

**Atlantic Metropolis Centre ~ Working Paper Series**

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**Attracting and Retaining Immigrant Artists:  
Challenges and Opportunities in Halifax**

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**Working Paper No.39 2011**

**Série de documents de recherche 39-2011**

**July 2011**



Centre Métropolis Atlantique  
Atlantic Metropolis Centre

**The Atlantic Metropolis Centre's Working Papers Series**  
**Série de documents de recherche du Centre Métropolis Atlantique**

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3 May 2011

**Attracting and Retaining Immigrant Artists:  
Challenges and Opportunities in Halifax**

*A preliminary summary of interview results*

In the contemporary development context, cities see attracting and retaining talented and creative workers as the key to economic dynamism. However, given low birth rates in Canada and an aging population, increasing immigration has become the principal strategy to encourage population growth. With the popularity of “creative cities” ideas (Florida 2002, 2005; Landry 2008) – the notion that creativity drives growth -- governments at various levels are especially interested in developing plans and policies to attract, integrate, and retain talented and creative immigrants.

This project examines the challenges of and opportunities for attracting and retaining immigrants in the arts and culture sector in the Halifax region. Creative industries are becoming increasingly important contributors to local economic performance: they affect the ability of communities to attract and retain talented workers of all kinds. Workers in the arts and culture sector are highly educated but relatively poorly paid; consequently, this may present particular concerns for creative workers who choose to immigrate because they face multiple challenges to making a living while engaging in their creative practices. This paper considers which policies may be most effective in supporting such workers to come to and stay in places like Halifax.

Halifax, Nova Scotia, has a reputation of being a magnet to workers in several sectors of the arts and culture industries (such as visual arts and music), but it faces challenges in retaining people in other cultural fields (such as theatre and dance). Relatively little has been written about the particular challenges for immigrants in the arts and culture sector. Similarly, limited research has been conducted (e.g., Markusen and Schrock 2006; Kronstal 2010) on the effectiveness of municipal immigration and cultural plans in creating a suitable policy context to encourage the attraction and retention of immigrants in the arts and culture sector. This project seeks to address these knowledge gaps while providing policy-relevant research that will prove useful to local governments and those working in the culture sector.

In the summer of 2010, we prepared a working paper on municipal best practices in cultural and immigration planning (Kronstal 2010). This follow-up working paper summarizes the data collected from interviews with cultural workers in Halifax. (Although we also conducted a focus group comprising policy makers and intermediaries involved in the arts and culture sector, those results are not included in this summary.)

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<sup>1</sup> Funding for this research was provided by the **Atlantic Metropolis Project**. Any opinions expressed are those of the authors. The authors are grateful to the many people who took time from their busy schedules to meet with us.

## *Summary of interview findings*

The objective of the research project is to gather information that can be used to evaluate the ability of Halifax Regional Municipality's (Halifax) immigration plan, cultural plan, and economic development strategy to meet the needs of immigrant artists and cultural workers and then to make recommendations about potential policy improvements. Over the summer of 2010, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with immigrant cultural workers<sup>2</sup> – professionally trained artists, dancers, and musicians -- working in and around Halifax, Nova Scotia. The interviews focused on learning about issues and opportunities that affect Halifax's ability to attract and retain artists from abroad. Here we summarize the major themes and issues that emerged by analyzing study participants' shared experiences and opinions about moving to Halifax and working as artists in the city.

Thirty-two immigrant cultural workers participated in the study: eleven musicians, four dancers, and seventeen visual artists. The nature of artistic careers practiced by the participants varied significantly in regards to genre, proportion of total income earned from their art practice, and current commitment to a professional artistic career. While some participants earned a living or obtained a partial income by marketing their trade, others were compensated as members of institutional art programs or as educators. Some participants were not actively pursuing careers as artists at the time of the interview, while others relied on other primary financial sources, such as spouses or previous employment earnings.

The demographic characteristics of the participants proved diverse. Sixteen males and sixteen females participated, ranging in age and coming from many parts of the world,<sup>3</sup> at least one of whom has left Halifax since being interviewed. Each interview was recorded and transcribed to allow for detailed thematic analysis of the content.

Nine fundamental questions served as topical guides for the interview process: they were directed at identifying policy challenges and opportunities associated with attracting and retaining cultural sector workers in Halifax.

- What attracted study participants to Halifax?
- What do participants believe are the disadvantages of living in Halifax?
- What do participants see as the advantages of living in Halifax?
- What factors influence participants' decisions to stay in Halifax?
- What challenges do artists encounter in immigrating to Canada?
- How welcoming is the Halifax community towards immigrant artists?
- What barriers do immigrant artists face working in Halifax?
- What types of services and programs assist immigrant artists in Halifax?
- What improvements can be made to make Halifax a more attractive and enabling city for immigrant artists?

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<sup>2</sup> We used a consistent set of questions to lead the interview but followed up on questions in a less structured way. Interviews generally lasted between 40 and 80 minutes. We use the terms "cultural worker" and "artists" in a general sense to include those involved in the cultural industries. In referring to particular interview respondents, the term "artist" specifies visual artists.

