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***Towards Attracting and Retaining Newcomers in Halifax  
Regional Municipality***

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Abstract:

This paper presents major findings from a two-year research project funded by the Atlantic Metropolis Centre (AMC). The project investigated how newcomers can engage in planning and shaping their host communities as essential components of attraction and integration. This paper outlines the project's purpose and methodology, with a focus on Learning Exchanges, which enabled the research team to refine the engagement process for the project while also learning about barriers and bridges to integration and participation in planning processes. Finally, this paper proposes possible implications of better immigrant engagement in community planning processes.<sup>1</sup>

Key words: newcomer, engagement, planning, barriers, bridges, integration

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## Introduction

All three levels of government in Canada recognize immigration as a key variable for future economic growth and also see it as an important cultural and social indicator. At the federal level, the current immigration system in Canada emphasizes an immigrant's ability to contribute to the economy, using a multi-faceted point system to determine a person's suitability to immigrate to Canada based on education, language ability, family status and skill set. Meanwhile, "the diversity of Canadians as regards to race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion" (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985, para. 8) is well recognized as a fundamental characteristic of Canada and an invaluable part of the country's heritage.

Provincially, the government of Nova Scotia has recognized the need to create more welcoming communities for newcomers. Like many other provinces, Nova Scotia has a declining birth rate, an aging population and a high rate of out-migration among youth. An influx of population is therefore required to stimulate economic growth and fill positions requiring skilled labour (Akbari & Sun, 2006; Province of Nova Scotia, 2005; HRM, 2005). Attracting immigrants to Nova Scotia is part of a long-term commitment that has been outlined in successive provincial immigration strategies (Province of Nova Scotia 2005, 2011). These documents focus on enhancing employment opportunities and service access for immigrants; the strategies also recognize immigrants' preference to settle near others of similar ethnicity but fail to acknowledge the potential of neighbourhood planning to attract and retain immigrants.

At the municipal level, the attraction and retention of immigrants are particularly important and are supported by the Immigrant Action Plan (HRM, 2005) and, more broadly, through Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) Community Engagement Strategy (2008), the latter providing clear direction for engaging all citizens in program and service development to foster strong, vibrant communities. As of 2006 immigrants represented only seven percent of HRM's total population (Statistics Canada, 2007). If HRM improves strategies to attract, retain and integrate newcomers, increased numbers may choose to settle here in the future. How can we ensure that HRM is welcoming to newcomers and provides a quality of life that encourages new residents to become engaged in their communities and stay in HRM?

This paper presents major findings from a two-year research project funded by the Atlantic Metropolis Centre (AMC) that investigated how newcomers can engage in planning and shaping their host communities, which could become essential components of attraction and integration strategies. The paper outlines the project's purpose and methodology with a focus on Learning Exchanges, which enabled the research team to refine the engagement process for the project while also learning about barriers and bridges to newcomers' integration into the community and participation in planning processes. Finally, this paper proposes possible positive implications of strategies to improve immigrant engagement in community planning processes.

## Purpose

The purpose of this project is to explore two major questions:

- How might newcomers be engaged in planning processes in HRM?
- What impacts might immigrant involvement have on HRM's neighbourhoods?

These questions are particularly important given current provincial and municipal policies that call for increased attraction of immigrants to HRM and Nova Scotia and their retention. It is also significant in relation to trends in the planning profession over the last few decades toward more inclusive and accessible planning processes. Government policies and strategies support creating welcoming communities that meet the needs of newcomers in an effort to create the sorts of places in which people will want to stay and live – places where they can find work, secure housing and feel part of the larger

community. While community design and planning policies play an important role in the livability of cities and communities, little research has been done to connect land use planning, public engagement and neighbourhood design to the attraction, retention and integration of newcomers.

There is significant value in exploring these connections, both to meet the needs of newcomers and also to reflect on a public environment (both physical and social) that builds more welcoming communities. Newcomers face many unique barriers to participation and integration into their new communities. Local governments and planners have a responsibility to understand and meet the needs of people who experience barriers to participating in society. It is important for them to acknowledge that for some newcomers it is a particularly difficult struggle to be here.

