistic continuity in a predominantly Anglophone context.
- 4) I address feelings of security and belonging, emphasizing the emotional significance of familiar linguistic and cultural spaces.
- 5) I analyze the presence of bilingualism and multilingualism in spaces as potential strategies for navigating diverse environments and fostering intercultural engagement.

I examine how the language dynamics intersect with both the theory of interculturality, and with the concept of intercultural spaces.

5.1. Overview of Participants

Participants reported varying levels of English proficiency, which significantly influenced their ability to cope with Ottawa's predominantly Anglophone environment. For some, such as Soumaila, limited knowledge of English led to an active search for comfortable spaces where French could be spoken; this highlights the role of language in shaping feelings of belonging. Others, including Ibrahim, Salomon, and Melanie, had higher levels of English proficiency; and so, their daily choices tended to be guided more by proximity and convenience than by the availability of Francophone spaces.

Table 3: Self-Reported English Language Comfort Among Participants

| Participant | Comfortable in English | Moderately comfortable in English | Not comfortable in English | Unknown |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Soumaila | | | x | |
| Elimane | x | | | |
| Kylian | x | | | |
| Melaine | | x | | |
| Salomon | x | | | |
| Ibrahim | x | | | |
| Amelie | | | | x |
| Nessib | | x | | |
| Roman | x | | | |
| Melanie | x | | | |
| Samira | x | | | |
| Melvine | | x | | |

This table summarizes participants’ self-reported comfort with using English. Responses are categorized as *Comfortable*, *Moderately Comfortable*, *Not Comfortable*, or *Unknown*, reflecting varying degrees of linguistic ease and confidence in English-language contexts. However, English proficiency alone did not fully account for participants’ spatial practices. Kylian, for example, worked daily in an Anglophone context, and expressed strong comfort with the English language; yet he still actively sought out places where French was prominent (such as entertainment venues featuring French music). This habit underscores the symbolic and affective attachments to language that extend beyond questions of necessity or functionality.

Transportation accessibility further shaped these dynamics, particularly for participants who relied on public transit. For many, the distance to Francophone-specific venues posed a barrier for some, concentrating their daily activities in areas closer to the city's core. The downtown environment—including the University of Ottawa, La Cité, and the ByWard Market—emerged as key sites where proximity and accessibility made Francophone interactions easier and provided spaces of inclusion.

5.1.2. Places of residence and everyday spaces

Participants resided in a range of neighbourhoods across Ottawa, with notable concentrations in areas close to downtown such as Lowertown and Vanier—which stand out as historically important Francophone neighbourhoods, with decades of experience hosting immigrants—and also in Orléans. (Now a distant suburb in the far east end, Saint-Joseph d'Orléans was originally a small French village that was eventually incorporated into the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton.) Decisions about where to live reflected both pragmatic considerations and linguistic-cultural attachments. Some participants, such as Soumaila, Kylian, and Roman, described actively seeking out Francophone or predominantly Francophone areas. Others, including Melanie and Elimane, chose places of residence based explicitly on the availability of Francophone services, such as schools, or the presence of established Francophone communities.

Proximity was a recurring factor that shaped participants' access to spaces across the city. Home location, workplaces, and educational institutions often determined the spaces they frequented. At the same time, there was a shared appreciation for everyday spaces perceived as diverse and accessible. The University of Ottawa and La Cité were repeatedly mentioned as important hubs of Francophone life, offering not only practical services but also a sense of belonging and inclusion within a minority-language context. Similarly, the ByWard Market was described as a central and accessible environment that combined cultural vibrancy with everyday practicality, allowing participants to engage in both daily activities and culturally meaningful interactions.

Taken together, these findings underscore the interplay between linguistic proficiency, transportation accessibility, residential location, and everyday spaces in shaping the lived realities

of Francophone immigrants in Ottawa. While higher levels of English proficiency expanded mobility to the broader Anglophone environment, the symbolic importance of French remained central in participants' spatial practices. Accessibility and proximity further constrained or enabled their ability to engage with Francophone communities, underscoring the pivotal role of central neighbourhoods and institutions in sustaining minority-language life in an urban context.

5.2 Choosing Everyday Spaces by Language

Language emerged as a central organizer of participants' everyday decisions about which spaces to frequent. In an Anglophone-dominant city, Francophone newcomers described French not only as a medium of communication, but as a cultural resource and identity marker—one that shaped where they shop, worship, study, and socialize. Core Francophone everyday spaces (such as schools, community centres, parishes, and cultural venues) functioned as anchors of belonging, and as environments where encounters with other linguistic and cultural groups could occur. At the same time, practical constraints mattered: proximity, transit access, and service availability influenced how often participants could reach explicitly Francophone spaces. A substantial subset (6/12, or 50%) reported that French was decisive in many choices (such as settling near French-language schools or crossing to Gatineau for stores and events); while 25% (3/12) prioritized convenience but still sought opportunities to “live in French” when possible. The next subsections trace these participant dynamics: 1) everyday language choices and spatial patterns, (2) residential decisions and service ecosystems, (3) “living in French,” (4) adaptation over time, and (5) availability gaps.

5.2.1 Everyday language choices and spatial patterns

Participants frequently described seeking out everyday spaces where French is spoken and, when necessary, prioritizing linguistic compatibility over convenience or proximity. These choices were especially evident in cross-river trips to Gatineau, which several framed as a “safer” linguistic option—with a greater likelihood of encountering French speakers in shops, services, and leisure venues. For instance, Soumaila, who lives near Rideau Street and the ByWard Market, travels to

the Maxi supermarket in Gatineau because he speaks little English, and prefers to communicate in French. Kylian, based in Vanier, likewise crosses the bridge for Francophone spaces, music, and businesses, because “there are more chances of encountering French spaces and people.”

Commitments to French shaped many areas of daily life. For Melanie, attending mass in French at Sacré-Cœur parish, on the university campus, was central to maintaining cultural connections:

It was always important for me to attend mass in French at Sacré-Coeur parish. I’d say my integration went pretty smoothly. I’m French-speaking, but I have a good knowledge of English. So as far as services in English are concerned, I don’t really have any problems. So I can always speak French, and have services in French. It’s going very well.⁴⁴

The church on the university campus was mentioned by three participants: Melanie, Corinne, and Nessib. Several pointed to proximity as one important factor, along with their desire to attend church in French. Even for Melanie, with her English-language proficiency, this was still important. The experience also outlines her language proficiency, lets understand that there are multiple priorities at play here, religion to begin with but then closely by the ability to attend church in French, regardless of her comfort level with other languages.

Participants’ efforts to engage in Francophone interactions show how language organizes daily routines and anchors identity. Across grocery shopping, worship, transit, and leisure, linguistic accessibility often outweighed convenience or proximity. Micro-practices—such as greeting bus drivers in French—help sustain recognition and belonging within an Anglophone-dominant city. Friendship networks also pull people toward Francophone everyday spaces, especially in Gatineau,

⁴⁴ The English translation of Melaine’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Bon, en parlant de religion, par exemple, c’était important pour moi de faire la messe en français ici, donc sur la paroisse Sacré-Cœur, sur le territoire du campus. Et donc je dirais que mon intégration s’est faite assez facilement. Je suis Francophone, mais j’ai de bonnes notions en anglais, donc pour ce qui est des services en anglais, je n’ai pas vraiment de problème et je peux toujours aussi avoir la possibilité de parler le français et d’avoir des services en français, donc ça va très bien »

reinforcing participation and comfort. For a subset 3/12, language shaped residential decisions: as in Samira's case, settling in Orléans secured access to French-language schools and safeguarded cultural continuity for children, mitigating the sense of "cultural rupture." Taken together, these patterns underline how language choice structures both everyday spatial patterns and community building. Samira commented:

Yes, I was ready to do it, but it was also important for me to stay in a French-speaking environment. For example, that dictated our choice of housing to a certain extent. There were several factors involved, yes, but one of the factors that was important in our decision to settle in Orleans was the prevalence of French-speaking elementary and secondary schools. Because I didn't want my children, who already had a different migration history than me, to experience a major cultural break, so I wanted them to maintain a sense of cultural continuity. So I looked for a place where, as you can see, people speak more French in Orleans than in other areas of Ottawa. So sometimes I speak French, sometimes I speak English, that's it. ⁴⁵

Her decision to settle in Orléans to secure access to French-language schools and services, sought to prevent cultural dislocation for her children and herself. This choice underscores the intrinsic link between language and adaptation: language operates simultaneously as a practical instrument of navigation and a symbolic anchor of heritage and belonging. In this context, French-language schools, healthcare, and community services are not mere conveniences; they are lifelines that sustain cultural continuity. A parallel is evident in Melanie's search for a French-speaking parish, illustrating that participants' selections of everyday spaces turn as much on cultural expression and