<sup>3</sup> The sample included one Canadian born abroad who had also lived and worked as a professional abroad for many years before migrating to Halifax.

Participants were given the freedom to discuss issues important to them within the context of the questions, while the interviewer took time to explore subjects as they arose. This summary organizes major themes and issues emerging from the interviews in relation to the above foundational research questions.

*What attracted study participants to Halifax?*

Immigrant artists come to Halifax by different roads at different stages of their lives. For many in this target group, the decision to settle in the city was not pre-planned. Neither did all artists choose to come to Halifax: some came as children immigrating with their parents or as refugees. Those who chose Halifax as their point of entry to Canada and those who arrived in Halifax after living in other Canadian cities came for various reasons, many unrelated to their artistic careers.

Respondents often described personal connections as a reason for choosing to settle in Halifax: people fell in love with a Nova Scotian or Nova Scotia itself after visiting here. Seven participants formed relationships with Haligonians or Canadians from other cities while living in their home countries and immigrated to Halifax to live with a spouse or partner. Two met Haligonians while visiting or studying in the city and decided to immigrate afterwards. Six participants also mentioned having children in Canada since moving to the country. Generally, then, family provided a strong reason for deciding to settle permanently outside their native country.

Five participants originally came to Halifax as international students. While two came to study art at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD University), the rest came to study fields not directly related to their current artistic interests. International students' decisions to stay in Halifax after their studies were generally not premeditated when they first reached the city.

A dancer described ending up in Halifax rather than specifically choosing to be there.

*Q: What made you decide you wanted to become a part of the community in Halifax?*

*(Dancer): I didn't actually. I didn't want to be. It was never something that was planned or pre-planned or pre-thought. It was just something that happened. So there was no decision. If you told me in 2005 that I'd be here, I would have said "you are lying, I won't be here by now". So yes, that wasn't planned. So I didn't make a decision. It kind of just happened.*

Participants also came to Halifax to improve their quality of life. They described Halifax as a safe urban environment that offers a comfortable, leisurely lifestyle near beautiful natural environments. Some of these qualities -- in particular the ideal of a safe community -- are difficult to dissociate from participants' perceptions of Canada in general. Three participants attracted to the Halifax lifestyle mentioned that their decision to move to the city was partly influenced by the migration of the Shambhala Buddhist community to Halifax in the 1980s.

Few decisions to come to Halifax were motivated primarily by respondents' desires to work as artists in the city. Of those making the choice to immigrate, most were attracted to the city by offers of full-time employment with a cultural institution. Only one participant described being drawn to the city by its reputation for having strong cultural traditions. A visual artist also mentioned learning about culture in Halifax before coming to the city. Although this artist had not come to Halifax to seek career opportunities, these comments suggest that the visibility and vibrancy of artistic culture in the city may have been one factor in the artist's decision to immigrate.

Decisions to immigrate are often complex and multi-faceted. Although some respondents mentioned career opportunities or personal reasons for moving to Halifax, many described other attractive qualities about the city during the interviews. A cultural worker may come to Halifax because of an employment opportunity *and* perceptions of the quality of life possible in the region. Those who remained in the city might be expected to have reasonably positive views of the quality of life here, although the relative importance of quality of life over other reasons for choosing to practice in Halifax was not explicitly investigated in the interviews.

*What do participants believe are the disadvantages of living in Halifax?*

Respondents viewed the disadvantages of coming to Halifax to live and work as an artist comparatively in relation to the advantages of living elsewhere. Halifax was not seen as an immigration hub. Many participants believed Canada's largest cities -- Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver -- have reputations as centres of economic and cultural activity that make them the dominant choice for immigrants and artists. Participants suggested that the promise of employment in larger cities' robust job markets make them more attractive than smaller Canadian cities. In comparison, Halifax was described as an entry point that immigrants often leave to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

A visual artist described an impression of Halifax as a stop along the way for immigrants.

*(Visual artist): The stats are very clear on this, that most immigrants... just as they may come to Canada via other countries in Europe, they don't stop in Halifax. They move on to the big urban centres. Often if they are from large urban centres, they don't want to stay in a small centre where there are not as many opportunities. While they may love Halifax -- and many people do, it's one of the best kept secrets in Canada I think personally -- but they typically exit to usually Toronto or Vancouver, increasingly Calgary, and Montreal. But they won't go east to St John's. They won't go north, most of them.*

Although immigrants may love the city, Halifax may not have enough employment opportunities to keep artists here.

Participants also described the attraction of large urban centres' established immigrant communities. Although some artists view Halifax as culturally diverse, others said that its lack of established immigrant communities made it less comfortable for some newcomers. They noted that newcomers to Halifax lack both the social supports that can be offered by established immigrant communities and access to familiar products and services that help ease the transition into a new place and a new way of life.

A dancer described the challenges of adjusting to life in Halifax for family members.

*(Dancer): I have my parents here. They came up and it was rough for them. For me it was easy. But for my parents it was hard. Because the language and... I mean everybody was great to them, really was, man. Canada rocks, really welcoming. But it was rough. You know? There's really nothing that they can relate to. You know what I mean?*

In several immigrant artists' opinions, other regions in Canada -- particularly the largest three cities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver -- typically attract more professional artists than Halifax does. Participants believed these centres offered artists more opportunities for career advancement and freedom of artistic exploration and also for earning a living as a full-time artist.