Learning about these challenges reveals many aspects about the kinds of cities we are creating and how they can be improved, not only for newcomers, but also for all residents. If planners and local governments can improve living conditions, access to services and social environments for newcomers and others who encounter barriers to integration (e.g., youth, seniors, people on lower incomes), the design of communities will improve for all residents. Broader social, cultural and civic integration can build stronger and more welcoming communities, which will increase participation in civic life, a fundamental element of integration into a new place.

This paper focuses primarily on understanding barriers to integration and participation and the implications of improving community engagement and planning processes for integration and retention. During the course of the project, two additional products were developed that elaborate on the findings and implications of the broad research questions. The *Newcomer Engagement Manual for HRM* (Cities & Environment Unit, 2011), a toolkit developed specifically for HRM Community Development staff, outlines strategies for making planning and community engagement processes more inclusive of and responsive to newcomers and is intended to inform and/or complement HRM's planned *Community Engagement Inclusion Guide*. The *Geography of Immigration* (Cities & Environment Unit, 2011) identifies where newcomers to HRM have settled and then explores factors that may contribute to attraction and retention specifically related to neighbourhood features such as housing types, intensity of uses, amenities and transportation connections. Additional details about the content of this research project and the process it followed, including Learning Exchange agendas, presentations and summaries have been compiled in *Supplementary Materials* (Cities & Environment Unit, 2011), a volume that has been provided to the Atlantic Metropolis Centre.

## Methodology

To explore how newcomers might be better engaged in planning processes in HRM, it was important first to understand barriers to community integration and participation. To achieve this objective, a series of Learning Exchange sessions was conducted. Their design and structure were based on best practices in immigrant engagement from existing literature but were also refined as the project proceeded to improve the experience for participants.

Areas in HRM with high proportions of immigrants, as identified by examining census data, were chosen to host the Learning Exchanges. The *Geography of Immigration* provides more detail on these settlement patterns and areas of concentration. These locations included Clayton Park-Fairview, West and South End Halifax, Bedford, Spryfield, Downtown Dartmouth, Downtown Halifax and North End Halifax. Despite two attempts in the North End and one in Downtown Halifax, no participants attended sessions in these areas. Instead, a Learning Exchange was held in the Quinpool Road area. Several different strategies were used to recruit people to participate in the Learning Exchanges, but working with service providers who helped recruit participants was the most successful.

Two Learning Exchanges were conducted in each of the six locations (for a total of twelve sessions) between July 2009 and June 2010. This iterative process of two sessions with the same people provided more time with participants and enabled both the research team and participants to share and validate information, as well as providing the opportunity to prepare appropriate content for the second session.

