



LEVEL
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

Prioritizing Newcomer Engagement in Creative City Strategy

SANDI WANJUN LIANG

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The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

ABOUT THE LEVEL INITIATIVE

LEVEL is a youth-engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth population in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL CONSISTS OF
THREE PILLARS OF
WORK TO ADVANCE
RACIAL EQUITY:



ABOUT THE LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies and are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓d̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



SANDI WANJUN LIANG

Sandi WanJun Liang is a settler to unceded Coast Salish territories, born and raised in Guangzhou, China. She immigrated to Canada with her family at age 15. Sandi has worked with Newcomers, immigrants, and refugees as a Settlement Practitioner. She is passionate about supporting her community through working and volunteering on the front line. Sandi holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts degree from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Believing in Art as Empowerment and as Catalyst for social change, she enjoys participating in storytelling, community collaboration, and art in public space.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A majority of Newcomer residents in Vancouver, unceded homelands of Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations, do not feel they belong to the city.² To support integration, a federally funded settlement program provides services to meet Newcomers' needs in the everyday life. The service topics can range from finding a job, to learning English, to getting a driver license. The settlement program is free and available in many languages. When learning about how to live in Canada, at the same time Newcomers are disconnecting from their own heritages, languages, and cultures that are not well-represented in the city. Those who came with passions as artists and cultural workers, may get lost in the settlement journey. Individual's migrant story can be very different between immigrant and refugee, between those who choose to move to the country, and those who are forced to leave their own countries. Newcomers are looking for creative spaces and supports to express their stories.

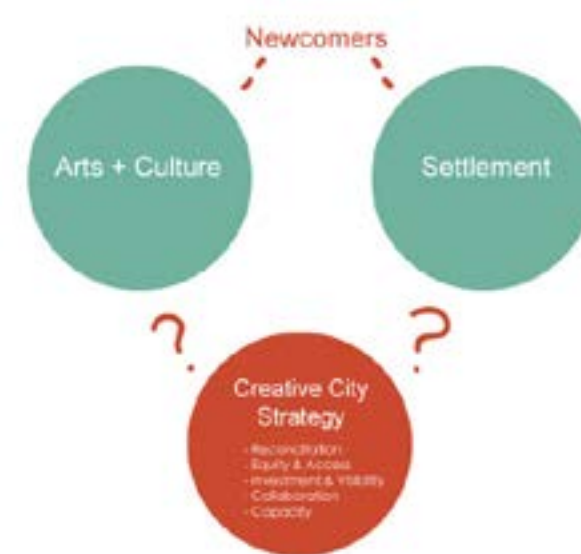
This urgent need aligned with the key themes of Creative City Strategy, a vision and plan for art, culture, and creativity in Vancouver under a framework of Reconciliation. The strategy aimed to commit to equity, access, and inclusion. To support art and cultural diversity in the city, Creative City Strategy should work with the Newcomer community to learn about their needs; to make collaboration and to create opportunity for relationship-building between Indigenous people, Newcomers, and other arts and culture communities in the city.

This project looks to fill the three main objectives:

- To identify the current approach of Creative City Strategy and its challenges for Newcomers engagement.
- To identify key gaps in resources and services between what is available in settlement programs and art service programs, with the actual needs of Newcomers.
- To provide recommendations and specific actions on how Creative City Strategy can address to the gap identified to better support Newcomers in the city.