The experience of participants in all sectors testifies to the challenges of earning a living in the cultural sector in Halifax. Eleven participants earned full-time incomes working in the cultural sector. Seven of the 11 were able to sustain themselves in the cultural sector with positions teaching or working for cultural institutions. Artists who work commercially and independently described the experience as challenging.

*Q: What kind of opportunities or advantages does Halifax offer an artist?*

*(Visual artist): You've got to be kidding. Sorry... No, it's a very, very tough little home. There's not many galleries. People in Windsor and Bedford and ... in Fall River have tried to run galleries. They've gone belly-up. They haven't been able to make a living at it. We seem to attract a lot of artists because we are a beautiful province. You can live relatively cheaply. But unfortunately, making a living at it is almost impossible. It is very frustrating.*

One musician explained that artists are attracted to larger centres that host a critical mass of cultural economy professionals and industry players needed to provide opportunities for career development.

*(Musician): You know if you are in a major urban centre, you are always thinking the phone could ring or an email can come through or whatever. So I think it would take a lot of courage for a younger artist to give that all up and come to Halifax because I don't think Halifax yet has that sort of critical mass of being a destination in terms of opportunities, in terms of encounters with other artists, and so on.*

While larger cities' wealthier commercial markets create opportunities for artists, participants noted that the Maritime region's struggling economy did not assure a sufficient number of affluent art patrons to support a thriving arts scene in Halifax.

*Q: What are some of the limitations of pursuing a career as an artist in Nova Scotia?*

*(Visual artist): Financial. It's a strain. There's not a big audience. There's not a lot of venues. There are very few galleries, and only a very, very few good ones. There are not enough people to buy or are willing to buy art. So it's a different kind of mentality. Of course in New York, you get a lot of people with a lot of money. You have a few people here with a lot of money.*

A common theme in the discourse about opportunity among visual artists was the idea that Halifax has more artists than the cultural industries can sustain. Not everybody thought that it would be a good idea to encourage more artists to come to Halifax before increasing the level of opportunity.

*(Visual artist): The problem ... is that Halifax is full of artists. And there are only that many galleries and the galleries are full. And what else is there? There are the grants, but not everybody wants to work with people. They want to just do their art. And some apply for art grants just to do your art, but there is only limited amount of money for that too. So I think to say yes, let's tell everybody to come to Halifax to do art would be extremely difficult for them to make a living here because that is just not going to happen. The money is just not here.*

However, some cultural workers resisted arguments that artists need to locate in larger cities to participate in a thriving cultural sector.

*(Musician): A lot of it is the mentality. You know, "you can't be that good if you're from Halifax because you didn't make it in Toronto". What does that even mean, you know? Like it's just a stupid mentality but it exists everywhere. I have friends of friends, like associates, "Oh, I played in New York." Do you know how easy it is to play in New York? Like you go there because in New York you don't get paid to play in a lot of clubs: you have to actually literally hand a tin around at the end of your performance.*

This musician went on to say that opinions privileging larger centres may prevent Halifax's music scene from garnering the type of respect and recognition it deserves.

*(Musician): But it's just that mentality, oh, wow, it's New York or it's Toronto. It doesn't mean that being here and playing here is bad. If anything, it's harder to play here because there are so many good people and there aren't as many venues to play in. It's quality.*

Another musician suggested that Haligonians fail to recognize the potential and value in their own city. The musician urged greater pride in the city so that Halifax might achieve the potential of its cultural industries.

*(Musician): I mean I've been here for three years, and I'm not asking "why on earth did I move to Halifax?" So again, it's that attitude. And I think really, at the end of the day, that is probably the main thing more than funding, I think it's that attitude that this deserves to be and should be and can be and probably will be a place where those questions are never asked.*

*What do participants see as the advantages of living in Halifax?*

Although many participants spoke of the attractions of Canada's larger cities, comparisons did not favour big centres over Halifax on all points. Participants saw several advantages of living in Halifax that benefit immigrant artists. Halifax was described as a more hospitable and accessible environment than larger centres and therefore more attractive to some newcomers. Participants believed that the relatively small size of the city makes it an ideal place for meeting people. They noted that social interactions were often closer and more personal in Halifax than in larger cities. Participants also believed the lower profile of the city means that although there may be fewer opportunities, they face less competition for them. The low profile translates into a more affordable living environment.

A musician explained how Halifax can offer substantial personal and professional advantages to burgeoning artists.

*(Musician): I mean those things don't happen in Manhattan. [A fellow musician] couldn't afford an apartment like he's got [if he lived] in Manhattan. And if he ever met his landlord, he sure as hell wouldn't serve as president of his board or anything. And Halifax is small enough that these connections can happen. You can be very productive. You can meet people all across all sectors. Everything is so accessible right now. And I think these are all huge gifts that Haligonians I think need to recognize and need to take advantage of.*

The musician noted that opportunities for artists are not simply related to the size of an industry or the amount of money available. Many factors, including affordability and a working environment that facilitates professional connections, were discussed as advantages Halifax has over cities traditionally viewed as cultural centres.