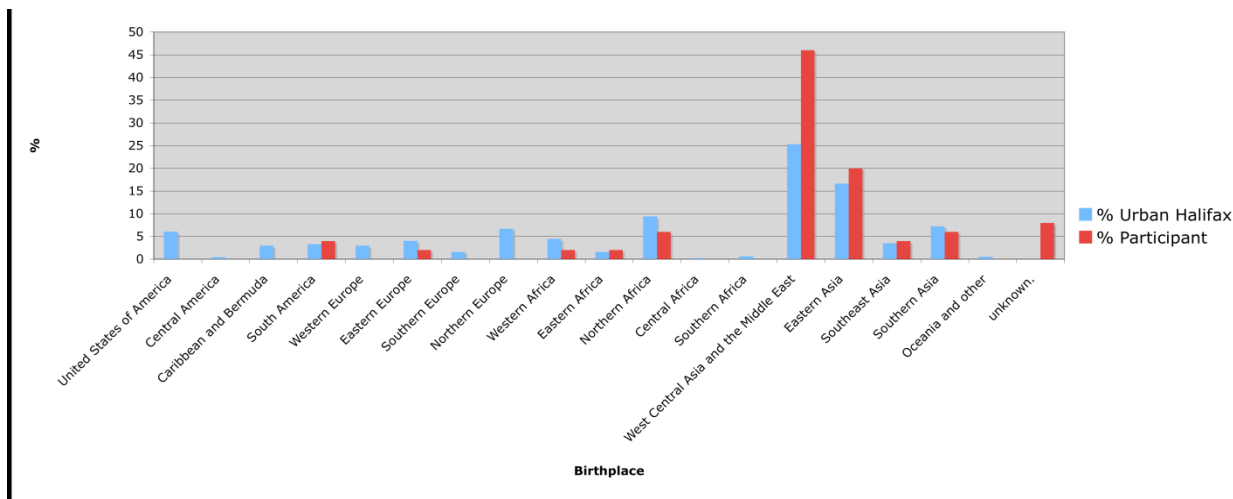
Each Learning Exchange began with a welcome and icebreaker activity followed by a short presentation on planning in Session 1 and on civic participation in Session 2 (session agendas are included in the *Supplementary Materials* volume). The second part of each session included activities designed to initiate discussion on the barriers to integration and participation. These activities included having participants identify their residence on a map and draw a map of their neighbourhood from memory; participants were asked to include services they often use and their regular modes of transportation. Further, participants discussed perceptions of HRM before and after moving here and identified what they would like to see changed and how they would choose to do so. Finally, each Learning Exchange included an opportunity for participants to offer opinions, ask questions or discuss their neighbourhood, service needs, integration and civic participation. Learning Exchanges were designed to be flexible participation events that evolved throughout the research project. As needed, activities were modified to allow sessions to flow so as to better capture information and to encourage sharing.

In total, 54 newcomers participated in Learning Exchanges. At the start of the session, each participant was asked to complete a brief survey, which asked for basic background information (Table 1). The smallest group had two participants and the largest 18, with ages ranging from as young as 19 to over 60. Figure 1 presents data on participants' place of birth compared to the distribution of all immigrants in urban Halifax, illustrating that the Learning Exchanges attracted a higher proportion of immigrants from parts of Asia and the Middle East.

**Table 1**

*Socioeconomic data of Learning Exchange participants*

	Sample	
	<i>n</i>	(%)
<b>Total number of participants</b>	54	-
<b>Age</b>		
19-29	14	25.9
30-39	11	20.4
40-49	12	22.2
50-59	11	20.4
60 and over	6	11.1
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	20	37.0
Female	34	63.0
<b>Immigration Status</b>		
Permanent Resident	47	87.0
Canadian Citizen	5	9.3
Visa	2	3.7
<b>Tenure</b>		
Rent	37	68.5
Own	15	27.8
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	15	27.8
Unemployed	37	68.5
<b>Average years lived in HRM</b>	2.5	-
<b>Median years lived in HRM</b>	1.1	-



**Figure 1:** Percentage comparison of urban Halifax recent (2001-2006) immigrant population vs. Learning Exchange participant place of birth.<sup>2</sup>

## Findings

This section presents barriers both to community integration and participation in planning processes and to civic life. In the context of this research, planning processes are defined to include official processes, such as plan amendments, rezoning, secondary plan reviews and development applications, with connections to broader engagement in civic life, including community events, neighbourhood groups and day-to-day activities. In general, Learning Exchange participants seemed happy with their choice to live in HRM. Although they faced some challenges and barriers that will be discussed later in this paper, they also spoke about many positive experiences about living in HRM. Since the focus of this research is to inform improvements to immigrant integration and participation in planning processes, the paper focuses primarily on the areas of concern where challenges and barriers might be overcome.

### *Barriers to integration*

The findings of this research project align well with those of many previous explorations into immigrants' experiences integrating into their new communities. Participants in Learning Exchanges also supported these broad findings through their comments and discussion of challenges they face. While conversations were specific to experiences in HRM, many stories shared relate to newcomer experiences generally. In HRM, however, the scale and geography of the city may exacerbate some challenges, particularly in terms of concentration of other newcomers, dispersed service providers and networks, and access to reliable transportation. The most common barriers to integration determined through the Learning Exchanges and supported in the literature include difficulty finding employment, lack of affordable housing, difficulty accessing information, challenges of adapting to new lifestyles and lack of transportation options.