² A survey of Metro Vancouver 2017, Vancouver Foundation

BACKGROUND



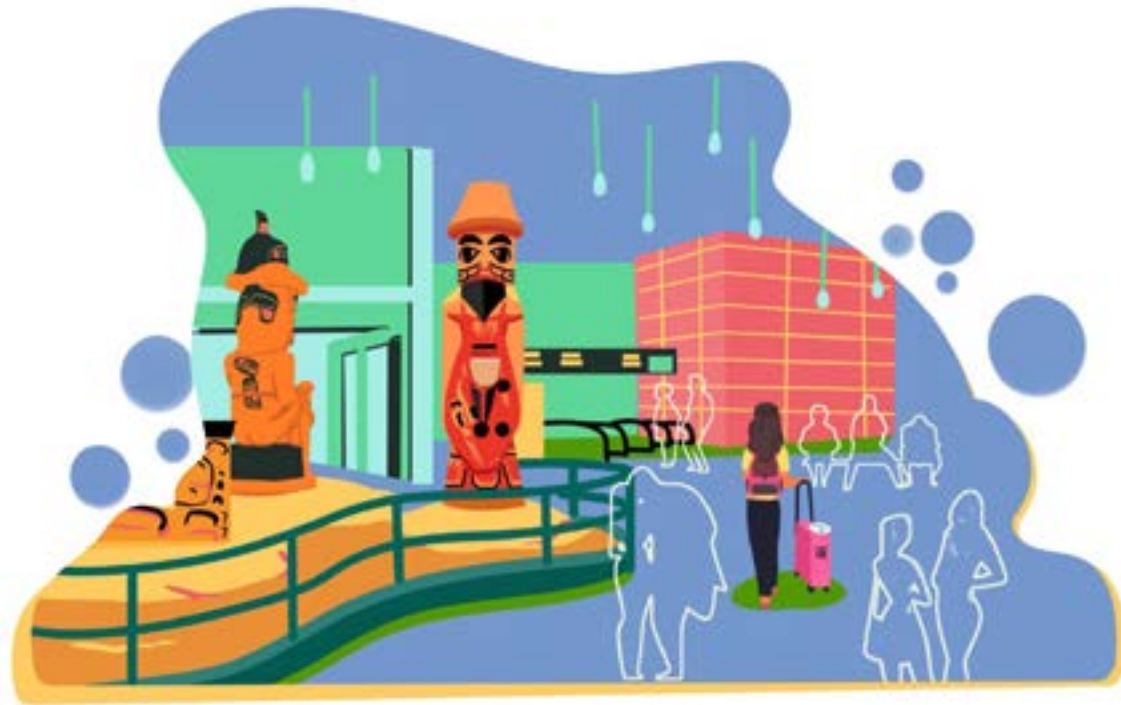
WHAT IS CREATIVE CITY STRATEGY?

在溫哥華文化計劃(Culture Plan for Vancouver 2008-2018)的基礎上，「創意城市策略」(Creative City Strategy) 是一個共同製定未來文化(Culture)和創意(Creativity)的計劃(Plan)和願景(Vision)。新策略承認了溫哥華(City of Vancouver)是在從未贈予的原住民家園土地 (on unceded homelands of Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nation)。為了建立文化中的和解(a culture of Reconciliation)，策略需要與東道主原住民 (Host Nation)緊密合作 (Collaborating Closely)。從2017年秋天開始，通過1,2,3階段(Phases 1,2,3)與不同藝術文化社群的公開協商和調查(public consultation)，第4階段計劃是在2019年秋天向市議員提出建議與落實的草案 (Recommendation and draft implementation)。³「創意城市策略」主題分別是 (Reconciliation, Equity & Access, Visibility & investment, Collaboration, Capacity)。

My challenge in explaining the Creative City Strategy to my family is reflected above in Chinese. The content is analyzed based on City of Vancouver's website. I invite you to interpret your own meanings from the texts. Language access is a key need for immigrants and refugees in Vancouver, a popular city for settlement in Canada. A recent national report stated that high percentages of Newcomers, especially those who are family and refugee immigrants speak neither of the official languages(English nor French).⁴ For Newcomers who recently arrived and have little or no connection with the land and its history, language barriers creates more challenges for them to access and learn about Indigenous people and culture. It is important within the framework of Reconciliation in building a creative city. It is important to engage the relationship-building between Newcomers and the Indigenous community, to share mutual understandings and cultural exchanges through the process of art making.

³ Content based on the City of Vancouver's website.