⁴⁵ The English translation of Samira's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui j'étais prête à le faire, mais c'était important pour moi aussi quand même de rester dans un milieu Francophone, par exemple ça a dicté un petit peu, ce qui dicte le choix du logement, c'est plusieurs paramètres oui d'accord mais un des paramètres qui était important pour la décision de nous établir à Orléans, c'était la prépondérance d'écoles élémentaires et secondaires Francophones. Parce que je voulais pas que mes enfants qui déjà allaient, ils n'ont pas le même passé migratoire que moi, donc je voulais pas qu'ils vivent ça comme une grosse rupture, aussi culturelle et cetera, donc je voulais qu'ils gardent quand même un, qui est une continuité comme ça culturelle pour eux voilà. Donc voilà j'ai cherché à être quelque part on remarque aussi d'ailleurs qu'à Orléans, on parle plus français que dans d'autres zones d'Ottawa. Donc voilà bon j'en joue des fois je je parle français des fois je parle anglais voilà. »

recognition as on everyday communication. As Deveau et al., (2008) argue, in contexts of national fragmentation and local recomposition within majority Anglophone environments, ethnolinguistic identity becomes complex and relational—defined not only by language use but also by the social categories and cultural affiliations individuals choose to inhabit. Samira’s narrative resonates with this framework, as her spatial and linguistic choices reflect a conscious effort to maintain cultural continuity and affirm her place within the Francophone minority. Building on this, Lefebvre (2010) offers a complementary lens by characterizing linguistic identity as porous and multifaceted, shaped through ongoing exchanges between Francophone and Anglophone spheres. Samira’s narrative reflects this fluidity: while she actively seeks out Francophone spaces to preserve cultural continuity for her children, she also navigates bilingual interactions in her daily life, shifting between French and English depending on context. This dual engagement illustrates how linguistic identity is not fixed but negotiated across spatial and social boundaries. Lefebvre’s perspective helps illuminate how Francophone immigrants in minority contexts like Ottawa may simultaneously affirm their cultural identity and adapt to the dominant linguistic environment, crafting hybrid practices that sustain both belonging and flexibility.

5.2.2. “Living in French”

Some participants articulated a broader aspiration to “live in French,” particularly in healthcare where comprehension stakes are high (Roman). The Montfort Hospital’s role exemplifies long-standing struggles for French-language access in Ottawa Roman explains:

I think living in French means receiving health care in French, because that’s very important. Yes, you can get by with Google Translator or quite a few other translation tools when you go to City Hall to get your health card. But if you’re

really sick and suffering, you need to be able to understand what's going on with your body. You want to be served in French.⁴⁶

Roman highlights the importance of being served in French in healthcare settings, but this idea extends to other domains, emphasizing the broader effort to maintain a Francophone way of life in an Anglophone-dominated environment. His testimony shows the diverse spaces and services that are vital for newcomers, underscoring that despite technological advancements enabling communication without a shared language, the concept of “living in French” remains deeply meaningful. Roman, who works at the University of Ottawa and had previously worked at La Cité, echoed in his interview the sentiment of the importance of French spaces more broadly, through events and activities, but as highlighted by the above example, felt strongly about the importance of services.

This notion is not only relevant to French, but also holds for native languages more generally, as they are central to communication and to fostering a sense of understanding and inclusion. Roman's discussion of healthcare exemplifies the specific challenges faced by Francophone communities in accessing services in French, as seen in the existence of the Montfort Hospital in Ottawa. His reflections on linguistic accessibility echo a longstanding struggle within these communities (Drolet, Bouchard, & Savard, 2017).

Moreover, Roman's insights regarding the selection of spaces bring to light the interaction between practical needs and personal desires, illustrating how language significantly shapes individuals' decisions about where to live and engage. Participants also described micro-practices that keep French present in everyday encounters: Salomon, for instance, routinely greets bus drivers in French— “in the hope, perhaps, of getting an answer in French.”

⁴⁶ The English translation of Roman's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Je pense le fait de vivre en français. Le vivre en français, ça veut dire recevoir des soins de santé en français, parce que c'est très important. Oui, tu peux te débrouiller avec un Google Translator ou pas mal d'autres outils de traduction quand tu vas à la ville pour, par exemple, avoir ta carte de santé, mais quand tu es malade, souffrant, t'as vraiment besoin de comprendre ce qui est en train de se passer dans ton corps. T'as envie d'être servi en français”

For many, the ability to communicate in their preferred language is a critical factor in fostering comfort and social support within their communities. These testimonies thus underscore the profound and sustained impact of language on integration and well-being among newcomers but also the desire to live in French, whether that means through services or small, everyday encounters.

5.2.3. Adaptation over time and mobility constraints

From the participants' narratives, a temporal pattern emerged: as they settled in Ottawa, they learned to read the city's linguistic geography, developing mental maps of where French was more or less available. Samira explains that eventually she started to know what places she could experience in French: "Over time, as you get to know the stores, you know which ones you can totally speak French in, and which ones they're less open to that. I think it's also maybe a question of age?"⁴⁷

Familiarization increased both linguistic comfort and navigational efficiency. As participants became more embedded, they identified locations that reliably offered French, allowing them to plan errands and social life accordingly. This evolving competence underscores the two-way links between integration and language acquisition: understanding local culture goes hand-in-hand with learning the linguistic affordances of specific places. As well, mobility resources shaped how fully participants could act on these preferences. Those reliant on public transit tended to concentrate activities near downtown, and were less inclined to travel long distances for explicitly Francophone venues; whereas access to a car expanded reach—especially to Gatineau, where French is more pervasive. Thus, proximity and travel time moderated the frequency of engagement with Francophone everyday spaces.

⁴⁷ The English translation of Samira's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Au fil du temps aussi quand on commence à connaître les magasins et cetera, tu sais dans quel magasin tu peux entrer parler total français, et dans quel magasin ils sont moins, c'est aussi une question d'âge, j'ai remarqué aussi. »

Of his experience participating in the Francophone community, Kylian said that he was more involved when he was in university—once he was more fluent in English, the way he approached people and places changed as well:

When I first arrived, I spoke only French; so it took some time to understand English, and to communicate with other communities. Then, little by little, through work and other activities, I came into contact with other English-speaking environments. Of course, French is still a big part of my environment.⁴⁸

Kylian's account, and Samira's, show how time changes spatial practices as well as language dynamics and choices. Their interactions with the city and with people became different, either because of their familiarity with it, or because of their proficiency in English, or a combination of those things.

Importantly, even when language did not determine initial neighbourhood choice, many participants selected Francophone options when available—for groceries, services, worship, and leisure—to sustain a sense of recognition and belonging. Adaptation, then, was both linguistic and spatial: participants refined their routines as they learned where French could be used comfortably, while mobility constraints set the practical boundaries of these choices

5.2.4. Availability gaps

Several participants reported difficulty locating Francophone everyday spaces outside a few spaces, especially beyond Gatineau and outside university settings. As Kylian noted, opportunities to speak French in Ottawa were often limited to known acquaintances or occasional encounters in specific venues:

⁴⁸ The English translation of Kylian's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Je pense qu'elle a baissé un peu. Parce qu'au début, quand je suis arrivé, c'était que le français. Donc, il a fallu du temps pour déjà comprendre l'anglais, pour m'adresser à une autre communauté. Puis, peu à peu, avec le travail, puis avec les autres activités, j'ai côtoyé d'autres environnements anglophones. Puis, bien sûr, le français reste dans mon environnement »