Finding employment is a significant barrier that many newcomers face. Transferring professional accreditation to the host country can be difficult because it is not always possible without more education and, if it is, may require long wait times and high costs (Steyn, 2008). Several employment barriers also were discussed. Many newcomers take pay cuts or work in jobs for which they are overqualified. As one

<sup>2</sup> Excluding participants who were non-permanent residents and those who arrived before 2001 (to match available dataset). To determine the population of Urban Halifax, the following census tracts were subtracted from the overall HRM Recent Immigration data: 121.03, 123.01, 130.01, 130.02, 132.04, 132.05, 140.00, 143.01, 143.02, 150.01, 150.02, 151.00, 152.00, 153.00, 154.00.



participant explained, *“My husband has a job but it is a very low salary (he just finished his MBA [in Canada]). He enters data. It is very hard to go from a higher job to this”* (Bedford 1).<sup>3</sup>

Several participants mentioned that if they, or people they know, cannot find adequate employment, they will not stay in Halifax. One participant mentioned, *“If I don’t find a job, I will not stay”* (Quinpool 1). Another stated, *“Some of them think this is a great place to be, but sometimes they don’t get a job or have a friend in [Alberta]...They go not because they want to, but because they don’t get a job”* (Spryfield 2).

Another significant barrier a newcomer may face is securing appropriately located and priced housing. Housing choices in HRM are limited, particularly as they relate to the proximity to services and amenities (e.g. language support, grocery stores, employment), the availability of larger residential units and the need to secure housing as a first requirement before a newcomer is in a position to look for a job.

A Statistics Canada study (2005) in which immigrants were interviewed after six months in Canada indicated that almost two out of five individuals had trouble finding a home, most often resulting from the high cost of housing. In the Learning Exchanges, some barriers to securing housing were discussed. One participant noted, *“One of the biggest barriers to me was the problem of credit history. Difficult to lease a car, buy a house because newcomers don’t have credit. Without credit you have to pay very high down payment”* (Dartmouth 2).

The difficulty getting a lease signed may be compounded by a lack of the kind of housing newcomers want or need. Many immigrant families seek units that accommodate families and also have amenities nearby that support younger children. Finding such larger units can be challenging, particularly in peninsular Halifax where the rental market caters primarily to students. One participant mentioned,

*“I didn’t want to buy a house; I wanted to live in an apartment. But I couldn’t find a three-bedroom apartment. It’s very difficult. I found one, but didn’t have a job then, so the landlord didn’t want to give the apartment to me. So I had suggested that I pay 12 months’ rent, but he didn’t accept me”* (Spryfield 1).

Many newcomers looking to establish themselves in a new city want to buy a home, but have to rent an apartment if a suitable home cannot be purchased. Renting an apartment can be difficult for many reasons, including a lack of options for rental units suitable for families. If they do not have a job, some landlords may not let them sign a lease. One participant mentioned, *“When I came to Halifax, I was looking for an apartment. Everywhere I went, I filled out an application but they didn’t answer. It was hard because I was not employed. They wanted me to be employed before getting an apartment”* (South End/West End 2).

In addition, many services and amenities newcomers seek in their neighbourhoods (such as child care, community centres, and grocery stores) are typically found in more urban areas but not always in suburban or outlying communities. While downtown housing may be desirable, it can be too expensive for some newcomers. Access to shopping and economic opportunities tends to be greater in more densely populated and well-connected neighbourhoods. Social connections are important aspects of feeling “at home”, but opportunities for casual and informal interaction may be challenging or non-existent due to a lack of public spaces, facilities and infrastructure.