A visual artist described the smaller size of the community as a great benefit to newcomer artists because it allows them to make connections.

*(Visual Artist): I think the biggest opportunity it provides is that it is a small community. So you get to know people. You can meet people quite quickly. And people are generally open to new filmmakers or new artists in the beginning. So I think that is definitely the biggest asset, just access to people with connections.*

Another visual artist noted that coming to a smaller community can help an artist's career flourish, perhaps because there may be less local competition.

*(Visual artist): I am much more successful here. It's easier to be a big fish in a small pond than a small fish in a big pond...I don't know, it's just things seemed good here. I started showing at Studio 21. ... And the art seemed to go well.*

Participants often associated the size of the city with the qualities that they found attractive about it. A visual artist suggested that Halifax's size strikes an ideal balance between the advantages of metropolitan opportunity and the problems of living in a big city.

*(Visual artist): The climate, the people. Nature. I mean, no, we like it here. Like in general, it is a great place to live. It's not like Toronto, like metropolitan. It's not too busy but it's busy enough. I mean that is kind of a golden mean. ... That is a nice spot to be that way, in general.*

*What factors influence participants' decisions to stay in Halifax?*

Participants expressed several reasons to consider leaving the city but also many reasons to stay. Most participants said that they do not want to leave, and many have formed connections with the community that keep them in Halifax. The most common reason artists considered for leaving was their inability to find employment in the city.

A visual artist's comment suggested that the desire to be in a familiar ethnic community and the realities of needing to make decisions based on job opportunities can convince a person to leave Halifax.

*Q: Is there anything that might make you decide to leave Halifax?*

*(Visual artist): The first thing that I could see as an advantage is let's say bigger cities. That there are quite a few big communities, like ... [participant's community of origin] communities in Canada. For instance, in Toronto. And yes, that could be something I would... since Canada is such a multicultural country, to have your own people by your side is quite a nice thing. Yes, the other thing is again the jobs. You know, the job offer could play a role in the whole thing. Much more jobs offered in the bigger cities than in Halifax.*

One visual artist described the possibility of being forced to leave Halifax to pursue career dreams in spite of expressing a strong desire to remain in the community.

*(Visual artist): I want to stay here. I might [move] in spite of I love Halifax, I love the people here. Now you need to choose. Like you have a degree, and you have dreams. If there is*

*something, there is light, you need to follow it and try. And especially like I told you, I got experience in the small city, but if I continue as a newcomer and nobody recognizes me, okay, I did my part and I will find something. And that is why we lose people here. We lose them. That is why we stay behind. Not stay behind, but movement is slow. We grow but very slow.*

For cultural workers, regardless of the connections they feel to Halifax, the opportunity to make fulfilling contributions remains a primary concern. If Halifax fails to provide immigrants with opportunities to grow as artists and as people, they may continue to seek other homes.

Although participants discussed possible reasons to leave Halifax, many gave reasons to stay in the city. Participants described becoming a part of the community with strong attachments to the place that they cannot easily abandon.

*(Visual artist): I would probably choose to continue having a base in Nova Scotia. This is just a very interesting feeling of being rooted here now.... I'm content with where I am and happy with where I am. And I think I can make a contribution. So I don't know. And it's a weird question. I really don't... Actually, even though I said money [might make me leave], I don't really see myself leaving Nova Scotia. Perhaps if my current partner has a job opportunity elsewhere, I might consider leaving Nova Scotia. That would be it.*

Thus, while some cultural workers discussed the potential that they may have to leave to maintain their careers or because their partners had to relocate, others saw themselves firmly rooted in the Halifax community. Many participants spoke of their need to feel productive in ways that are meaningful and personally gratifying.

*What challenges do artists encounter immigrating to Canada?*

Few study participants mentioned immigrating to Canada with the stated intent of working as a professional artist. Of those who immigrated to Canada as adults (rather than as children with their families), most went through the immigration process through the family case stream or through such other sponsored routes as the community-identified stream of the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee Program. Some participants immigrated to the country under the auspices of another profession, either because they had not yet begun pursuing a career in the arts or to avoid the perceived difficulties of immigrating to the country as an artist. One artist suggested that creative cultural professions are overlooked or ignored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

*(Visual Artist): And you may have noticed quite a few of the Canada immigration programs offer points for particular occupations that Canada needs. But there are no points for artists or film makers. If you have a specific trade, if you are a welder, for example, or in a profession or a trade that Canada requires, then your chances of obtaining acceptance to Canada are that much more developed.*

Participants who immigrated to Canada independently as professional artists had divergent experiences. One described the process as incident free and felt accepted as a valued contributor to Canadian society. Two others had less positive experiences at the immigration office, however. For example, one discussed being forced to apply several times before getting an application approved. The artist described the immigration officer as explicitly stating that Canada was not interested in bringing foreign artists into the country. Another artist explained the experience.