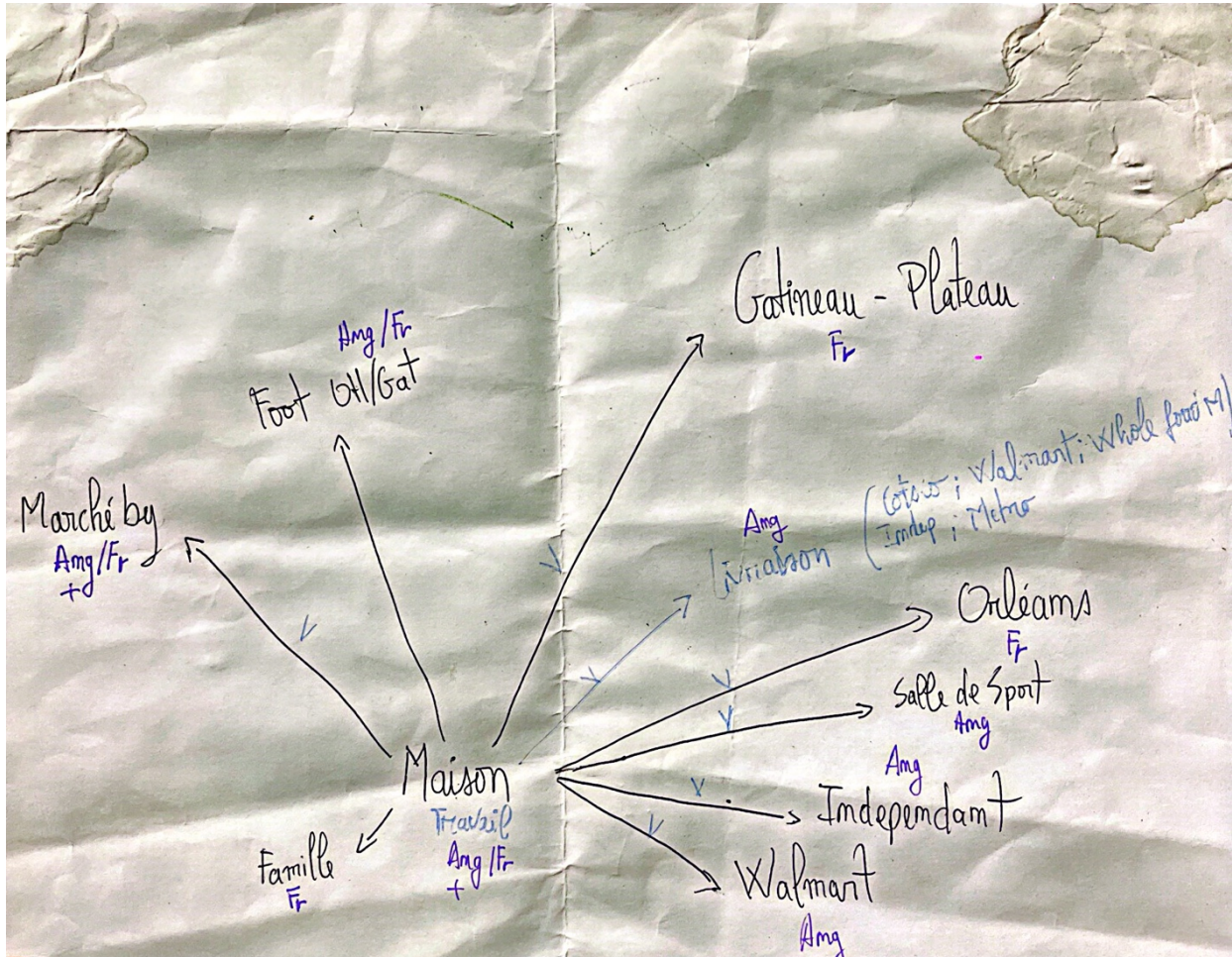
Once you step outside the university setting—if you’re not in Gatineau—meeting people to speak French with usually means people you already know in Ottawa who speak French. Sometimes, you may hear French spoken in places like certain restaurants; but it’s not as frequent.⁴⁹

This observation complicates Ottawa’s bilingual image: despite a Francophone and bilingual population, many social spaces remain primarily English-speaking, creating challenges for those seeking to sustain Francophone identity through their spatial practices. Kylian’s comments underscore the contrast with Gatineau, a Francophone-majority city. Participants’ experiences mirror patterns identified by Gilbert et al., (2014) regarding the uneven distribution of Francophone spaces in minority contexts.

Graphic 2 presents Kylian’s cartography. While drawing it, he emphasizes spending significant time in Gatineau, even remarking that “of course” he spends time there, as most of the people he knows live in that area. Consistent with the rest of his account, the majority of other locations he frequents—particularly in Ottawa—are identified as English-speaking, as indicated by the legend. Other spaces in the cartography marked by French are Orleans, where his girlfriend lives, some spaces in the market as he shared earlier in Chapter 4 and his house.

⁴⁹ The English translation of Kylian’s quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Mais quand tu sors du cadre universitaire, si ce n’est pas à Gatineau, que tu rencontres des gens pour parler français, c’est soit des gens que tu connais déjà à Ottawa et qui parlent français, ou parfois dans certains endroits, par exemple des restaurants, où tu peux voir des gens qui parlent français, mais ce n’est pas autant. »

Graphic 2: Kylian's Cartography



Some participants selected Ottawa neighbourhoods such as Orléans or Vanier to secure French-language services (such as Samira for school choices, and Roman with access to the Montfort Hospital), while others crossed into Gatineau for shopping, leisure, or cultural participation in French. These choices illustrate the interplay of access, convenience, and linguistic preference in shaping spatial routines.

Soumaila initially knew little about Ottawa's Francophone minority or the broader struggles of French speakers in Canada, yet he prioritized French-speaking spaces—from basketball courts to grocery stores—and travelled to Maxi in Gatineau for comfort and familiarity. He explained:

I speak French with my friends on the basketball court, and I also speak French with people at school. I prefer it when it's French-speaking, but I get along better when it's a bit English, because it makes me joke around a bit! Sometimes people tell me it's easier when it's with people who aren't French.⁵⁰

Soumaila's case highlights the cross-border linguistic fluidity of the Ottawa–Gatineau region: proximity to Quebec enables some to maintain Francophone interactions within an Anglophone-majority city. While not universal, such intentional choices—coupled with geography and mobility resources—shape linguistic accessibility, social connection, and cultural continuity amid notable availability gaps. Kylian also mentioned going to Gatineau for bars and to listen to French music, which illustrates the dynamic of the Ottawa-Gatineau proximity. He explains:

So, yeah, right now I'm looking for specific places to go. Also, when I go out downtown, when I happen to go to bars, etc. I'm looking for places that are organized by, for example, a French-speaking community, where you know that with the music, you feel represented. (Kylian)⁵¹

Kylian's account offers valuable insight into the evolving nature of immigrant engagement with Francophone communities in Ottawa. Having lived in the city since 2015, he reflects on how his interactions with the Francophone community intensified during his time at university, where institutional support and linguistic accessibility encouraged deeper involvement. He continues to seek out spaces that offer access to French, noting that while not all such spaces are located in

⁵⁰ The English translation of Soumaila's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui, au terrain, avec mes amis quand ils jouent au basket, je parle le français avec eux. Et à l'école aussi, je parle le français avec les gens là-bas... Je préfère plus quand c'est un peu francophone, mais je m'entends mieux avec, quand c'est un peu l'anglais, parce que ça fait blaguer un peu, parfois, on me dit que c'est plus facile quand c'est avec des gens qui ne sont pas français »

⁵¹ The English translation of Kylian's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Donc, ouais, là je cherche des places spécifiques pour y aller. Aussi, quand je sors au centre-ville, quand ça m'arrive d'aller dans des bars, etc. Je cherche justement des endroits qui sont organisés par exemple par une communauté francophone, là où moi tu sais qu'avec la musique, tu te sens représenté. »

Gatineau, a significant number are, particularly those frequented by his Francophone peers who now reside there.

5.3. Security and Belonging

Language functioned for participants as more than a way of communication; it anchored identity, belonging, and emotional security. For many, French provided stability and confidence in navigating daily life, strengthening ties to Francophone everyday spaces and networks. We show how language underpins security and belonging by shaping settlement decisions, producing feelings of recognition and ease, and enabling targeted forms of participation in Francophone spaces.

Accordingly, this theme examines participants' affective responses to language and their engagement with Francophone and intercultural everyday spaces as sites of recognition and affirmation. It highlights how language shapes spatial choices and patterns of participation and, ultimately, informs broader integration within Ottawa's Francophone context.

5.3.1. Language as a foundation for security

For many participants, language figured centrally in their migration trajectories, shaping where they settled and how they experienced integration. Linguistic preferences informed both initial relocation decisions and longer-term feelings of belonging within Ottawa's Francophone Minority Community (FMC).

Elimane drew a direct link between his move to Ottawa and language, showing how linguistic preference operates as both a practical necessity and an emotional anchor during resettlement:

Let's say I had the choice between Ottawa and Quebec, but I was a bit reluctant to speak English because I'd just arrived. I felt that I'd have to start all over again, because speaking English would make me feel ... that I wasn't safe.⁵²

Here, “security” does not refer to physical safety but to linguistic and cultural security: the ability to understand and be understood in everyday encounters, to navigate administrative and professional settings with fewer barriers, and to preserve a sense of continuity with one's linguistic heritage. In FMC contexts, this counters the linguistic insecurity often produced by Anglophone-dominant environments.

Despite his concerns, Elimane did not withdraw from bilingual settings. Instead, he anchored his family's routines in Francophone institutions, especially schools, to sustain recognition and ease:

Yes, let's say that, as I was saying earlier, to try and find ourselves in a general way, of course we still frequent Francophone environments. The children are in Francophone schools, so all contacts with the school—like meetings, and management—are all in French.

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His testimony underscores how language continuity fosters belonging not only for individuals but also at the family level, guiding educational choices and community participation. In short, participants leveraged Francophone spaces to secure both practical navigability and emotional assurance, demonstrating the foundational role of language in settlement and security.