Language is another barrier to integration newcomers face. According to Statistics Canada, 58 % of immigrants attended English language training within six months of their arrival (Statistics Canada, 2005), which indicates a need and desire to learn the local language to integrate into society more easily. One participant mentioned, *“my wife wants to talk to people but she is afraid because of her English.”* (South End/West End 1). Another indicated how the new language extended to uncertainty concerning the culturally appropriate way to communicate, stating, *“When we come to Halifax, we don’t have very much*

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<sup>3</sup> Refers to Learning Exchange location and session number (not participant number).

*knowledge. Sometimes we just don't know how to talk to people – for example, we don't know whether it's good to say hi to people, smile, say 'Ms.', etc. These are barriers”* (South End/West End 2).

Cultural barriers may also affect the ability of a newcomer to integrate by decreasing opportunities for social networking (Steyn, 2008). In addition, learning about cultural and community norms in Canada can be challenging. One participant mentioned,

*“If you go to a place where you don't know anybody, how do you make friends? Do you go to people's houses? Do you wait for them to come to your house? I don't know how to get to know my neighbours – I don't know the people who live next to me. This is a concern: how can/should newcomers meet their neighbours?”* (Clayton Park 1).

Besides language barriers, newcomers are likely to be unfamiliar with the new social structure, services provided, civil and political rights and local customs in Canada. Newcomers can find it difficult to navigate daily life in a new place, particularly those who face language barriers. For example, a 2003 survey in New Jersey showed that some immigrants could not use public transit due to limited English proficiency (Schachter & Liu, 2005). In the Learning Exchanges, lack of information often came up as barrier to integration in HRM. One participant stated, *“As a newcomer, when we came here, it is our problem. Don't have any information about the city and community. We must find everything by ourselves. It was very difficult”* (Dartmouth 1).

Some newcomers are uncertain what services are available to them and how to gain access to those that are (Frissen and Wallace, 2003). One participant discussed this experience:

*“I looked up who to call and I found the Housing Authority. But I went there and they were surprised I was there. The Housing Authority was different than what I thought it was... When we come to a new place, sometimes we just don't know what to do or who to call. Lack of knowledge is a problem. Sometimes we create more problem for the government not because we want to but because we don't know how to do it”* (South End/West End 2).

Many participants indicated that provision of more accessible information by the government would be useful. Another participant mentioned that, *“As a newcomer... the suggestion I have... the government do not help us to know the city. We should discover the city by ourselves”* (Dartmouth 1). When questioned about the current HRM Newcomers Guide, this participant mentioned:

*“Well I have seen the guides... A newcomer... in Halifax in the beginning does not have any car. They do not know the bus lines. Where to go, where to change. It should be more from the government. You are living here, these are your possibilities, these are your shops, your libraries, your places for shops. It is not enough. It could be in English”* (Dartmouth 1).

It can be challenging to adjust to living in a new area. In the Learning Exchanges, boredom in HRM and lack of entertainment or activity were discussed. One parent lamented the high cost of children's activities (i.e., sports and music), while others said, *“I think there isn't much entertainment here for kids.”* (Bedford 1) or *“Children get bored. They spend their time and money at McDonalds”* (Quinpool 1). One participant mentioned, *“Sometimes I want to go to a busy country. Sometimes I feel that it is too boring”* (Quinpool 1), or *“the only thing I find, I don't find a lot of fun in this city”* (Dartmouth 1).

One of the participants related boredom to retention of newcomers. Referring to the participants in the room, he stated that

*“The average age is about 40-45; if the younger people were here and [they] would complain about it being boring city. In my culture, if my children want to go to another city to study then we go together.” ... “If you make a good place for them to stay here then we stay here. What you need is fun”* (Dartmouth 1).