*(Visual artist): And I thought that was sort of a thing at the immigration office. I had a conversation with the officers. And they kind of expressed like, "Well, we have a lot of..." not directly but with the idea that we have a lot of our people, like artists and so on. Like they are looking for a job. They are staying and having trouble. So difficulties. Like letting you know, "why should we have you here who would maybe take an opportunity, a job from our native people?" Well, native-- from the Canadians. So I don't know. I'll just leave it like that.*

Although Halifax and other cities may be promoting the cultural sector and pursuing a creative cities agenda, cultural sector workers commonly suggested that Canada may not openly welcome artists as immigrants.

*How welcoming is the Halifax community towards immigrant artists?*

Most study participants had high opinions of the Canadian people and the country's treatment of immigrants. Respondents often considered Canada a more welcoming community for immigrants than participants' native countries or other places they had lived. For many, Halifax's community is one of the city's best assets. Participants believe Halifax provided them with a welcoming environment, describing people in the city as courteous and friendly.

All study participants had positive experiences or impressions to share about the people of Halifax. Comments about welcoming experiences outnumbered those of exclusion; however, contrasting themes emerged in the discourse on the subject. Although all immigrant artists felt welcomed in some way, the extent to which participants described being included in the community differed. Stories suggested that the cultural attitudes in Halifax towards newcomers are predominantly considerate but that Haligonians may sometimes be reluctant or hesitant to fully embrace newcomers as members of the community. The experiences and opinions of study participants revealed that while some elements of the community may exclude those identified as "different", other community residents make direct efforts to include and welcome newcomers. Those interviewed recognized and valued these welcoming initiatives.

Musicians, visual artists, and dancers said that despite the warmth of the community, subtle barriers sometimes separate newcomers from the local population. Some described an insular cultural attitude.

*(Visual artist): And the other thing about Nova Scotia, and I will say this as someone who comes from what I realize is a different culture, is that this place tends to be small "P" provincial: insular, tribal, and there still is the sense of "you are a CFA" ... You've heard that term: come-from-away?*

The respondent suggested that native-born Haligonians identify more strongly with close friends and family, making newcomers feel like outsiders. Some participants characterized the term come-from-away as discriminatory or discomfiting.

Several participants believe that people are not immediately accepted as members of the community when they move to Halifax; in other words, becoming part of the community takes a long time. Some indicated that although Haligonians are courteous and friendly to newcomers, the onus is on the newcomer to make inroads toward being meaningfully included in the community. One participant described feeling treated like a newcomer despite living in the community for nearly a decade.

*(Visual artist): They consider me a newcomer, eight years here. I don't know, after 20 years they will call me what? It's very weird. Like if I am here 20 years, and they will still call me a newcomer, I will say come on, stop doing it. I am not a newcomer.*

Experiences of overt racial discrimination, xenophobia, and feelings of alienation were rarely mentioned but not entirely absent. These experiences were not always directly related to immigration but were often connected to the experience of being visibly different in what was sometimes considered a predominantly white European population and culture. Some participants also noted that Nova Scotia's Aboriginal and African Nova Scotian community members face discrimination despite being from the area.

Some participants believed the distinction between Haligonians and people "from away" can work against newcomers in the job market; for example, five described unwelcoming receptions from local artists when they arrived. Stories of encountering peers protecting their "turf" or territories in Halifax affected immigrants working in all sectors; however, they proved most common among the dancers interviewed (mentioned by three of four participants).

While some participants did not experience or mention direct hostility, they said that the arts community could be insular or closed. Participants attributed such attitudes to what they considered to be the inherently territorial and highly competitive nature of cultural industries rather than casting a negative reflection on the city itself. One musician and two visual artists believed Halifax's arts communities were welcoming and accessible in comparison to those in other cities. Others simply had high opinions of their artistic peers. The impression of a strong and supportive community of visual artists in Halifax emerged through the interviews.<sup>4</sup>

*(Visual artist): Like there's a close-knit art community so you can kind of be supported and bolstered. It's relatively non-competitive in a way that other arts communities can be much more so. Like I mean I think all arts communities, because there's not much available, tend to be a competitive kind of arena. But I think Halifax has a softness about it or a community spirit about it that I think people find attractive.*

Another visual artist attributed the strength of the peer community to the support network provided by local cultural organizations.

*(Visual artist): Yes, I think it's really the fact that artists meet, they support each other. It's a real good support system that is here through VANS – Visual Arts Nova Scotia – but also Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council. And it's just amazing how they really want to make it work for everybody. It's not there are the top good ones and now nobody else gets a spot anymore. It's really okay, let's check it out. How can we make it work that everybody can be included? And I really love that supporting feel.*

*What barriers do immigrant artists face working in Halifax?*

One subject discussed in the interviews was whether or not participants believe that being an immigrant affects the ability to pursue an artistic career in Halifax. Although some participants thought coming from

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<sup>4</sup> Previous research on the music scene in Halifax similarly found a strongly supportive social environment (Grant *et al.* 2009; Hracs *et al.* 2011).

another country had no significant bearing on their artistic careers, others described additional barriers that they faced as immigrants. They noted that the challenges of adjusting to a new way of life in some ways inhibited their ability to advance their careers as artists.