⁴ Linguistic Profile of Immigrants – Self-identified. Government of Canada



LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY GREATLY IMPACTS NEWCOMER ENGAGEMENT

While language support is often the essential needs of Newcomers, it is important that Newcomers are invited to participate throughout the decision-making process with language access. For example, in the early finding stage, Host My Own Engagement, a one-time grant provided by city's cultural service, supports organizations to organize public engagement in their communities. Some granted projects were conducted in languages other than English. The purpose is to make spaces for people to discuss art and culture from where they are, especially underrepresented people and community.

Creative City Strategy recognized that the voices from different communities are valuable. They influence what within and how the strategy would be prioritized. However, on the city website, the information about current updates and reflections of the findings are only available in English. It directly excludes a number of groups who participate in giving feedback, but cannot access the outcomes because they are not English speakers. It made me question, for Newcomers, what does it mean to be fully invited and valued in decision-making?



NEWCOMER ARTISTS + CULTURAL WORKERS DISCONNECT FROM CAREER PATHWAY

Finding a job and English language programs are the top services needed by Newcomers. For Newcomers with diverse artistic and cultural backgrounds, many are finding themselves unemployed or working at low-paying jobs that do not match their creative skills and passions. One main reason is that, other than having a creative mindset, the career path of artist also involves developing art administrative skills and building professional network in the sector. It could be challenging for those who do not have the practical tools and are unable to communicate fluently in English. Therefore, to better support Newcomer artists and engage new creative voices in the city, it requires an open and collaborative relationship between the settlement and art and culture sector to provide support that can address Newcomers' actual needs.

Working as artist does not require going through a common hiring process. Creating resume and cover letters, building interview skills, connecting with employers and preparing for job fairs, these are the employment services provided by government-funded settlement program for skilled Newcomers. Although most settlement programs have services in different languages, there are not enough resources regarding working in the arts and culture sector. On the other hand, national art service organizations such as Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens (CARFAC) supports working visual artists by providing basic guidelines on artist's fees, taxes, grants, copyright, marketing tools, etc.⁵ Resources are compiled only in English and French. While it has been widely distributed by other local art organizations such as Vancouver based ArtStarts in Schools, it is not accessible for Newcomers who likely go to lower-barrier services at settlement agencies, libraries, or community centres.⁶ Language can greatly impact Newcomer artists' ability in developing their creative practice, such as learning how to protect their works and to connect with other artists in the city.

5 Canadian Artist Representation, "Tools for Visual Artist," <https://www.carfac.ca/tools/>
 6 Access to city services, Vancouver Immigrant Survey Highlights 2015



Clearly, there is a gap between art service organizations and settlement services organizations on identifying the accessibility needs among Newcomer art and cultural workers. Due to the restrictions of Vancouver Charter, the city’s cultural service cannot grant individual artists. Therefore, Newcomers rely on services provided by organizations. Most Newcomer services programs are federally funded and some employment programs are provincially funded, which disconnects the settlement sector from taking part in municipal art and culture future planning. To address this issue, Creative City Strategy should build effective engagement and collaboration with settlement organizations and art + culture organizations. The goal is to ensure multilingual career-development services, and that resources are available and accessible for Newcomers across the city.



RECOMMENDATIONS

TOP PRIORITY: NEWCOMERS ENGAGEMENT IN CREATIVE CITY STRATEGY

Goal 1: Support Cultures of Reconciliation Between Newcomers and Indigenous people

Recommendation: Work together with settlement sector to support opportunities and resources for Newcomers and Indigenous people to share mutual understandings and cultural exchanges

Actions:

- Support opportunities for not only arts and cultural workers, but also settlement frontline workers to learn about Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh art and culture.
- Connect settlement organizations with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations to organize multilingual community connection activity for Newcomers to learn about Indigenous stories and lands behind public art.
- Form a working group to review and evaluate the accessibility of city’s publication First People: A Guide for Newcomers based on current Newcomers’ needs and barriers

Reference:

- Dialogue Project: First Nations, Urban Aboriginal, and Immigrant Communities
- First People: A Guide for Newcomers

