

## Stories matter: using Photovoice to understand migrants' perceived and lived experiences in smaller Canadian cities

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### Abstract

Although there is a growing number of migrants settling in smaller Canadian cities, there are few studies that explore the role of space and place in shaping and enhancing newcomers' lived experiences in smaller communities. Much of the attention has focused on how to settle and integrate migrants through factors such as employment, housing, and language and less so on how migrants perceive and experience space and place which is conducive to building a sense of belonging and a welcoming community. This research centres the theory of the production of space to gain a better understanding of the interactions between space, place and people. Specifically, it engaged immigrants, refugees and foreign workers from nine smaller cities across Canada to use Photovoice to capture and describe their day-to-day spatial practices and lived experiences in the communities they resided in. Photovoice is a powerful and inclusive tool that empowers marginalized communities to engage in social and policy change by critically reflecting and presenting their personal narratives and articulating their needs and perspectives. Stories matters when it comes to the understanding of the complexity of migrants' lived experiences in smaller communities and migrants' agency in shaping those places and their rights to claim space.

### Biography

Dr. **Zhixi Zhuang** is a Registered Professional Planner and an Associate Professor at the School of Urban and Regional Planning, Toronto Metropolitan University. Founder and director of the DiverCityLab, her research explores the growing urban diversity and how city-builders can instill the values of equity and inclusion into planning policies and practices. Specifically, her work focuses on how immigrant and racialized communities have made long-lasting marks in urban landscapes inscribing places with important cultural, historical, and political meanings. She has conducted mixed-method and arts-informed research to effectively engage immigrant communities to gain a holistic perspective on immigrant integration, place-making, civic engagement, and inclusive policy-making. Her research addresses the impacts of global migration on local governance and inclusive community-building and sheds light on equity-based approaches to planning and design with diversity.