The experiences of visual artists and musicians indicated that independent commercial artists often find employment and financial support through varying sources and in different places. For independent musicians, opportunities to perform often come through informal connections by word of mouth. Visual artists are constantly working to promote their art to get exhibition space in galleries and also applying for grant money. Dancers rely on grants to produce shows. In all cases, artists' careers depend on access to information and communication. Immigrant artists who lack social capital to facilitate access to opportunities, or who face language barriers, can face significant disadvantages in the working environment.

Participants explained that language barriers sometimes prevented them from learning about and connecting with opportunities. Some spoke of difficulties applying for grants and accessing information about employment and funding opportunities in what is their second or third language. Also, participants still learning English noted that the language barrier made it difficult and intimidating to network. One artist described missing potential opportunities because of the language barrier.

*(Visual artist): My English is not enough. So if it's like four or five pages of information, I'm lost. Yes, I'm just lost. I don't want to keep it up. So sometimes, okay, I just give up on this one. I just select some. Okay, I can do this one because it is simple. I can do this one, yes, because I have time. But I can't explore every event.*

Many participants had difficulty accessing opportunities in a city where they have no established reputation and few connections in the community. Artists in all fields said that building a good reputation and being familiar with industry members is essential in the cultural industries. Further, they said that it takes time to build a reputation and, therefore, a successful career. One spoke of needing an opportunity to begin establishing a name in the city.

*(Visual artist): I think only here, they don't recognize me as an artist yet, as a new artist. I know I need to build my name. To build your name, you need to be years, years, years, and working hard. You need to show your art. You need to have an offer.*

This participant had a fine arts diploma and had worked as an artist for years before coming to Canada. None of this previous experience was recognized in Halifax; however, starting again from nothing without connections seemed daunting. A musician described a similar frustration after losing the benefits of years of experience and having to start over.

*(Musician): But I must say, it was challenging at first kind of assuming... not assuming.... I wasn't famous in [native country] or anything. I had established who I was. You know, people knew who to call if they wanted the kind of music I did. Whereas here, all of a sudden I'm just burst onto the scene and people just assumed I just started doing this when I've been doing it for 10 years before. And it's just something you've got to get your head around.*

Networks of peers developed over time in a place provide important opportunities for musicians and other artists. Immigrant cultural workers, however, have to re-establish those networks and re-assert their identities in the new location. For the most part, artists who have immigrated to and stayed in Halifax have succeeded in doing that. The artists who experienced re-building their careers in the city emphasized the

importance of cultivating a network of contacts within Halifax's arts community and institutions. Their comments indicated that many respondents believed Nova Scotia's employment culture is founded on social connections and ties to the community. Some participants suggested that being known was at least as important as being talented when it comes to obtaining funding, getting jobs, or accessing opportunities to showcase work in local venues. In fact, artists familiar with Halifax and its cultural industries speculated that social relationships may be more important in Halifax than they would be in larger competitive urban contexts, where the emphasis on raw talent may affect outcomes more directly.

Newcomer cultural workers in Halifax must overcome the barriers of being new to the community to advance their careers, and respondents saw breaking into the social networks that ensure access as the first step in pursuing a cultural career.

*(Dancer): Because Nova Scotia is kind of tight knit, if you didn't notice. So like I told you, it's like a club. And your role is to cut into that club. And I think you have to really... because if you didn't grow up here, they won't remember you when you were small. So you have to kind of remind them about who you are. And really just build a rapport with people. Be who you are. But build your rapport with people so they will remember who you are. So you are an artist, you are a social artist, and you are a strategic artist.*

By using the expressions "tight knit" and "cut into that club", the dancer suggests outsiders likely will not have easy access to the same opportunities as locals in Nova Scotia.

Many participants see Halifax as culturally sophisticated and welcoming in the contemporary arts context; however, several artists spoke of challenges immigrants may face expressing themselves within the city's cultural environment. Dancers, visual artists, and musicians described difficulties encountered when artists do not meet the dominant cultural expectations of an industry or sector. In most cases, such issues are related to the broader Canadian or American cultural assumptions that Halifax shares rather than the unique cultural environment of the city. For instance, a musician experienced challenges when a band's appearance did not mesh with the image typically associated with its genre.

*(Musician): But it's like we don't fit the mould. You know, there's a certain thing. If you play blues rock, you have come from this background. If you play progressive rock, you come from this background. If you play urban hip hop, you come from this background. And even though it may not seem that way, I think from the inside, it is very clearly defined in the record companies here.*

Three musicians mentioned that the Maritime region's strong association with certain musical genres (e.g., fiddle music or singer-songwriter) may limit opportunities to pursue other styles. One musician speculated that immigrants familiar with other genres might find the cultural environment isolating.