Goal 2: Advance Diverse and Equitable Leadership and Practices⁷

Recommendation: Work with community stakeholders to ensure multilingual services and resources are available and accessible for newcomer artists and cultural workers

Actions:

- Develop language access policy to ensure cultural staffs can provide service to underrepresented ethnocultural community with Interpretation/translation
- Host consultation with settlement sector and arts & culture sector to address the gaps between local art service and employment service
- Provide fund to organization translate practical resources for newcomer artists and cultural workers
- Participate in Mentor Connect Program, a collaboration between City of Vancouver and IECBC to support newcomers in a leadership role in public sector
- Work with school settlement workers in Vancouver School Board to support for arts and cultural opportunities for newcomer youth

Goal 3: Strengthen Relationship and Collaboration With Newcomer Community

Recommendation: Support Newcomers' art and culture integration through effective engagement

Actions:

- Develop language access policy to support public engagement.
- Ensure non-English speaking people can participate throughout the policy decision-making process. For example, if a survey is conducted in languages other than English, the feedback and final decision should be translated into the same language.
- Work with Vancouver Immigrant Partnership (VIP) to learn about current settlement programs in the city and to promote year-round arts and culture opportunity for Newcomers.
- Provide funding for projects that support Newcomers to share their cultural and artistic identities to align with the New Start Strategy.

Reference:

- New Start 2016-2025: A settlement and integration strategy for immigrants and refugees in Vancouver⁸
- We Heart Canada Project (Partnership between Vancouver Asian Film Festival, City of Vancouver, and Vancouver Immigrant Partnership)

⁷ From Creative City Strategy purpose and key themes Presentation, City of Vancouver
⁸ <https://www.vancouverimmigrationpartnership.ca/media/1259/new-start-online-pdf-july-4.pdf>

CHALLENGES + REFLECTIONS - WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

語言障礙是這次寫作中我認為最大的挑戰，對於移民來加拿大快要十年的我來說，即使可以流利的用英文日常交流，但我卻發現很難用這個語言去理解和討論關於政策上的改變。於是我想，是不是因為我英文還不夠好，以至於不能參與與我息息相關問題的討論和決策？

