



# MIGRATION: CITIES

**Above:** Jane's Walk, 2015.  
Photo credit: Jessica Wood

## (Im)migration and Arrival Cities

**Catherine C. Cole**

The Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) is collaborating with ICOM CAMOC (Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities) and ICOM ICR (International Committee of Regional Museums) on *Migration: Cities*, a long-term project to explore how to foster dialogue between diverse people and encourage the participation and inclusion of migrant populations within ever transforming urban environments, in what Doug Saunders has referred to as Arrival Cities’.

Europe is facing unprecedented migration with millions of refugees arriving in the last few years, leaving museum workers struggling to find their place in the context of rapid change. Therefore, the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) released *Museums, Migration and Cultural Diversity – Recommendations for Museum Work*, guidelines that provide a constructive approach to working with different communities including migrants, refugees and minorities.

Strategies range from small, immediate, inexpensive measures to more extensive, long-term changes and will be helpful to people with little experience working in culturally diverse communities.

For Canadian museums, the situation is less acute than in Germany but we too are thinking about how to engage the 25,000 refugees who have recently arrived in this country – and those who will come in the months and years ahead. From the late 19th to the late 20th centuries, Canada accepted millions of immigrants from Europe, many of whom came as displaced people from war-torn areas, or for political or religious freedom. Canada is a country of Indigenous people, immigrants and migrants from other parts of the country.

Museums are recognized as safe places to learn about other cultures, forums for discussion about contemporary issues, and vehicles to promote integration. They provide a laboratory for immigrants to learn Canadian values. Beyond

‘Heritage Days’ types of events that present music, dance, costumes, and food – entertaining, family events – museums offer activities that allow more two-way communication with other cultures that deepen our understanding and build trust.

Working in collaboration with Don Bouzek of the popular theatre company [Ground Zero Productions](#), I initiated *Mill Woods Living Heritage* in 2012. Edmonton does not have a city museum but this would be a perfect project for one. Inspired by Saunders’ *Arrival City*, which stressed the need to think about transitional urban spaces, places where people retain connections to their place of origin as well as to the city, neighbourhoods where the transition from poverty occurs and the next middle class is forged, the next generation’s dreams, movements and governments are created. Whether Saunders would consider Mill Woods an ‘Arrival City’ or not, the questions he posed informed the questions we are addressing in research and oral histories.

Mill Woods has had several incarnations over the years: Initially the Papaschase Indian Reserve, then a farming settlement and, since 1969, an “urban village”. The province secretly acquired the 9 square miles of land through a land bank and the City developed a design concept with physical, social and economic objectives. Physically, urban sprawl continues to be a problem. Socially, younger members of ethnocultural communities appear to mix more than their elders and the community suffers from largely unwarranted fears of violence. While economically, the development was indeed a success – the City was said to have made \$185M on the development.

*Mill Woods Living Heritage* is an experiment in bringing heritage and arts organizations and community leagues together. We work with artists living in the community, artists of different cultural backgrounds working in a variety of mediums (poetry, dance, music and sculpture). Our website, which is not expensive or flashy but was built to keep people informed about the project, is updated as new activities are completed.

The website includes excerpts from some of the more than 50 oral history interviews that have been conducted. We work with ethnocultural organizations, such as Memoria Viva for the Latin American Community and Cari-West for the Caribbean community, and the Cultural Diversity Collaborative and Aboriginal Family Night, to build trust with community members, identify people to interview, and explore the community in different ways. Community-based work is extremely time-consuming but rewarding.

I use information from the oral histories and archival research to write a monthly column for a community newspaper called the *Mill Woods Mosaic* and as the basis of displays, walks and workshops, and it inspires the artists with whom we work. We created a temporary display shown at the local Canada Day celebrations – the largest in the city – and at various community facilities since. We have led walking tours where we talk about the three distinct histories of use, community development, and place names, and have invited community members to

share with us site visits including a gurdwara, a mosque, an Islamic Centre, a housing cooperative, and a neighbourhood park.

We facilitated a community mapping workshop in which we provided photographs, maps and other materials and asked participants to select images that were meaningful to them, discuss them with participants in small groups, create a collage showing what Mill Woods means to them collectively, and share their ideas with the larger group. We also created a pop-up exhibition that involved interpretive panels, some written by me based upon our research and some written by community members. Then we put them up all over the community last Thanksgiving, and created a map showing where they were.

We worked with an Indigenous artist who created a sculpture about the community and helped a group of kids at the Indigenous family night dinner contribute to the backdrop, with a South Asian khattak dancer on a piece about the meaning of light in Indian culture integrating a phrase from an oral history as the rhythm line, and with a Chilean rap poet on the experiences of Latin American immigrants. We’re now working on a piece that will combine Aboriginal music and khattak dance to tell a story about cultures mixing, all means of engaging immigrants in thinking about place.

***Catherine C. Cole has been a heritage consultant for more than 20 years and previously held curatorial and interpretation positions. She is Secretary-General of CAM and Vice-Chair of CAMOC. If you’re working on a project related to migration and would like to be included in Migration: Cities, contact [CatherineC.Cole@telus.net](mailto:CatherineC.Cole@telus.net); 780-424-2229.***