⁵² The English translation of Elimane's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « OK. Bon, disons que j'avais le choix entre Ottawa et le Québec, mais j'avais un peu de réticence avec l'anglais parce que j'arrive nouvellement, il faut tout recommencer, j'avais trouvé qu'en anglais, ça me ferait une... j'étais pas en sécurité »

⁵³ The English translation of Elimane's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Oui, disons qu'effectivement, comme je disais tantôt, pour essayer de nous retrouver aussi de façon générale, bien sûr qu'on fréquente toujours les milieux Francophones. En commençant par les enfants, les enfants sont dans des écoles Francophones, si bien qu'à ce niveau, tous les contacts avec l'école, la direction, ça se fait en français. Nous allons dans les réunions, dans les écoles, tout ça se passe en français. »

5.3.2 Social inclusion and emotional ease

Beyond settlement decisions, language strongly shaped some participants' feelings of being included. Kylian emphasizes the ease and confidence he experiences when interacting in French:

When I'm interacting with someone and they speak French, I feel relieved, I feel at ease, welcomed. Even if you can express yourself in English, it's much easier to communicate if the other person speaks French—because you can communicate your ideas much better. French is just the language I express myself best in.⁵⁴

For Kylian, French provides more than communicative efficiency; it offers emotional relief and a stronger sense of belonging in social spaces where he can fully articulate ideas. He also actively seeks Francophone venues—particularly in Gatineau and at French-language cultural events—where cues like music signal recognition “Now I look for specific places to go. Also, when I go out downtown, to bars, etc., I look for that are run by the French-speaking community. With that kind of music, you feel represented.”⁵⁵

Taken together, these accounts show how first-language interactions reduce social friction and cognitive load, increase confidence, and guide spatial choices toward settings that affirm identity. Linguistic familiarity thus fosters belonging within FMCs by shaping both interpersonal encounters and the selection of everyday spaces.

⁵⁴ The English translation of Kylian's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Ouais, c'est tout. Qu'est-ce qui contribue à ces sentiments, genre d'être à l'aise, d'être bienvenu? Parce que déjà, le français, c'est la langue dans laquelle je m'exprime le mieux. Donc, quand j'ai une interaction avec quelqu'un et puis tu vois que la personne parle français, tu es déjà soulagé un peu quand même. Même si tu peux t'exprimer en anglais, mais c'est beaucoup plus facile de communiquer si la personne parle français parce que tu maîtrises mieux les mots, tu peux mieux lui exprimer ton idée. »

⁵⁵ The English translation of Kylian's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: Donc, ouais, là je cherche des places spécifiques pour y aller. Aussi, quand je sors au centre-ville, quand ça m'arrive d'aller dans des bars, etc. Je cherche justement des endroits qui sont organisés par exemple par une communauté Francophone, là où moi tu sais que avec la musique, tu te sens représenté. (Kylian)

Salomon shared a similar message echoing other participant's in the feelings that arise when able to speak French:

Sometimes it happens unconsciously. Especially when you're in a corner, you hear someone speaking French, and you feel like they're talking to you. Sometimes you go up to the person speaking French, that kind of thing.⁵⁶

Even across different experiences, and time spent in Canada, the feelings surrounding being able to communicate, engage with other people and in certain cases live in French where echoed across different age groups and migration experiences, this echo in experiences offers an insight in the importance of access to spaces and representation through spaces and language in FMCs

5.3.3. Selective engagement

While many participants actively sought broad Francophone engagement, others adopted a selective, interest-based approach. Melaine exemplifies this pattern: she participates primarily in religious and musical settings, where French supports specific practices and affiliations rather than a wider community immersion.

Right from the start, I had these two connections: the actual church and choir, and this French-speaking religious community. And I'm still active with those commitments. But I haven't yet had any new opportunities to get more involved in the French-speaking community.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The English translation of Salomon's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Là, ça vient parfois de manière inconsciente. Surtout quand tu es dans un coin, tu écoutes que quelqu'un parle français, tu te sens comme interpellé. Parfois, tu vas aller voir la personne à qui tu parles français, un peu ce genre de choses-là »

⁵⁷ The English translation of Melanie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Dès le début, j'ai eu ces deux connexions-là, donc l'église, la catéchèse, la chorale aussi, et puis ce groupe-là, cette communauté religieuse Francophone. Donc, dès le début, j'ai eu ces engagements-là et je suis toujours active dedans. Je n'ai pas encore eu de nouvelles opportunités de m'engager plus amplement dans la communauté Francophone, non, je n'ai pas encore identifié. »

Melanie's account illustrates targeted participation in which linguistic identity serves specific functions—worship, music, and fellowship—without presuming comprehensive involvement across all Francophone institutions. This aligns with Huot & Veronis (2018), who show that newcomers calibrate engagement according to personal interests, social networks, and cultural priorities, navigating bilingual environments selectively. In this view, belonging is situational and practice-based: it is consolidated in particular everyday spaces where recognition is meaningful, rather than through blanket participation in the Francophone milieu.

5.4. Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Practice

Participants engaged with bilingualism and multilingualism in ambivalent ways. For some, Ottawa's bilingual profile was a draw; yet many soon confronted how English proficiency functions as a de facto prerequisite for employment, service navigation, and social participation in an Anglophone-dominant city. Thus, while bilingualism is publicly celebrated as a cultural asset, newcomers frequently experience it as an uneven requirement, revealing the structural challenges typical of Francophone Minority Communities (FMCs). This theme examines how bilingualism operates simultaneously as opportunity and constraint across everyday spaces—facilitating access and bridging ties within supportive institutions, disadvantaging unilingual Francophones, and interacting with multilingual biographies to shape identification, belonging, and everyday practice.

5.4.1. Structural asymmetries for unilingual Francophones

A consistent observation across interviews was the systemic disadvantage faced by unilingual Francophones in Ontario. Although official bilingualism implies parity between French and English, everyday practice often defaults to English-first in public interactions, workplaces, and service encounters—creating barriers for those who rely primarily on French. Elimane captured this mismatch between policy and practice:

We obviously understood Ontario bilingualism differently: we thought it meant French or English, but first and foremost English. So, my interpretation is that when you're unilingual French ... it's not that you're not welcome, exactly, but that you have more difficulties than a unilingual Anglophone. Whenever we meet someone, it's always English that starts.⁵⁸

His account points to a hierarchy within bilingualism: Francophone newcomers are expected to adapt to English-dominant spaces, while Anglophones seldom face reciprocal pressure. This aligns with Garant and Labrèche (2018), who argue that in FMCs, policy-level bilingualism does not necessarily yield equitable access to services or professional opportunities. In effect, the promise of bilingual parity is undercut by an interactional norm that privileges English at first contact, reinforcing the need for Francophone and genuinely bilingual institutions to mitigate these asymmetries. Similarly, Amelie struggled with the idea of bilingualism. She had done research before moving to Ottawa and was shocked by the challenges she encountered:

I found that the University of Ottawa was a French-speaking island in an English-speaking sea. That's when my disillusionment set in. When I first arrived, during the summer, I found that the people I spoke to were often temporary or substitute staff. Sometimes they had trouble speaking French. So I thought, bilingualism needs a little work here. And I also thought: where are all the French speakers? It's kind of my mission to find them, and to keep up my French—even though I loved being in a bilingual city.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The English translation of Elimane's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Ce qui fait que nous on comprenait le bilinguisme autrement, ça veut dire français ou anglais, mais c'est d'abord français. Alors, l'interprétation que j'ai c'est que quand on est unilingue, comme nous on était unilingue, mais en français, ça c'est, pas qu'on n'est pas la bienvenue, mais on a plus de difficultés qu'un unilingue qui est Anglophone ici en Ontario. Alors, c'est à ça qu'on est soumis, si bien que dans notre quotidien, c'est pour rencontrer quelqu'un, c'est l'anglais qui commence. »

⁵⁹The English translation of Amelie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « J'ai trouvé que l'université d'Ottawa était un îlot francophone sur une mer anglophone. C'est un peu là que ma

Amelie's experience was echoed, to a lesser extent, by other participants—who, perhaps because of their greater English proficiency, found it less of a challenge. However, her experience does exemplify the gap between a policy of bilingualism, and its actual practice. It also echoes what Elimane pointed out about the difficulties of bilingualism: that Francophone speakers are often expected to have English competencies to thrive in supposedly bilingual contexts.