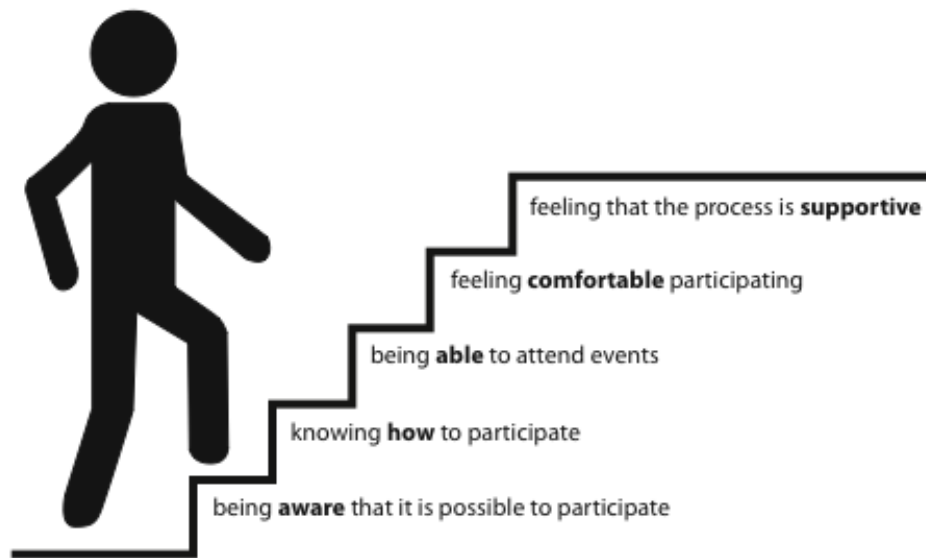
The inaccessibility of the public transportation system in HRM often came up as a barrier during the Learning Exchanges. The current insufficient transit system severely hinders access to services for those without a car. Current problems with the system include poor bus stop design/shelters (“*The bus stops in my area are not built. They need to be more permanent, there are no seats and we have to stand*” (Clayton Park Fairview 1)), poor bus route design and availability, long wait times (“*What I don’t like is the bus services, the bus system, takes too long*” (Spryfield 1)), poorly lit bus shelters and a high cost for short trips (“*The bus is convenient but sometimes my son tries to take the bus from here to here, 1-2 minutes and the cost is the same as to go to Mic Mac Mall for an hour*” (South End/West End 1)). Lack of available maps and route information, especially at the bus stops, were also cited as issues.

One participant described her experience by saying, “*In the winter, it’s a very big problem. It’s cold and the buses don’t come on time and I have to buy a car. I bought a car because two years ago I stayed in the bus station for almost one hour and it was cold and windy. I cried. I came home and I told my husband that I need a car*” (Clayton Park/Fairview 2). Stories like this are not unique; lack of access to reliable and predictable transportation poses real barriers to mobility, interaction and community engagement.

Long-term integration into communities is a central goal of immigration policy and community development; however, in HRM the retention rate of newcomers is low. This research, particularly the Learning Exchanges and *Geography of Immigration* paper, indicates that newcomers are resilient and cope with what they have, but that is not sufficient to expect that retention and integration will increase significantly without bridging barriers. These findings point to a need to find better ways of engaging newcomers to increase people’s desire to settle in communities. Learning Exchange participants revealed that while there are particular barriers to participation and gaps in neighbourhood design, there are also significant benefits to newcomers and all community members of broader participation that can transform communities. Identifying these gaps and improving opportunities for participation in civic life and community planning will foster retention and integration of newcomers in communities they find welcoming, vibrant and comfortable.

### *Barriers to participation in planning processes*

Barriers to participation in planning processes were also discussed in the Learning Exchanges and in the various stages of participation represented in the following diagram (Figure 2), ranging from newcomers being aware that they can participate to their feeling that the process is supportive and inclusive. To develop appropriate policies and strategies to ensure planning processes are more engaging and inclusive, it is important for governments and planners to acknowledge the different needs of newcomers generally, as well as specific variability in ability to participate that depends on individual circumstances. The *Newcomer Engagement Manual for HRM* elaborates on these five steps and offers practical bridges to overcome the barriers.