*(Musician): Musicians watch the ECMAs [East Coast Music Awards] just to see how many fiddles they can count. And I laugh. I go, "Come on, guys, like don't be so harsh. It's Nova Scotia." But it is sold like... So someone outside that clique or someone from away might come here and go, "wow, I have no chance here. Like how am I supposed to play my kalimba and make a go of it when it's all...everyone seems to be playing guitars and mandolins and violins?" So it would be overwhelming for sure.*

This participant also mentioned that in the past, such traditional genres have received endorsement from the province but noted that in recent years, it is becoming more common for authorities to support diverse styles. Other musicians (as well as participants in the visual arts sector) expressed beliefs that complemented this observation, noting that Halifax supports a diverse and vibrant cultural environment.

*What types of services and programs assist immigrant artists in Halifax?*

Immigrants working as visual artists, dancers and musicians had accessed various support services and programs to help them pursue careers in the arts and adjust to their new homes. These support services included provincial and federal grant programs, immigrant settlement service providers, and local cultural organizations. Halifax Regional Municipality's support for the arts was recognized as a benefit for artists by some participants; however, others criticized the city's lack of commitment to investing in culture. No participant was aware of any programs dedicated specifically to assisting immigrant artists. In a few cases, however, settlement service providers had helped artists with their career development.

Cultural workers received funding from provincial and federal departments and agencies through grant programs. Some participants with landed immigrant status were impressed that they were eligible for funding before they became Canadian citizens, with Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage grants being the most common funding source participants mentioned. No grant program described by participants focussed on immigrant artists; however, some participants described federal grants programs that target members of cultural minorities.

Halifax is home to several cultural organizations that assist and promote musicians, visual artists, and dancers. Groups mentioned by participants included Jazz East, Music Nova Scotia, Dance Nova Scotia, Visual Arts Nova Scotia, and the Nova Scotia Crafts Council. Several participants were members of these organizations and had taken part in events or programs that the groups supported. Participants believed that these groups offered immigrant artists important opportunities to get connected with the local arts community and helped them with orientation by providing information about opportunities for work and funding.

Visual artists recognized Halifax Regional Municipality for its support of the arts. Participants mentioned municipal support for Nocturne, for example, a popular outdoor art festival, and other community art programs throughout the city as important contributions to art promotion. The city's contribution to public art projects and art education was also noted.

Not all study participants were impressed by government support for culture, however. Some respondents accused the provincial and federal governments of underfunding artists. Participants from all sectors also decried a pervasive lack of respect for the arts in the education system. One visual artist suggested that support for the arts in Nova Scotia has traditionally been lower than in other provinces.

*(Visual Artist): Statistics Canada collects data every year on government expenditures for culture. They break it down by federal government and provincial governments. And Nova Scotia is consistently ranked near the bottom of the list for culture expenditures, which is a very broad category.*

A dancer argued that Nova Scotia has not promoted itself as a culturally significant province and that this inattention has resulted in a national reputation of being unsophisticated.

*(Dancer): Nova Scotia does not identify itself as a culture. And I don't think it is seen like that by the other provinces in Canada. I think it is seen, from my perception... I think I was telling you about that, in travelling a little bit around and talking to this guy from the federal government, and just going to this conference where there is...I'm talking about performing arts...from all over the country. Nova Scotia is just perceived really as this place where nobody goes. So if you bring a group on tour, they are going to go Montreal, Toronto and maybe Calgary, Vancouver. But they are not going to go to Halifax because you just don't do that. So it is perceived as this place down there which is really something country, fishermen. I don't know. It's not perceived as a cultural place.*

Participants noted that investment in culture would positively impact the regional and provincial economies by encouraging a dynamic and innovative community, thereby making the area more attractive to prospective employees, employers, and tourists. Such comments suggest study participants hold perspectives that resemble current HRM cultural and economic development policy assumptions and reflect contemporary theoretical positions on what attracts visitors, in-migrants, and investors. Yet participants made few remarks that suggested that they recognized the confluence of views between themselves and the city, although one dancer commended the city's investment in constructing a new progressively designed public library as a positive step towards establishing Halifax as a cultural centre.

Several study participants had accessed immigrant settlement services through Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS). ISIS provided these artists with English language and other courses to help them adjust to the local business environment. In several cases, ISIS work placement programs helped participants find positions working for cultural institutions. Artists able to find work through these programs argued that the positions made a difference in their ability to connect with the community as newcomers.

*Q: To what extent did Halifax provide a welcoming community for you?*

*(Visual artist): Absolutely welcoming, absolutely just great. But in fairness, I have to say that I did come to the arts community in Halifax with the endorsement of the [cultural institution]. So was it me or was it where I was working? So I don't know. I'm sure I am not in a playing field with other people without that advantage. So I don't know, again.*

*What service provision improvements can be made to make Halifax a more attractive and enabling city for immigrant artists?*

Although several participants believed that dedicated services to attract immigrant artists would be challenging, some saw value in finding ways to bring immigrant artists to the city. Participants also suggested types of services or programs that could be developed or improved to help immigrant artists living in the city overcome challenges they face. Most participants who had been personally involved with immigrant settlement services commended the work being done. They appreciated the efforts to include them, saying that settlement services helped them feel like valued members of the community.

The most commonly suggested program improvements to help immigrant artists develop careers in Halifax related to orienting newcomers to and helping them with the grant application process. (This reflected their deep concern about economic support for cultural practices.) A dancer described how funding opportunities and services may not always be visible to immigrant artists and explained the challenge that learning how to write a grant represents.