5.4.2 Bilingual institutions as bridging spaces

Despite the asymmetries noted above, participants also reported positive experiences in bilingual settings, especially La Cité and the University of Ottawa. These institutions offered linguistic accessibility that enabled Francophones to participate socially and professionally while sustaining a French-speaking identity. Corinne highlighted the interpersonal and developmental benefits of such environments:

Then I had my second internship here at the University, it's more bilingual, so you meet a greater variety of people. And I find that when it's bilingual, it's better.⁶⁰

Her account echoes research showing that educational institutions can foster inclusive bilingual environments that strengthen Francophone social inclusion (Huot et al., 2023; Veronis & Huot, 2018) and act as bridging mechanisms between linguistic groups while preserving cultural identity (Farmer & da Silva, 2012).

désillusion est arrivée. J'ai fait énormément de recherches avant de venir ici... Pendant la période d'été, au départ, je trouvais que c'était souvent des emplois pétés ou des personnes qui étaient remplaçantes. Des fois, elles peinaient à parler français. Leur anglais était parfait, par contre... Je suis désolée, je ne parle pas français. Ils revenaient souvent sur le campus. Donc, je me suis dit que le bilinguisme, il faudrait un peu le retravailler. Et je me disais, en fait, il y a des francophones ici. Où est-ce qu'ils sont ? C'est un peu ma mission de les trouver. Et puis de voir comment est-ce que je pourrais garder mon français, même si j'aimais le fait d'être dans une ville qui était bilingue, il fallait quand même garder mon français. »

⁶⁰ The English translation of Corinne's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « Puis mon deuxième stage que j'ai eu ici à l'Université. Ici, à l'Université, c'est plus bilingue, donc tu rencontres des personnes diverses. Puis je trouve quand c'est bilingue, c'est mieux »

At the same time, perceptions of bilingualism varied. Amelie underscored the fragility and fluidity of linguistic identity, noting how accent and multilingual biography shaped her comfort in bilingual spaces:

I found it really hard. I feel comfortable in English because my father is Greek. I've always lived in non-French-speaking countries. For me, multilingualism is different from what was familiar. I don't think I've ever identified myself as a Francophone.⁶¹

Amelie's perspective aligns with Gélinas and Vatz-Laaroussi (2012): bilingual spaces can support connection for some while leaving others less recognized, particularly when accent, self-identification, or migration histories complicate belonging. In short, bilingual institutions often function as inclusive nodes of participation, but their capacity to confer recognition is uneven across immigrant biographies.

5.4.3 Exclusion in Anglophone-dominant workplaces

Alongside the opportunities offered by bilingual institutions, several participants reported exclusionary dynamics in Anglophone-dominated workplaces. These included everyday pressures to shift to English, devaluation of French in meetings and client interactions, and a general sense that bilingual policy did not translate into practice. Amelie described her frustration with what she termed “francophobie” in her workplace:

⁶¹ The English translation of Amelie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « J'ai trouvé ça vraiment dur. Je me sens à l'aise en anglais, parce que mon père est grec. J'ai toujours habité dans des pays non Francophones. Pour moi, le multilinguisme est différent de c'était familier. Et surtout, ma langue, mon accent. Je crois que je ne me suis pas identifiée comme Francophone »

Francophobia it's in my workplace with my employer and my colleagues. And this is an Anglophone environment that's supposed to be progressive, who call themselves progressive, there, That really offends me.⁶²

Her account echoes findings on the policy–practice gap in Ottawa: despite a public commitment to bilingualism, organizational routines often default to English, disadvantaging Francophones in everyday communication and professional advancement (see Veronis & Huot, 2018). Participants noted that the burden of adaptation typically falls on Francophones—through constant code-switching, self-monitoring of accent, or translating for others—while reciprocal adjustments by Anglophones were less common.

Amelie also emphasized a mismatch between expectations and realities for newcomers. Ottawa is promoted as a bilingual city with demand for Francophones, yet English proficiency remains crucial for hiring, promotion, and social integration. For some immigrants, this produced a difficult adjustment and feelings of diminished recognition within the workplace. Overall, these narratives underscore how English-dominant operational cultures can limit the inclusive potential of bilingual policy, even in settings that explicitly value diversity.

5.5 Summary – The Practice of living in French in Everyday Spaces

Participants expressed both a preference and, at times, a need for Francophone spaces. Proximity to Gatineau increased their opportunities to use French but did not feel it as an obligation: people went whenever particular venues, services, or networks made the trip worthwhile. Mobility resources conditioned access: transit-reliant participants clustered their activities near downtown, while car owners ranged farther. In an Anglophone-dominant city, limited English proficiency has the potential to limit people's ability to access services and slow their professional progression.

⁶² The English translation of Amelie's quote has been edited for clarity. This is the original French version: « C'était suivi de près ou de loin. Mais là, quand la francophobie a commencé, c'est là que ça m'a interpellée. C'est mon employeur, c'est mon lieu de travail et que mes collègues, dans un environnement qui est supposé progressiste, des Anglophones qui se disent progressistes, là, ça m'a offusquée complètement. »

FMC institutions, or genuinely bilingual venues, can help to mitigate these constraints. Intercultural ties, often via religious communities, made it easier to meet non-Francophones; yet participants still gravitated to places where they felt linguistically recognized. Overall, adaptation unfolded as a joint linguistic–spatial process shaped by availability, distance, and network effects.

Across accounts, belonging emerged as the central thread linking language to place. Participants described how interacting in their first language produced feelings of welcome, recognition, and ease, especially in Francophone and intercultural everyday spaces. The capacity to communicate “in one’s own language” was repeatedly cited as a key driver of feeling accepted and understood, underscoring the formative role of language in experiences of integration.

Language preferences also shaped spatial choices—not only which venues participants frequented but, for some, where they chose to settle. Many associated French with security and with reconnecting to cultural identity; accordingly, they prioritized settings where French could be used comfortably, even when this meant trading off convenience or proximity. The strength of this effect varied with English proficiency and broader multilingual repertoires, yet even fluent speakers (e.g., Kylian) tended to seek out Francophone spaces they identified as “their community.”

Overall, the findings show that language is not merely instrumental; it is constitutive of social ties and place attachments, structuring patterns of participation and enabling newcomers to navigate the complexities of integration with confidence and continuity.

Bilingualism and multilingualism in Ottawa are best understood through the lens of interculturality: spaces where French and English meet create opportunities for contact, recognition, and exchange. The University of Ottawa stood out as an anchor of bilingual practice; participants consistently described it as open and inclusive, with its bilingual mandate enabling meaningful social and professional participation for Francophones.

Beyond campus, however, bilingualism was uneven. Many everyday settings defaulted to English, producing disadvantages for unilingual Francophones, even as visible efforts—French-language

signage, staff switching to French in restaurants and shops—were appreciated. Proximity to Gatineau expanded access to Francophone spaces, but this option was not equally convenient for all.

Participants adapted by calibrating their spatial routines: some selected housing to secure French-language services, while others, maintained residence elsewhere but sought out Francophone venues for shopping, worship, study, or leisure. No single pattern dominated, yet across cases language remained a salient organiser of daily mobilities and community participation.

Overall, bilingualism functioned as both bridge and barrier—facilitating inclusion in supportive institutions while reproducing asymmetries in English-dominant contexts. Linguistic considerations thus played a nuanced, multifaceted role in shaping how participants navigated urban space and forged belonging within Ottawa’s Francophone landscape.

5.6 Language, Interculturality, and Everyday Spaces

This chapter highlights the linguistic experiences and preferences of participants in anglophone, francophone and bilingual spaces, as well as the importance attributed to language in everyday encounters and communication. This chapter effectively addresses the relationship between integration, language, and the sense of belonging, which constituted one of the key objectives of the research. It also provides insight into the role of physical and social spaces in facilitating intercultural exchange and interaction among members of diverse communities. Intercultural everyday spaces—sites that enable cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and exchange—are pivotal to immigrant integration (Acero, 2022). As newcomers navigate unfamiliar environments, these spaces create opportunities for interaction and recognition, underscoring how language shapes identity, access, and representation (Chen & Borsari, 2024). In Canada, Francophone Minority Communities (FMCs) exemplify this dynamic as “third spaces” where linguistic minorities sustain cultural ties while engaging broader society (Veronis et al., 2023; Delaisse et al., 2024).

Language mediates intercultural adaptation and the power relations between dominant and minority groups (Karimi & Bucerius, 2018). In FMCs, schools, campuses, faith venues, businesses, and community hubs serve as integration nodes where immigrants navigate bilingual settings and build belonging through linguistic and cultural affirmation (Mejía, 2016; Huot et al., 2023). Yet accessibility is uneven: linguistic diversity has the potential to either enable inclusion, or else to reproduce segmentation—depending on the availability and distribution of intercultural networks and services (Teräs, 2020).

Effective communication remains the foundation of these spaces, shaping social cohesion and integration outcomes (Ahmed & Veronis, 2020). In the Ottawa–Gatineau region, routine contact between Francophones and Anglophones produces a complex linguistic landscape—at times generating hybrid repertoires or a “third language” in particular venues (Acero, 2022). Overall, the findings show that language is not merely instrumental but constitutive of intercultural accessibility and community building. Strengthening genuinely bilingual provision and expanding the spatial reach of Francophone hubs are therefore critical to supporting belonging and equitable participation in minority-language contexts.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how Francophone immigrants experience integration through everyday spaces in Ottawa. In doing so, it focused on experiences within Francophone community spaces while also identifying a variety of everyday spaces that facilitate intercultural exchange, communication, the sharing of experiences, and broader processes of social integration.

