

# Researchers investigate Italian diaspora

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Third-generation Italian-Canadians' connections to their grandparents' culture is the subject of the Simon Fraser University Institute For Diaspora Research and Engagement's (IDRE) first online survey.

To deepen its understanding of how diaspora identities evolve over time, the recently launched institute is collaborating with the Italian Cultural Centre (ICC) on investigating the cultural evolution of Vancouver's Italian population.

Eva Sajoo, an IDRE research associate, first conceived of the project. She was curious about the phenomenon of identity retrieval among third-generation immigrants.

Observing how Vancouver's many different immigrant groups identify with their own and their new country's culture, Sajoo noted three evolutionary phases. While new immigrants busy themselves with establishing their lives in Canada, their children often distance themselves from what they see as their parents' old country.

It is the grandchildren, the third generation of a new immigrant Canadian family, who tend to take an interest in their grandparents' ancestral and cultural past. Third generation immigrants are more likely to visibly affirm some aspects of their ethnic background in their identity's development.

Mauro Vescera, ICC director, notes young Italian-Canadians' attachment to their original culture often sparks an interest in Italian language

classes, which the centre offers. The centre also hosts a museum, social events, art and culture performances, and even a daycare. "We are looking for a way to redefine our role so that we are serving not just a particular segment of the Italian community, but the community as a whole. How do we move from being the Italian Cultural Centre, to being a community centre for Italians?" muses the former director of advancement for SFU's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

The brief [online survey](#) feeding into IDRE's and ICC's collaborative study, Being "Ethnic": Third Generation Italian Identity in Vancouver, interests the ICC because information gathered from it will help the centre better serve the needs of successive immigrant generations. The survey asks questions about how people describe themselves and what being Italian-Canadian means to them.

"We are looking for patterns," Sajoo says. "Are there patterns of behaviour that influence how strongly Italian identity is preserved?" These might include speaking Italian, or being involved in activities where individuals socialise with other people of Italian descent."

The study is likely to serve as a starting point for further research. "We are a country of immigrants," notes Sajoo. "Some populations arrived earlier than others, but how we understand where we came from and what that means now is a question many of us can relate to – Italian or not."

**More information:** To participate in the study, visit the IDRE website, or contact Eva Sajoo at [esajoo@sfu.ca](mailto:esajoo@sfu.ca). The results of the study are expected to be publicly available by the end of the year.

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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