**Figure 2:** The five steps to bridging barriers to participation in planning processes.

Some newcomers may not be aware that they can participate. Even Canadian-born individuals may not be aware of all the ways they can get involved in civic life and planning processes. However, coming from another country, newcomers are likely less informed than the general public. They may not know there is an opportunity to get involved. For example, one participant asked, “*Can everyone go to public meetings? If I am aware of it and everyone is allowed to go, I will go*” (Clayton Park 2). Newcomers may not know they have the right to participate and may think they have to be a Canadian citizen. Or they may not know how to participate. One participant said, “*We didn’t know how to participate in some problems in Halifax*” (South End/West End 2).

Other newcomers may come from a country where public participation in planning does not occur or occurs in different ways. Also, different cultural norms play a major role in a newcomer’s perception of planning processes. For example, in many countries people rely on and expect government officials and agencies to protect their interests. In other places, a culture of civic engagement or activism may not be prevalent, or based on culture or respect there may be a reluctance to confront peers in a public setting. One participant discussed this:

*“It’s only been a few months since I’ve been in Halifax, so I’m not familiar with what the municipality is doing for the people. I haven’t heard the news about them. But in my opinion, city planning is to make a better environment, make better city places. But it’s not something that the people can do. It’s the job of the city planners. It’s based on the statistics that they gather from people. HRM can send people to the different neighbours to ask questions and collect information. I’ve been here a short time and haven’t seen anything like this”* (Dartmouth 2).

Some simply are not interested in participating in planning processes. As one participant mentioned, “*so far, nothing has made me want to participate*” (South End/West End 2), while another said they “*would rather do something with [their] family as opposed to sit through a meeting*” (Bedford 2). Another consideration may be if individuals are very involved in a group or ethnic community and less concerned about the physical aspects of their neighbourhood (Lee, 2002). Also, participants may have different views regarding speaking with local political representatives; one participant mentioned that “*It could get political. They aren’t honest and don’t tell you their real feelings*” (South End/West End 2).

Some practical hurdles may prevent people who want to participate from getting involved. For example, newcomers with lower incomes and lower education levels are less likely to be able to participate and therefore typically are not represented (Lee, 2002). Many newcomers are not able to get to meetings if they do not have a car, a license or access to a bus. One participant mentioned, *“Public meetings, especially in winter, can be hard to motivate yourself to get to a meeting – many bus connections is a deterrent, bus does not come frequently, if you miss the bus the wait for the next one can be long”* (Spryfield 2). Some individuals may not have access to reliable childcare. These hurdles are not specific to newcomers. Many of these same barriers also prevent members of the general public from participating, particularly those who may not have access to transportation or social networks or may not be employed.

Even if individuals are aware of how to participate and would be able to, they may have some reservations or feel uncomfortable doing so. This feeling may prevent newcomers from going to an event or cause them to hold back from participating during one. Participants mentioned, *“I am a newcomer, I find it difficult to talk to people. I don’t know if I should go to them”* (Clayton Park/Fairview 2); and *“I don’t know anyone in my area”* (Clayton Park/Fairview 2). They may also feel that they should have a better understanding of the culture and the history of the city before participating. One participant mentioned, *“If the neighbourhood thinks a project is a good idea, and I don’t, how can I speak about this with any authority? I am a foreign woman. It’s difficult for me to be a leader here”* (Dartmouth 2).

Another common barrier to participating in planning processes is language. One participant who had attended a public meeting shared her experiences:

*“Last year, the municipality asked about how we want the Commons. I didn’t understand too much, but if I didn’t get involved, then I would never understand. When I went the first time I understood 20%. I understood and was interested in the subject and topic because the Commons is very nice. I don’t want this space for sport facilities; a park is better for me. But the people who live around this area gave their opinion”* (Dartmouth 2).

She later said *“language was an issue when I first got here. Now I can understand more. When the Commons project first started, I got a flyer under my door and I was very interested, but the reality was that I couldn’t participate because of my language and lack of information”* (Dartmouth 2).

In addition, many newcomers find ways to shape their communities without necessarily becoming involved in official planning processes. For example, opening ethnic shops, starting a church or creating a social group are all ways of transforming neighbourhoods. It is important for governments and planners to think beyond formal, official planning and policy-making processes when considering how best to involve and welcome newcomers.