The research questions that guided the study were: 1) how do French-speaking immigrants access, experience, and perceive everyday spaces in Ottawa; 2) in what ways these spaces facilitate intercultural exchange and interaction among diverse community members; 3) and what role do such spaces play in supporting immigrant integration and fostering a sense of belonging within the Francophone minority community.

This study draws on the theory of interculturality – which examines how people relate across cultural differences and how these interactions unfold in everyday contexts combined with the concept of intercultural spaces – which are understood not simply as diverse environments, but as sites where communication, reciprocity, and “in-betweenness” enable meaningful cross-cultural engagement. This framework guides the analysis of everyday spaces in Ottawa, allowing the study to explore the conditions that foster or limit intercultural interaction and immigrant integration.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach to examine French-speaking immigrants’ experiences in Ottawa’s Francophone community spaces. Participants were recruited to reflect diversity in age, gender, origin, and time in Canada, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews, socio-demographic questionnaires, and cCartographies of Everyday Geographies. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify both predetermined and emergent themes, providing a nuanced understanding of how community spaces shape daily interactions, participation, and belonging.

The findings are presented across two chapters. Chapter 4 offers a detailed examination of how French-speaking immigrants access and experience everyday spaces, shedding light on their

perceptions of the environments they regularly frequent. It aligns with the first research objective and answers questions one and two, which are centered around how French speaking immigrants access, experience, and perceive everyday spaces, and in what ways these spaces facilitate intercultural exchange. The experiences of the participants reveal the diversity of their spatial preferences, shaped by personal histories, cultural affiliations, and linguistic preferences. The chapter underscores that choices regarding frequented spaces are not arbitrary but are deeply connected to notions of access and identity, particularly in relation to French-designated environments. This connection between space and identity emerged as a central theme, illustrating how everyday geographies contribute to a sense of belonging and cultural continuity.

Chapter 5 examines how francophone immigrants navigate and choose between French, English, and bilingual spaces along their integration trajectories. While more explicitly centred on the role of language, the chapter addresses how immigrants access and experience space through linguistic practices and choices. This chapter touches on question three, which centers around the role of spaces supporting immigrant integration and a sense of belonging in francophone communities, while complementing the discussions around research objective number two that aimed to examine the experiences of integration in specifically francophone spaces. The chapter documents a range of actions, from everyday micro-practices to broader settlement decisions, revealing how language use shifts across different spaces and moments in daily life. The findings show that the importance attributed to language emerges at different stages of the integration process: for some participants, language is prioritized early on, such as in the decision to settle in Ottawa for its bilingual character, while for others it becomes salient through routine choices, including preferences for grocery stores or restaurants offering services in French. The chapter also highlights the significant role of Gatineau's proximity, which expands access to French-language spaces and shapes the lived experiences of francophone immigrants in Ottawa.

Finally, both chapters examine different types of spaces and the ways in which these spaces facilitate intercultural exchange. Drawing on participants' experiences, these findings meet the third research objective, to use an intercultural lens to identify spaces that facilitate intercultural

exchange, communication sharing of experiences and whilst also supporting immigrants' integration. Chapter 4 highlights perceptions of diversity—particularly in terms of nationalities, religions, and languages—across a range of everyday spaces. It also sheds light on how participants felt within these environments and how such spaces shaped their sense of comfort and belonging. Chapter 5 addresses this question from a different angle. While engaging less directly with interculturality as such, it focuses on the francophone experience and demonstrates how spaces are lived and experienced differently depending on linguistic access. The chapter further underscores the importance, for some participants, of having access to bilingual and multilingual spaces.

This study highlights how the social and cultural diversity of community spaces shapes participants' sense of belonging across different settings, as well as the importance of institutionalization in sustaining environments where intercultural interaction can occur. Intercultural spaces were most evident in highly structured settings such as universities and places of worship, not only because of their community-oriented mandates but also because of the diversity they bring together and the opportunities they create for interaction and engagement. Drawing on participants' experiences in institutionalized environments—including the University of Ottawa with its bilingual mandate, La Cité Collégiale, community centres, and places of worship—this section directly addresses the research question concerning the ways in which these spaces facilitate intercultural exchange and interaction among diverse community members. Taken together, the findings underscore the advantages of institutionalized spaces in fostering intercultural encounters and offer valuable insights into their role in supporting immigrant integration in Ottawa.

Universities and places of worship emerged as key sites of integration and intercultural exchange among francophone immigrants. These spaces offer environments in which individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together, share experiences, and navigate new social contexts. This finding reinforces our understanding of the importance of spaces that are not only physically accessible, but also culturally inclusive, reflecting the notion of intercultural spaces adopted in this research as places of encounter and exchange that support meaningful inclusion and active

participation in ethnoculturally diverse environments. Beyond their formal mandates, the community-oriented nature of these spaces appeared to support immigrant integration into host communities, at times transcending barriers related to proximity and, in some cases, language. This responds directly to the third objective of this research that centers around identifying spaces that can facilitate intercultural exchange, communication and the sharing of experiences.

Everyday spaces also functioned as informal contact zones. Places such as markets and restaurants encouraged intercultural encounters, even though fostering social connections was not their primary purpose. The study highlights the range of everyday spaces with which participants engaged in their daily lives, each contributing in different ways to immigrant integration and intercultural exchange. Based on participants' accounts, we found that community centres, despite their explicit mandate to foster community connection, produced more mixed outcomes. While some facilitated cross-cultural engagement, others remained relatively insular, which may signal the need for broader outreach and more inclusive integration strategies.

In examining how spaces facilitate intercultural exchange and interaction among diverse community members, participants' perceptions of diversity emerged as central. A key finding is that intercultural spaces often correlate with diversity, though this relationship is highly context dependent. Accessibility, representation, and sustained participation surfaced as critical conditions for fostering meaningful intercultural engagement. Such engagement was closely tied to how inclusive and representative spaces were, as well as to whether they encouraged ongoing interaction across cultural groups. In addressing the research question—*in what ways do these spaces facilitate intercultural exchange and interaction among diverse community members*—the findings demonstrate that intercultural dynamics are most likely to emerge when spaces actively support diverse participation and create conditions for repeated, reciprocal encounters.

Participants' patterns of residential settlement and everyday mobility across different spaces revealed distinct linguistic dynamics, illustrating how language intersects with intercultural spaces and institutionalization in the integration process. While some participants prioritized living near French-language services, others actively sought out Francophone spaces across Ottawa and

Gatineau, underscoring the importance of linguistic accessibility and inclusion. Although language was not the primary focus of the study, it emerged consistently throughout participants' accounts. Many immigrants, despite speaking multiple languages, gravitated toward Francophone spaces for personal and familial reasons. not only because of linguistic preference, but also because of the sense of belonging and security these environments provided. Language thus played a significant role in shaping participants' identities and feelings of belonging, highlighting its capacity to foster connection and sustain cultural ties.

Language also emerged as central to processes of intercultural exchange, as participants frequently described it as a bridge between cultural groups. Shared language facilitated connection, suggesting that linguistic commonality can play a key role in enabling interaction across cultural differences. In this context, bilingualism and multilingualism were often understood as markers of openness to intercultural engagement, with participants associating these linguistic capacities with diversity and inclusivity in the spaces they frequented. In addressing the research question—*What role do these spaces play in supporting immigrant integration and sense of belonging within the Francophone minority community*—the findings show that linguistic dynamics are integral to how participants experience different spaces. Spaces that supported the use of French, while also accommodating multilingual realities, were perceived as especially conducive to integration because they enabled communication, mutual understanding, and sustained interaction across cultural boundaries.

Overall, language emerged as central to both fostering a sense of belonging and supporting social integration. Participants consistently linked their sense of welcome and emotional connection to spaces where they could use their preferred language, shaping their participation, their everyday spatial choices, and their community affiliations. In line with the study's objective to investigate Francophone immigrants' experiences of integration in specifically Francophone community spaces, these findings show that such environments play a distinctive role in sustaining identity, security, and cultural continuity. Francophone spaces were associated with familiarity and comfort,

with many participants prioritizing linguistic alignment over convenience or geographic proximity when deciding where to live, socialize, and access services.

6.1 Existing Literature and Theoretical Framework

This study contributes to scholarship on institutional spaces as sites of immigrant integration and intercultural exchange. Veronis and Huot (2018) emphasize the role of general community spaces in facilitating encounters across difference, while G elinas and Vatz-Laaroussi (2012) show how places of worship evolve into intercultural hubs through immigrant participation. These findings resonate with the present study’s observation that religious institutions and universities, though not always designed for integration, serve as informal yet impactful platforms for inclusion.