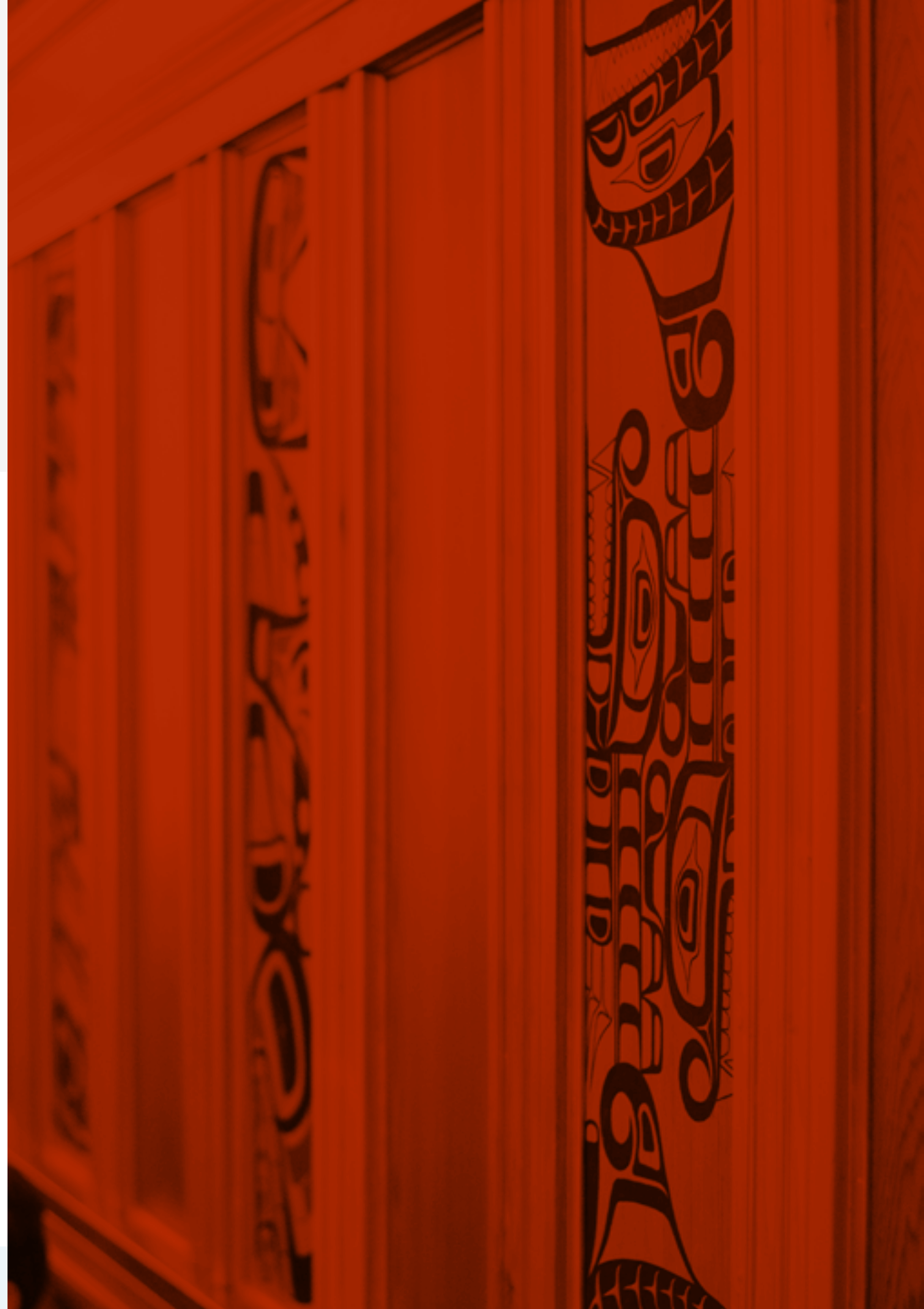
在這個國家，英文對於交流固然重要，但我藝術的背景讓我會直覺去關心人的感受。為甚麼有人想反對某些政策？為甚麼有人去爭取某些權益？我認為如果我想去認知和了解一些真相，是無法只靠讀的，因為不能讀到每個人生活最真實的感受。數據分析可以讓妳了解新移民藝術家面對的問題嗎？可能可以；但可以讓你理解到我們因為語言障礙而不能表達自己的那種迷茫，不敢接納自己的那種恐懼和挫折嗎？一定不能。所以，讀下來的你或許很困惑，因為你無法理解這篇裡的每一個字，但這卻是我在用我最舒服的工具，藝術和母語，去嘗試傳達給我最真實的經歷和感受。或許從這裡我們可以一起重新思考，當一個創意城市在提出了公平，開放和包容這些承諾時，是為了說這些字而說，還是真的感受到人們的需求，到底在說的是什麼？

The language barrier is the biggest challenge for me in writing this policy project. Although I have been in Canada for almost 10 years and can communicate fluently in English, I found it is extremely difficult for me to understand and talk about policy in English. So, I thought, is it because I am not good enough in English, that I can't participate and decision-making about issues that closely related to me?

I recognize that learning English is important for communication in this country. However, my art background makes me intuitively care about people's feelings behind the words. Why do people want to oppose certain policies? And why are some people fighting for certain rights? I believe if I want to know and understand some truths, I can't just read them, because I can't read the true experiences of everyone's life. Can you read and learn about some problems among Newcomers artists? Maybe, but can it allow you to understand the kind of confusion and frustration that we can't express ourselves because of a language barrier? Must not. So you may be confused because you can't understand every word in my policy ask. But I am using my most comfortable tool, art, and my home language to try to communicate my real life experience and feelings with you. Perhaps, we can rethink together from here – when a creative city is proposing equity, access, and inclusion as commitment, what is it talking about? Is it to say these words literally? Or really feel the needs of community?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Illustrations: Juno Yiwei Zhang



ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.



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