*(Dancer): Yes, I think for instance it took me two years to find out about the grants. I had no idea. So you're here. And then I heard someone, "I got a grant." And to get a grant in [native country] is like a miracle... So it took me a long time because you just don't know. And then you have to write these grants, which you have no idea how to write a grant. I mean writing a grant: I've never written a grant. You know, all those things. I mean my English is quite okay but I think if you don't speak English or can't write English or something, it's pretty much over, I guess. I don't know. So I think letting people know or assistance with that kind of thing would be really great. To show people the programs that are available or tell them about those possibilities, that would be great.*

Another dancer indicated that the jury process in granting programs was not structured to recognize the value of work new to Nova Scotia and suggested diversifying the grants process or department to overcome this barrier:

*(Dancer): I really think that the grants department in Nova Scotia needs to be more diversified. That is my final word on that. Diversified in that I don't want to be judged on my material by somebody who does ballet. .... Artists working in different fields don't have an appreciation for another art. You know what I mean? Like I saw ballet, I would probably say, "wow, that is beautiful or that requires a lot of technique". But do I know what a real good arabesque looks like? So then how do they know what I'm doing?*

Cultural workers suggested improvements in the areas where they had had direct experience. Few, however, offered concrete suggestions about how to improve cultural or immigration plans to better address the needs of immigrant artists.

### ***Final notes and policy implications***

Halifax is blessed with a cohort of talented immigrant artists who have come to the region from across the world. They bring insight, innovation, and inspiration to those who experience their cultural contributions. Many cultural workers we interviewed (and countless others we could not include) see Halifax as a warm and welcoming "second home", where they can practice their avocation in a supportive context. That said, the interviews revealed a good deal about what Halifax might do to help cultural workers make the choice to come to the city, find the wherewithal to engage in their cultural practices in Halifax, and become well integrated into the social, cultural, and economic contexts of the city.

The experiences and opinions of immigrant artists working in Halifax revealed that social and economic factors affect the city's ability to attract and retain immigrant artists. The significance of these findings for policy makers and planning practitioners is twofold. First, we identified some challenges immigrant artists face that can be relieved by support the city and/or the province might be able to provide. Second, through insights about how immigrant artists make migration decisions, the interviews identified factors that can be influenced to improve the attraction and retention of immigrant artists.

To create a sympathetic environment for immigrant artists in Halifax to succeed, local governments need to try to reduce or remove barriers that prevent immigrant artists from enjoying the same opportunities as Canadian-born artists. The interviews indicated that these efforts are already being addressed at some level by Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services and through local cultural organizations. Reducing barriers to communication, providing orientations for new artists, facilitating connections with cultural industries and the wider community, and developing funding opportunities also can assist immigrant artists. The city can reduce

barriers faced by immigrant artists by taking steps to support institutions that provide settlement services for newcomers and ensure that newcomers know about the services available to them. The city can also consider its commitments to the culture sector; for instance, programs of public art and performance could provide important opportunities for culture sector workers to find audiences and employment.

Challenges related to social inclusion faced by immigrant artists are being addressed through the efforts of settlement service providers. Extending a welcoming hand to immigrant artists by providing these services has made a difference to participants' experience of feeling included.

The interviews indicated that factors that bring immigrant artists to Halifax often have little to do with level of opportunity for artists in the city. In other words, Halifax is not now an international magnet for the arts when opportunities in general remain somewhat limited. Halifax *does* attract musicians from across Canada (Grant *et al.* 2009; Hracz *et al.* 2011), but a relatively small number of musicians come from outside the country. Members of the international cultural community have migrated to the city largely for reasons beyond the control of municipal officials: sometimes for love, sometimes for an education, sometimes for new opportunities. At the same time, however, these international migrants in the arts saw Halifax as an attractive and promising locale for artistic practice. They recognized the city's potential for attracting other cultural workers if economic conditions could support more artists. Respondents noted that immigrants' decisions to consider leaving were almost always motivated by finding better employment opportunities elsewhere.

Recent literature on economic development has identified "the artistic dividend" that arts communities can offer to stimulate local growth (Markusen and Schrock 2006; Scott 2007; Wojan *et al.* 2007). Our preliminary findings suggest that taking greater steps to support the cultural sector may make Halifax more attractive to immigrant artists; however, interviews indicated significant challenges to the prospect. Participants recognized that larger centres have an advantage in attracting cultural workers: their economies create more opportunities for artists and their families. Other factors, such as the existence of established immigrant communities, influence the destinations that immigrant artists consider in their migration choices. These issues cannot be addressed through cultural or immigration policy alone; they require an economic environment that can encourage, sustain, and retain large-scale immigration.

For smaller cities like Halifax, retaining those cultural workers who choose to immigrate may be the most important target to encourage growth in the sector. Artists will continue to come to Halifax to attend university or art school or to reunite with loved ones. Municipal policy and immigrant services can better insure that those cultural workers stay in the city by helping to develop opportunities for artists to make a reasonable and meaningful living as they engage in their cultural practices and integrate into local social networks.

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