Further, Veronis and Couton (2017) highlight the importance of institutional completeness in supporting immigrant engagement, and Wu and Veronis (2022) underscore the co-construction of spaces that adapt to diverse needs. This study affirms that institutionalized environments—by virtue of their embeddedness in community life—can transcend barriers such as language and proximity, offering immigrants meaningful opportunities for connection, belonging, and active participation.

This study reinforces existing scholarship on intercultural spaces as inclusive environments shaped by linguistic diversity. Participants’ spatial choices—whether proximity to French-language services or engagement with Francophone institutions—highlight the role of language in fostering accessibility and belonging. These findings align with research by Elias and Mansouri (2020) and Ter as (2012), which emphasize how bilingual and multilingual settings enable intercultural interaction and support immigrant inclusion. Universities and places of worship, in particular, emerged as dynamic sites where linguistic openness enabled meaningful participation across cultural boundaries.

Moreover, the emergence of language as a recurring theme in this study reflects the conceptualization of interculturality as a space of reciprocity and complexity (L usebrink, 2019).

Participants described language not only as a tool for communication but as a bridge for connection, identity, and cultural continuity. This supports Chen and Borsari's 2024 argument that multilingual environments enhance social cohesion by enabling diverse groups to engage in shared practices. The presence of bilingualism and multilingualism thus signals the potential of intercultural spaces to foster integration through ongoing interaction, negotiation, and mutual recognition.

6.2 Practical Implications

These findings suggest that while institutionalized settings such as universities and places of worship play an important role in facilitating intercultural encounters, integration cannot rely solely on formal and organized institutions. The study highlights the significance of everyday spaces—such as markets, restaurants, and grocery stores—as informal sites of intercultural contact. Although these spaces are not designed with explicit integration mandates, they nonetheless contribute to immigrants' integration experiences by enabling casual interactions across cultural and linguistic groups.

Practical implications therefore extend beyond formal policy and programming to include the intentional support and preservation of accessible and inclusive public spaces, as well as the conditions that allow individuals to participate in everyday social life. Spaces such as cafés, restaurants, and bars emerge as important sites of interaction, where routine encounters can foster connection and familiarity. Strengthening social capital and encouraging the use of shared spaces may be as critical to integration as institutional frameworks, pointing to the need for a balanced approach that values both formal structures and informal, everyday interactions.

6.3 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge several limitations in interpreting this study's findings. Recruitment challenges resulted in disproportionate representation of participants with higher education credentials. This skewed distribution likely reflects the proximity to the University of Ottawa, initial recruitment through university-affiliated individuals, and reliance on snowball sampling. The overrepresentation of university-educated participants may limit the degree to which this

research can be generalized to broader populations of French-speaking immigrants with different educational backgrounds.

The sample also demonstrates limitations in age distribution, with younger participants (18–34 years) comprising the majority. This may reflect recruitment methods and networks accessed, but limits insights into experiences of older immigrant populations. The relatively small sample size of twelve participants, while appropriate for qualitative research depth, limits breadth of experiences captured. The concentration of participants from Côte d’Ivoire, while reflecting existing community networks, may overrepresent certain national perspectives while underrepresenting others. Similarly, the high proportion of recent arrivals and students may not fully capture experiences of immigrants in different life stages or career phases.

Despite these limitations, the depth of data collection through multiple methods and the focus on detailed experiential accounts provides rich insights into how French-speaking immigrants experience and navigate intercultural spaces within Ottawa’s FMC. The limitations primarily affect generalizability, rather than the validity of insights into the specific experiences examined.

6.4 Contributions to Research

This study advances the growing body of literature on Francophone immigration within minority communities (FMCs) and their integration challenges. By adopting an intercultural lens, the research offers a fresh perspective on spaces of integration, emphasizing the lived experiences of immigrants in FMCs. This approach enhances our understanding of how intercultural spaces function, not only in fostering linguistic retention and social participation but also in strengthening community cohesion within Canada’s Francophone minorities.

By focusing on intercultural spaces, the study highlights their critical role in inclusion, belonging, and recognition—demonstrating how they enable cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and interaction. These spaces serve as bridges between newcomers and host societies, enabling immigrants to navigate linguistic barriers, engage in meaningful exchanges, and access community

networks. Understanding how these spaces operate within FMCs contributes to broader discussions on immigrant integration and intercultural relations, reinforcing the need for more inclusive and responsive institutional frameworks.

Additionally, this study expands knowledge on Francophone immigrant needs, integration pathways, and social cohesion, deepening existing research on immigration and minority-language communities. By focusing on immigrant experiences and the dynamics of intercultural interactions, it provides insights into how diverse Francophone spaces function and evolve, strengthening efforts to support inclusion and enhance integration strategies within Canada's linguistically diverse landscape.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This study broadens the conversation on the role of institutions and community spaces in immigrant integration, emphasizing the need to assess the real impact of community centres while recognizing the contributions of other sites such as universities and public spaces (e.g., the ByWard Market). Rather than diminishing the significance of community centres, the findings highlight the importance of intercultural spaces that foster meaningful connections between newcomers and host societies. Understanding how diverse environments can affect social interaction and linguistic integration is essential for refining future integration strategies.

Additionally, the project's location calls for a comparative study in an FMC without a dominant Francophone presence, such as Gatineau. Examining integration experiences in areas where access to a larger Francophone community is limited could offer deeper insight into the factors immigrants prioritize in their settlement decisions. Participants frequently cited Gatineau as their preferred destination for French-language services, raising questions about how linguistic accessibility influences integration in other FMCs. A broader geographic analysis would help determine whether similar challenges and preferences exist elsewhere.

Furthermore, a more diverse participant pool would enhance future studies, particularly by incorporating individuals with varying levels of education and professional backgrounds. The current sample, while valuable, reflects Ottawa's high concentration of post-secondary educated immigrants, which may not be representative of other FMCs across Canada. Expanding the study to include immigrants from different educational and occupational contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of integration pathways and barriers, ensuring that research findings apply across various Francophone communities nationwide.

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Annex 1. Interview Guide/Guide d'entrevue

Guide d'entrevue pour les membres de la communauté

| | |
|--|--|
| Thème : Introduction et cartographie de la vie quotidienne | |
| Présentation et parcours dans la Francophonie | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Pouvez-vous vous présenter et me parler du français dans votre vie (Par exemple, d'où venez-vous, depuis combien de temps habitez-vous dans [ville], votre situation de famille, avez-vous appris le français en tant qu'enfant, avez-vous grandi/vécu dans des environnements majoritairement francophones etc.)5. (Pour les participants immigrants) Pouvez-vous nous parler un peu de votre expérience d'établissement et d'intégration à ce jour?6. Pouvez-vous me parler de votre participation/engagement dans la communauté francophone ? Par exemple, dans quels espaces utilisez-vous le français ? Quels espaces/associations/institutions/grou |

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| | <p>pes informels francophones fréquentez-vous?</p> <p>7. Comment avez-vous eu connaissance de la CFSM/des espaces que vous venez de mentionner? Comment/dans quel contexte avez-vous commencé à y participer ?</p> <p>8. Comment votre participation/engagement dans la communauté francophone a-t-elle évolué au fil du temps? (Étiez-vous plus/moins engagé à d'autres moments de votre vie? Pourquoi?)</p> <p>9. Y-a-t-il d'autres espaces/communautés/associations qui sont importants pour vous en dehors de la Francophonie? Par exemple, est-ce que vous participer à des associations ou des groupes, pas spécifiquement francophones, mais qui jouent un rôle majeur dans votre vie quotidienne?</p> |
| <p>Cartographie de la vie quotidienne</p> | <p>10. Sur cette feuille de papier, pouvez-vous dessiner les endroits où vous vous rendez au cours d'une semaine et d'un</p> |

| | |
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| | <p>week-end ordinaires (dans votre vie quotidienne). Pouvez-vous me décrire ce que vous dessinez, quels sont ces endroits, comment vous faites pour vous y rendre et ce que vous y faites. (Décrire une routine typique)</p> <p>11. Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres espaces/activités importantes qui ne sont pas représentées sur cette carte ? Par exemple, les espaces virtuels, les appels téléphoniques, le temps passé sur internet.</p> |
| | <p>Avant de poursuivre, y a-t-il d'autres idées que vous souhaitez partager sur vous-même et / ou votre lien à la communauté francophone ?</p> |
| <p>Thème: La cohésion communautaire et l'inclusion de la diversité dans la communauté francophone</p> | |
| <p>Expérience d'inclusion ou d'exclusion dans la communauté francophone</p> | <p>12. Vous sentez-vous le(la) bienvenu(e) / à l'aise quand vous participez dans la communauté francophone ou non (dans les espaces communautaires, les événements etc.)?</p> |

13. Si oui, dans quels espaces/événements? Qu'est-ce qui contribue à ce sentiment?
14. Sinon, est-ce qu'il y a des endroits où vous ne vous sentez pas le(la) bienvenu(e)/ mal à l'aise? Qu'est-ce que contribue à ce sentiment?
15. Quand vous participez dans (tel espace francophone), est-ce que vous sentez que c'est un espace « fait pour vous »? Est-ce qu'il y a des espaces francophones où vous ne vous sentez pas à votre place?
16. Y a-t-il des espaces francophones que vous connaissez mais auxquels vous ne participez pas? Pouvez-vous expliquer pourquoi (e.g. manque d'intérêt/pertinence)?
17. Y-a-t-il d'autres barrières à votre participation dans la communauté francophone (manque de temps, distance, langue, caractéristique de groupe) ?
18. Selon vous, y-a-t-il des groupes dans la communauté francophone qui font

face à des barrières spécifiques ? (par exemple, les immigrants) Est-ce que la communauté vous semble en mesure d'aider / de soutenir ces groupes ? Qu'est-ce que la communauté pourrait mieux faire pour eux ?