Many of the barriers and obstacles articulated with respect to participation and engagement also relate to the quality and intensity of the public and social environments. Without local, daily opportunities to interact with long-term residents, neighbours, friends and other newcomers, building contacts, social networks and comfort level can be challenging in a new community. Informal opportunities for interaction, information sharing and building community depend on the types and locations of public amenities such as parks, open spaces, and community facilities and of such basic services as grocery stores and childcare. The connections among planning processes, neighbourhood design and integration become clearer when one take a broader view of what it means to develop whole, complete communities.

## Implications

The findings of this project represent a significant step in articulating some barriers newcomers face in HRM. Newcomers themselves identified many, which could directly inform recommendations for change. Given the scope of this project, we could not identify all the barriers newcomers face or seek their opinion on how best to address them. Moving forward, however, newcomers should be involved in a continuous feedback loop as a way to promote integration and participation (HRM, 2005; Bahbahani, 2008).

It is important for communities to provide effective ways for newcomers to participate in planning processes and other forms of civic life. Through increased participation, we will all gain more insight into how to improve our neighbourhoods and communities so that they are accessible, inclusive and welcoming for all. While participation in planning is one way to promote integration, communities most successful at integrating newcomers into civic participation and planning processes are those challenging all barriers newcomers face integrating into society (Sandercock, 2003). Many barriers preventing participation are the same as those hindering integration. Planning policy, public engagement and neighbourhood design all influence how successful integration can be for newcomers.

Comments from Learning Exchange participants also indicate that HRM needs to encourage more diversity and intensity, particularly within the public realm. Investing in public infrastructure, improving access and mobility, and encouraging a wider range of social and cultural activities will make the city more welcoming and inclusive as a whole. The priorities of newcomers can be captured in a few major focus areas for action and improvement, specifically housing, employment, transportation, public space and intensity of uses. Attraction, retention and integration of newcomers are influenced by urban form, socioeconomic factors and engagement in the community.

Transportation issues were a recurring theme during discussions with participants. Newcomers frequently depend on public transportation; consequently, the current levels of access, reliability and comfort of the system pose significant barriers. Several participants also expressed a desire for more opportunities to meet their neighbours and connect to social networks. Encouraging intensity and diversity of uses, along with investment in high-quality public spaces, can go a long way toward nurturing welcoming and vibrant communities. Newcomers are unlikely to settle in a place they find boring; they will seek out cities and communities that provide a high quality of life for their families.

The physical environment of our communities is manipulable; those who know how to participate and can engage in planning and development processes are already shaping their communities and neighbourhoods. It follows then that through more inclusive and creative engagement that responds to the needs of newcomers (and others with significant obstacles to participation) and challenges the barriers they face, all residents will feel more ownership and pride in their communities. All these factors contribute to people's desire to stay and live in a community to which they feel connected.

The implications of these findings for public policy and planning are not incidental. The public processes by which newcomers can become engaged in civic life play a significant role in retention and integration. These findings not only support improving public engagement processes to address barriers newcomers face, but also suggest that policy-makers and planners reconsider how communities can be designed to meet the needs and lifestyles of all residents. Flexibility in terms of process as well as policy is required. For example, it might be reasonable in some areas to apply different zoning provisions to enable newcomers and residents to have greater control over aspects such as housing design, signage, play spaces or mix of uses. A decentralized model for community engagement in planning processes in particular, for example going to where newcomers are rather than always expecting them to come to the process, could help increase people's comfort level and ability to participate.

In conclusion, the connections between long-term community integration and participation in planning processes and civic society are clear. Fundamental to the development of welcoming communities is the need to invest in meaningful civic engagement strategies that reach out to the broader community. To take action toward improving attraction, retention and integration of immigrants, we must acknowledge and seek to overcome the significant barriers facing many newcomers and adopt an attitude that sees civic engagement as a way of changing and improving the form of communities.

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