

## Final Report: Student Research Stay at UBC

Jasmin Miah

FU Berlin

Vancouver's Greenest City Initiative and public engagement

September 2017



I wanted to go to UBC because I had decided to write my master's thesis on the Greenest City Initiative in Vancouver. I focused on the public engagement process and how the city tries to create a truly green society.

That is why I was really happy when I was told that I could go to Vancouver and do my research on-site. My main source were expert interviews from different kind of stakeholders and academics but I also thought it was important to actually see the city and experience the actions taken on the basis of the Greenest City Initiative.

My research experience was very two-sided. On the one hand, I did get a lot of interviews done and pretty much finished my research as planned. On the other hand I did have some logistical problems like finding a room and an adviser. I came in September when the school year starts so professors are busy and a lot of other students are looking for a place as well. So this situation might have been better at another time of the year. But when you apply to go to UBC you should keep in mind that you cannot apply for housing at UBC or any of the private student housing places (this would have made my stay 100 times easier) because they require a minimum stay. UBC also gives no assistance in finding a place to stay for international students and Vancouver is extremely expensive. Overall, finding something affordable is very difficult – and made even more difficult if you only want to stay there for 1-3 months. This is something important to keep in mind.

As to the results of my research – I am still writing my thesis and am still conducting some research but it seems like Vancouver did a lot to include all levels of society when they came up with the Greenest City Initiative. However, there is an imbalance between providing information and actually

incorporating people's ideas (as is the norm everywhere). There also seems to have been very few follow-ups with expert advisers. I am also still looking into whether or not the general public that participated truly represents all of society or only an elite fraction as is often the case with participation. Overall, I do think Vancouver did a good job in engaging the public. But I am still analyzing all the data I gathered so I cannot give a final report on that yet.

A very positive experience of my research was that a lot of people were very helpful and willing to talk to me. As I said before, the main reason I wanted to go to Vancouver was to conduct expert interviews – which is one of the main sources for my thesis. I talked to professors and academics but I also talked to organizations in the city and government officials. It was great meeting them, getting their expert opinions and also asking them for further advice on where to look for information. If it works with your research topic, I would recommend doing interviews since it gives you a good and local perspective.

Vancouver itself is a very interesting and beautiful city. Given my research topic I can recommend looking at the greening efforts of the city. While Vancouver is not as green as some people believe or want it to be (just think of the term “greenest city”) there is definitely a strong effort. I encourage you to talk to people about cycling because just as in many other cities it is a highly controversial topic and an important part of the Greenest City Initiative because the mayor is a cyclist himself.

What I read before and also very much noticed was that Vancouver is highly multicultural. The majority are Asian, in particular, Chinese immigrants. And UBC is also a very diverse school, as far as I observed. If someone would want to incorporate multiculturalism into sustainability research Vancouver would be a very good place to do so, I think.

All in all, I did have some organizational difficulties but I still enjoyed my stay and finished my research. Vancouver, despite the high cost of living, I liked a lot and would like to go back – also to see how much greener the city has gotten by then. Technically, by 2020, it should be the greenest city in the world.