19. À vos yeux, les espaces francophones que vous fréquentez sont-ils diversifiés ? À quel égard (par exemple en termes de race, religion, culture, accent, orientation sexuelle, identité de genre)?

20. Est-ce que certains espaces francophones que vous fréquentez sont volontairement réservés à un groupe particulier de francophone ? (Par exemple, un groupe de femme francophone, un groupe religieux particulier, la diaspora d'un pays ou d'une région particulière)

21. Dans votre expérience, quelle est l'attitude des organismes et de la communauté francophone envers la diversité ? Pouvez-vous donner des exemples ?

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| | <p>22. Dans votre expérience, quand la diversité est abordée dans la communauté francophone, est-ce plutôt positivement (comme une force pour la communauté) ou négativement (comme un défi) ?</p> <p>23. Les organisateurs des espaces francophones que vous fréquentez vous semblent-ils représentatifs de la diversité des membres de la communauté ?</p> <p>24. Selon vous, qu'est-ce qui unit/rassemble (ou bien pourrait unir/rassembler) les membres de la communauté ? Qu'est-ce qui est le plus fédérateur dans la communauté francophone ?</p> <p>25. Qu'est-ce qui vous semble diviser les francophones ? Qu'est-ce qui empêche l'inclusion de tous ?</p> |
| <p>Cohésion communautaire et inclusion de la diversité dans les organismes francophones</p> | <p>26. Qu'est-ce qui aide/a aidé à votre participation dans la communauté francophone locale ?</p> <p>27. À votre avis, qu'est-ce qui pourrait permettre ou améliorer la cohésion de</p> |

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| | <p>la communauté francophone/d'expression française locale à (ville/province)?</p> <p>28. Pouvez-vous donner des exemples d'évènements, activités, services, organisations que vous pensez être inclusifs/répondant aux besoins des membres d'expression française de la communauté?</p> <p>29. Selon vous, y a-t-il des évènements ou projets ayant le potentiel d'unir, de mobiliser et de rassembler les francophones et francophiles de la communauté?</p> |
| <p>Thème: La cohésion communautaire et l'inclusion de la diversité, des politiques publiques aux pratiques communautaires</p> | |
| | <p>30. Selon vous, l'immigration est-elle un enjeu pour les CFSM? Pourquoi?</p> <p>31. (Pour les participants immigrants) Selon vous, est-ce que le fait d'être francophone a joué un rôle dans les procédures pour être sélectionné / vous installer au Canada? Est-ce que le fait</p> |

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| | <p>d'être francophone a facilité votre sélection/immigration au Canada?</p> <p>32. (Pour les participants immigrants) Votre sélection/immigration au Canada vous a-t-elle semblée liée à la communauté francophone?</p> |
| <p>Thème : recommandations pour favoriser l'inclusion de la diversité et la cohésion communautaire dans la communauté francophone</p> | |
| | <p>33. Selon vous, quelles actions devraient être menées pour favoriser l'inclusion de la diversité et la cohésion communautaire dans la communauté francophone?</p> <p>34. De la part du gouvernement?</p> <p>35. De la part des organismes francophones?</p> <p>36. De la part des membres de la communauté francophone?</p> |
| | <p>Avant de conclure, y a-t-il d'autres idées ou commentaires que vous souhaiteriez partager au sujet de l'inclusion de la diversité et la cohésion</p> |

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| | communautaire dans la communauté francophone dans [ville]? |
| Je vous remercie pour votre temps et de votre intérêt à participer à cette étude. | |

Annex 2. Demographic Questionnaire- Questionnaire démographique

Nous vous prions de remplir le questionnaire suivant dans le but de nous aider à mieux comprendre les personnes participant à l'étude. Votre participation est volontaire et tous les renseignements fournis seront maintenus confidentiels. Si vous ne vous sentez pas à l'aise de répondre à certaines questions, laissez les vides. Pour chaque question, s'il vous plait encercler la réponse qui s'applique le mieux, ou remplir dans l'espace fourni.

Quelle est votre fourchette d'âge?

37. 18-24

38. 25-34

39. 35-44

40. 45-54

41. 55 +

42. Quel est votre genre? _____

43. Quel est votre état civil?

44. Marié

45. Jamais marié

46. Séparé

47. Divorcé

48. Veuf/veuve

49. Autre (veuillez préciser): _____

50. Avez-vous des enfants? Oui Non

51. Si oui, combien? _____

52. Est-ce que vos enfants demeurent avec vous? Oui Non

53. Quel est votre niveau d'étude le plus élevé?

54. Moins d'un diplôme secondaire

55. Diplôme secondaire

56. Collège communautaire

57. Diplôme technique

58. Baccalauréat universitaire

59. Diplôme d'études supérieures (Maîtrise ou doctorat)

60. Autre (préciser): _____

61. Quel est votre situation d'emploi?

62. Temps plein

63. Temps partiel

64. Sans emploi

65. Autre (préciser): _____

66. Où êtes-vous né/e? (veuillez indiquer le pays si vous êtes nés hors du Canada et la ville ou province si vous êtes nés au Canada) _____

67. Si vous êtes nés hors du Canada

68. Sous quelle catégorie êtes-vous venu/e au Canada?

69. Travailleur qualifié

70. Entrée express

71. Parrainage familial

72. Immigrants investisseurs

73. Permis de travail

74. Candidat de provinces

75. Réfugié

76. Demandeur d'asile

77. Autre (précisé): _____

78. Avez-vous immigré au Canada :

79. Seul

80. Avec votre famille (en même temps)

81. Pour rejoindre un membre de votre famille déjà au Canada, qui vous a sponsorisé

82. Dans quels pays avez-vous vécu avant de déménager au Canada?

83. Depuis quand vivez-vous dans la région d'Ottawa? _____

84. Avez-vous vécu dans d'autres villes canadiennes avant la région d'Ottawa ? Si oui, lesquelles:

Merci d'avoir rempli ce questionnaire. Vos réponses seront gardées anonymes et confidentielles. Si vous avez des questions au sujet de ce questionnaire, ou au sujet de la conduite de cette étude, contactez-moi: Luisa Veronis à l'adresse suivante lveronis@uOttawa.ca ou à la ligne téléphonique pour les participants de recherche (Research Participant Complaint Line) au Bureau de l'éthique en recherche de l'Université de Colombie-Britannique, au 604-822-8598. Si vous êtes à distance, vous pouvez envoyer un email à RSIL@ors.ubc.ca ou appeler le numéro gratuit 1-877-822-8

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

| | |
|---|--|
| Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number | S-05-22-7984 |
| Titre du projet / Project Title | Projet cohésion communautaire (CRSH Savoir) |
| Type de projet / Project Type | Recherche de professeur / Professor's research project |
| Statut du projet / Project Status | Approuvé / Approved |
| Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy) | 20/05/2022 |
| Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy) | 22/02/2023 |

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

| Chercheur / Researcher | Affiliation | Role |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Luisa VERONIS | Département de géographie / Department of Geography | Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator |
| Suzanne HUOT | University of British Columbia | Chercheur principal - site d'examen primaire / Primary review site PI |
| LEYLA SALL | UNIVERSITÉ DE MONCTON | Co-chercheur / Co-investigator |
| Nathalie PIQUEMAL | University of Manitoba | Co-chercheur / Co-investigator |
| Faiçal ZELLAMA | Université de Saint-Boniface | Co-chercheur / Co-investigator |
| Leena LAMONTAGNE-DUPOIS | Département de géographie / Department of Geography | Assistant de recherche / Research Assistant |

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

NOTE: The expiry date of February 22, 2023 was set in accordance with the UBC-REB ethics certificate approval dates.

NOTE: La date d'expiration du 22 février 2023 a été établie en concordance avec les dates d'approbation du certificat du CER de UBC.

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée « Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires ». Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Riana MARCOTTE

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**